WHO ARE YOU IN AZEROTH?

A qualitative study of player motivations behind character creation in the MMORPG *World of Warcraft*

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Abstract

World of Warcraft is one of the most popular and most successful MMORPGs of all times played by millions of players from all over the world. The game offers its players a huge fantasy universe with extensive and compelling storylines, in which players have the freedom to be and to do whatever they want to. This comes at a price, as players are required to pay a monthly subscription fee in order to play the game. The game also requires a lot of time and commitment of its players. People who invest their time, money and effort in a game like World of Warcraft are often the victim of negative stereotypes regarding gaming and its consequences on players and society. Yet, what has often been neglected is that gaming can bring a lot of joy as well as positive consequences to its players, because players are driven by a motivation and consciously select and play this game in order to fulfill certain individual needs. Players have to create a character in order to play World of Warcraft, which mainly consists of choosing a race and a class. The game's latest expansion has offered many new options for this character creation on which recent research has not been done yet. To contribute to the gap in the academic field and to emphasize the positivity of gaming, this thesis aimed to analyze players' motivations behind the creation of their character's race and class in World of Warcraft. It also explores players' persistence in playing the game and how this relates back to players' motivations and characters. This research was done through participant observations and semi-structured online chat interviews. The data was then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes. The results have shown that players create their characters in ways that match their motivations to play the game as well as a certain need for identification with the character. Players with strong social interaction, escapism and immersion motivations have expressed strong identifications with their characters and selected a race and class that was either very similar to the player or that reflected an identity the player wanted to experiment with, which helped to conform to their motivations to play. Players with strong challenge and competition motivations have expressed weak to no identifications with their characters and generally selected a race and class based on strategical reasons in order to conform to their challenge and competition motivations. Persistence has shown that players continue to play the game because of the satisfaction of the needs for relatedness, competence, autonomy and meaningful context, as well as the joy that derived from their gratified motivations. This has shown that, in contrast to the negative assumptions around gaming, players actively choose to play WoW and create their character in a way to fulfill certain individual needs, which is beneficial to the players and shows that gaming also has positive consequences on its players.

KEYWORDS: *Player Motivations, MMORPG, Identification, Character Creation, World of Warcraft*

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Preface

I would like to thank a number of people who contributed to the completion of this thesis and supported me in various ways throughout the whole process:

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1. Introduction

The world of digital games is a very differentiated world that has grown exponentially over the last decade (Fuster, Carbonell, Chamarro & Oberst, 2012) and of which many different terms have been developed. When talking about video games, people generally think of something you buy in a store, put into a device, and finish in several hours of play. This is a big contrast with browser games or casual games like *Candy Crush* or *Farmville*. The big and popular game landscape now is the world of the MMOs (Massively Multiplayer Online game) and MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game). One current example is the famous game *Fortnite*, which gained a lot of popularity recently. MMORPGs can be understood as huge and immersive 3D virtual environments where players from all over the world come together to play and interact (Hsu et al., 2009). It is often this social element that differentiates these games from other genres (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell & Moore, 2006).

One of the most successful and popular MMORPGs or even "the pinnacle" in the gaming history (Glas, 2012, p. 9), is the game *World of Warcraft*. The social element is very prominent in this game and is a contributing factor to WoW's popularity and huge player-driven community (Ducheneaut et al., 2006, p. 4; Glas, 2012, p. 9). The game's player base is extremely large, ranging from the players in-game, to large online groups and forums, to merchandises and even annual conventions and events. WoW got launched at the end of 2004 and can be considered a classic among the MMORPGs. Nevertheless, the game remains to be one of the most, if not *the* most successful MMORPGs in the world (Glas, 2012; Tan, 2017) played by millions of people regularly ("WoW player count 2015-2023," 2019) and continues to attract new players with its constantly developing content and expansions up until today. The expansion packs together with the game's weekly updates, which add new content and developments to the original game, show that WoW is not just a static game, but is continuously growing, changing and expanding instead. What makes WoW even more special, is that all of its players are willing to invest their money into the game by paying the required monthly subscription fee of 13 euros per month. Therefore, with this game being such a special, dynamic and popular MMORPG with a huge and dedicated player community, WoW is a highly interesting, relevant and important game to analyze.

The first step in the analysis of this thesis focuses on the understanding of players' motivations to play WoW, because it is nearly impossible to separate motivations for playing the game from motivations for creating the character in the game as these are very closely related. This study will examine player motivations and explore why players decide to dedicate their time to play this particular game and not play something else. After this, the focus of the study moves to character creations in WoW specifically. The reason for this is that the way in which the player creates the character is done in a way that satisfies certain individual needs and is thereby also a motivated action (Jansz & Neys, 2015, p. 3). Analyzing characters in WoW is also important, because characters are the

key to the game. The way through which the player is able to play the game, enjoy the game and engage in social interaction with the virtual world and other players, is all done through the player's character (Chul-ho Paik & Shi, 2013, p. 310; Ducheneaut, Wen, Yee & Wadley, 2009, p. 1151). When it comes to this character creation, WoW offers a wide variety of different options, including the options to select a character according to a particular 'race' and 'class'. Important to understand is that race and class are highly contested concepts in contemporary society as well as in WoW's society (Langer, 2011; Monson, 2012). On the one hand, race and class in WoW are game terminologies and are not the same as race and class in contemporary society. On the other hand, the races and classes in *World of Warcraft* show connections to the wider social context and resonate with the depictions of different races and classes and their positions in contemporary society (Langer, 2011; Monson, 2012, Mosley, 2010). Race and class have a specific meaning within the game, but both concepts are dealing with differences and each race and class in WoW can clearly be distinguished from one another by their appearance as well as by the race or class' power and position within the hierarchy (Langer, 2011; Monson, 2012). Whilst certain races and classes are depicted as intelligent, genuine and powerful, others are depicted as weak, brutal or evil. Thus, the game is a real-world race-based society (Monson, 2012) in which differences in race and class are being emphasized and play an important role and are based on contemporary society's discursive practices and structures around race and class (Dumitrica & Gaden, 2009; Nakamura & Chow-White, 2011).

The wide variety of character creation options in WoW grants the players a lot of freedom in creating and customizing their very own and unique character (Pringle, 2015, p. 3). This study will dig deeper into the character creations in *World of Warcraft* by exploring players' motivations for choosing a specific race and class and thereby creating their own character in a particular way. The final part of the analysis is dedicated to persistence in playing *World of Warcraft*, which is relevant for understanding why players continue to invest their time, efforts and money into the game by fulfilling certain individual needs while at the same time gratifying their motivations.

Previous studies dealing with these topics generally focused on player motivations from a quantitative approach (O'Connor, Longman, White & Obst, 2015, p. 459). Earlier results of these studies were confirmed and have shown an overall agreement upon the studied player motivations for games. These motivations form an important and relevant theoretical framework that is used for this research and that will help to understand player motivations in WoW. This study will take this a step further by digging deeper into players' specific motivations behind the choices for the character's creation in WoW. This study will also provide new insights into the academic debate, as the addition of the last two expansion packs and various new updates have added new features and character options to the game on which recent research has not been done yet. Thus, this study is scientifically relevant, as it is timely and fills in the gap in the academic debate.

The societal relevance of this study is the importance to offset the stereotype of the addicted and isolated gamer and that the activity of gaming has negative and problematic influences on players

and society (Kirby, Jones & Copello, 2014, pp. 36-37). Contrarily, gaming can bring very relevant and positive consequences to players which has often been neglected. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the positivity that gaming can bring. Early research by Bessière, Seay and Kiesler (2007) already identified that characters play an important role and are used as a means through which different needs and goals of the players can be fulfilled and thus the character creations in WoW will be relevant to study. The concepts of race and class are also socially relevant to study because they show connections to the wider social context (Dumitrica & Gaden, 2009) and the power differences in these concepts are continuing topics in the public debate that persist to exist, regardless of the type of medium (Nakamura & Chow-White, 2011). Understanding these differences and taking them into account in this study, can contribute to the understanding of players' character creation decisions and the needs they try to fulfill by creating the character. What these specific needs are, is what this study aims to investigate by exploring players' motivations.

The research question of this study is: "What are players' motivations behind the creation of their character's race and class in the MMORPG *World of Warcraft*?" In contrast to many previous studies, this study uses qualitative methods. Qualitative methods help to find deeper and meaningful messages (Schreier, 2013, p. 2) in players' motivations behind character creation in WoW, without restricting and limiting possible outcomes. Especially since player motivations, race and class, are complex concepts, using qualitative methods will be suitable for finding rich and interesting findings for this study. The methods used in this study are in-game participant observations of the players and semi-structured online chat interviews, which have been analyzed with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach.

This thesis starts off by providing the theoretical framework which guided this research, starting with an explanation of the Uses and Gratifications theory, which is the main theory used for this study, followed by the Self-Determination theory. The next section is narrowed down to U&G in games and covers the main player motivations used in this study. The followed section discusses avatars in games in general and then focuses on characters in *World of Warcraft* specifically. After that, the methods used for this study will be explained. The next chapter presents the results of the analysis, leading up to an answer to the research question in the conclusion chapter.

2. Theory and Previous Research

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) will be used as the main theory for understanding player motivations in games, supplemented by the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which will help to explain persistence in playing. After explaining these theories, U&G will be discussed in the context of games specifically by presenting a list of player motivations that will be used for this study. The following section deals with the importance and the role of avatars in games and the ways in which players can identify with these avatars. Then, the focus moves to *World of Warcraft* by providing a brief description of the game and linking the avatar to the game, by discussing the character and its creation process in *World of Warcraft* specifically. The final part of this chapter dedicates time to discuss the concepts race and class and provide some critical notes regarding these. These sections together form the theoretical basis for this study which is needed for understanding players' motivations behind the creation of their characters in *World of Warcraft.*

2.1.   Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory presents the use of media as the gratification of a person's individual psychological needs and explains that audiences take a conscious role in the decision to choose and use a specific type of medium that will be able to fulfill these needs (Ruggiero, 2000; Shao 2009). Moreover, the audience is also able to recognize their own decisions for choosing certain media. In other words, instead of assuming that people use a specific medium without realizing the reasons behind these choices, U&G implies that media selection and usage is a conscious process with a personal motivation. Whilst many older studies on U&G research have been focusing less on the point of view and the impact of the audience and more on just trying to find specific gratifications (Ruggiero, 2000, pp. 5-7), Swanson (1987) attempts to redefine the theory by presenting its three main areas of focus. These areas emphasize the role of seeking gratification in media exposure, the relation between this gratification and the way audiences interpret and understand the content of the media, and the link between the content of the media and the gratifications. This highlights the importance of the audience's role in the gratification process. Research by Shao (2009) has added that different users are driven by different kinds of motivations, and therefore different kinds of gratifications of needs can be gratified by different types of media. In the upcoming section 2.3., these gratifications will be discussed in-depth for the specific media type of games and how playing games can lead to the gratification of different needs of the players.

Trying to understand how and why individuals use media using the U&G theory, will help to gain a better understanding of what these needs exactly are, where these needs come from and how these needs are being satisfied (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 27). Especially, since we now live in a digital age where the Internet plays a large role in people's daily lives and offers a great variety of different types of new media to choose from for the gratification of needs. Ruggiero (2000, p. 20) explains that out of

this large choice of different media, individuals will select the medium that interests them or matches their needs the most. U&G does not necessarily have to be applied to just traditional media, like television, newspapers or radio channels; it can be applied to our contemporary and non-traditional types of media like the Internet, social media networks, online platforms or games.

These new media show changes in users' behavior and roles online, which makes it interesting to use U&G to discover how these types of media are used to gratify individual needs (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 28). In contrast to many traditional forms of media, new media are often combining different elements such as video, music, images and text (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 29), making them much more interactive in nature and requiring higher levels of user engagement when consuming them (Jansz, 2015). Shao (2009) exemplifies this and argues that consuming an interactive new medium like a game is a motivated action, as these games possess a much broader range of different stimuli choices and require more active user engagements than, for instance, a newspaper (Shao, 2009). This interactivity also enables games to cater to many kinds of gratifications (Shao, 2009) and therefore there can be various different kinds of players with different motivations for playing games like *World of Warcraft*. Thus, consuming a medium like WoW is an active and conscious decision, by which the user actively assigns meaning to the consumption of the content of the game (Jansz, 2015) and will consume the game in a way that satisfies the individual needs of the user.

2.2.   Self-Determination Theory

While U&G deals with the conscious process where individuals choose and use media in order to gratify certain individual needs, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a motivation theory that can be applied to many different activities in life (Neys, Jansz & Tan, 2014, p. 197) and is focused on the inner psychological needs that are influential for intrinsic motivations of certain activities (Gagné, 2003, p. 201; Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that SDT proposes that individuals have three basic psychological needs they try to fulfill when pursuing a certain activity. These needs are competence, relatedness and autonomy, and have an important influence on an individual's way of functioning, growth, development but also personal well-being. "Autonomy" refers to the individual's ability to freely choose to seek an activity, "competence" refers to the individual's skills of mastering the activity and "relatedness" refers to the individual's feeling of connectedness and support with the activity (Dindar & Akbulut, 2013; Gagné, 2003). Just like U&G, SDT can be applied to games like WoW as well, as this game requires a great amount of time and effort and therefore playing it is a form of motivated action (Neys et al., 2014, p. 198).

Generally, the satisfaction of the autonomy need in games like *World of Warcraft*, comes from the player's flexibility and freedom of goals, paths or opportunities in the game; the satisfaction of the competency need in games often comes from the mastering of certain challenges, progressing or achieving certain goals in the game; the social interaction and communication with other players in the

game leads to the satisfaction of the relatedness need (Dindar & Akbulut, 2014, p. 121; Przybylski et al., 2010, pp. 155-156). Previous research has shown that individuals are more likely to be motivated in pursuing an activity, when they place themselves into environments and pursue goals that will support the satisfaction of these three needs (Dindar & Akbulut, 201; Gagné, 2003; Przybylski, Rigby & Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, placing oneself into a game environment that enables an individual to fulfill SDTs three needs, will lead to higher satisfactions gained from playing the game as well as stronger motivations to persist in playing a game (Dindar & Akbulut, 2014, p. 121). Thus, SDTs motivations deal especially with long-term motivations of activities (Gagné, 2003, p. 201) and can be used to explain persistence in playing games (Neys et al., 2014).

In this thesis, SDT will therefore be used to explain players' persistence in *World of Warcraft.* If the game's environment supports the satisfaction of SDTs three intrinsic needs, it also enhances the player's motivation of playing the game, which can lead to an increased persistence to play the game as an outcome of this (Przybylski et al., 2010, p. 157). Neys et al. (2014) explain this as behavioral persistence, instead of intentional persistence, as persistence in this case is an outcome of other motivational factors (p. 197). The social element is a very prominent feature of *World of Warcraft,* which increases the probability that the relatedness need will be satisfied when playing the game. Therefore, the support of the other two needs of competence and autonomy is expected to play a larger role in persistence for players of WoW. Understanding persistence is necessary as it shows why players continue to play the game while at the same time fulfilling certain needs as well as conforming to their motivations to play and motivation for the character.

2.3.   Player Motivations in MMORPGs

U&G will be used within the context of the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game *World of Warcraft* specifically in order to discover players' motivations to play the game. The results of previous studies have come up with various different sets of player motivations for playing games like WoW. Therefore, this section will provide the player motivations that will be the most relevant for this study, by using and combining the most common motivations of past research about WoW and the motivations that are the most applicable to WoW, into a complete set of player motivations that can be used for this study.

2.3.1. Social Interaction

The social element in MMORPGs forms an important part of these games and is what makes this genre so attractive to its players and different from other gaming genres (Ducheneaut et al., 2006; O'Connor et al., 2015). Shen, Monge and Williams (2014, p. 2128) argue that MMORPGs are vibrant sites of social interaction between players and among groups and communities and provide many opportunities for players to socialize and to form social relationships or even friendships (Dindar &

Akbulut, 2014, p. 120). Therefore, one of the motivations players can have for playing MMORPGs is *social interaction.* Yee (2006b, p. 7) describes that the forms through which players can achieve this social interaction in MMORPGS like *World of Warcraft* is through temporary collaboration between players by joining a group, the formation and joining of guilds by players, social events in the game, helping and guiding other players, or perhaps just casual social interaction which can be done by chatting through an in-game chat or by stumbling across another player and starting a conversation. Recognition and admiration by other players can also be a part of social interaction (Tone, Zhao & Yan, 2014, p. 322). Thus, MMORPGs enables many opportunities for social interaction to take place, which therefore is an important and tempting motivation to play for many players (Fuster et al., 2012; Griffiths, Davies & Chappell, 2004; Jinman, 2007).

U&Gs *social interaction* motivation focuses on players who are motivated to start playing the game for its social element, which is different from the previously discussed *relatedness* of SDT (see previous section 2.1.1.), which is used to explain why players continue to play the game in the long run. This is an important distinction to keep in mind in order to prevent confusion.

2.3.2. Immersion

The next player motivation is *immersion.* Players who play a MMORPG for the immersion, enjoy being absorbed or immersed into the game's fantasy world and want to feel like they are actually being a part of this world (Jansz, 2015, p. 268). Yee (2006c, p. 13) confirms that users who have a strong immersion motivation "(…) enjoy being in a fantasy world as well as being "someone else"". These players also like roleplaying or the story-telling aspects of the game (Yee, 2006c, p. 13). The storylines in *World of Warcraft* are huge and delving into these stories and becoming part of them can enhance the feeling of being immersed into the game. Hafner and Jansz (2018) have also shown that these players feel incorporated in the game's environment and temporarily forget about their physical surroundings.

The fantasy element of the game can also enhance the motivation to immerse into the game's world. Wu, Li and Rao (2008,) argue that fantasy is an important element of MMORPGs, which refers to the mental picture of something people have never experienced in their own lives and point out that "every MMORPG is built on a theme that provides a universe to allow users, non-player characters (NPCs), monsters and other elements to live (p. 220)." Just like World of Warcraft's world *Azeroth*, which is a fantasy-themed world full of many fantasy elements, creatures, environments and stories. These fantasy elements can stimulate players' imaginations and make them want to *immerse* into the game's fantasy world, because this is a world they have never experienced before (van Reijmersdal, Jansz, Peters & van Noort, 2013). Thus, for players with a strong immersion motivation, the game motivates them to explore and become part of its large and extensive fantasy world with all its compelling stories.

2.3.3. Challenge

Hsu, Wen and Wu (2009, p. 992) argue that the *challenge* motivation refers to "(…) the achievability of in-game goals related to the difficulty level of an in-game problem." A game allows players to push themselves to higher levels, ranks, or improve their skills by making them accomplish certain tasks or objectives (van Reijmersdal et al., 2013, p. 2643), but also by slaying certain strong monsters, completing quests, obtaining certain items or armor or leveling up the character (Hsu et al., 2009, p. 993). Accomplishing these achievements can grant the players with rewards, for example (Tone et al., 2014, p. 325), which helps to increase the satisfaction and motivation to continue playing the game and pursuing these challenges (Hsu et al., 2009, p. 993). In *World of Warcraft*, challenge can be sought in various ways. Examples are the collecting of achievement points, which are rewarded to the player by completing certain difficult achievements and challenges and can sometimes even reward players with extra items. Or the collecting of rare items or the strongest armor with the highest level, by completing dungeons and killing bosses on higher difficulties, or by leveling up and progressing the character. Thus, players who play the game for its challenge, have a desire to gain power through achieving goals, progressing in the game and collecting items or objects that will add to this power (Yee, 2006c, p. 13). Important to keep in mind is that these players like this challenge in order to challenge themselves and their own skills, and not for the competition against other players.

2.3.4. Escapism

Another common and relevant player motivation is *escapism*, which refers to the motivation to play a game to avoid or escape real-life and its problems and stresses. In this, the game serves as a safe virtual environment in which reality's struggles do not exist, which helps to temporarily forget about any problems and helps to relieve stress and bring relaxation (Jinman, 2007; van Looy et al., 2012; van Reijmersdal et al., 2013; Yee, 2006c). The large world in *World of Warcraft*, all its people, the various different and unique zones and all the different possibilities and activities in the game, can easily make people forget about their daily lives for a while. For these players, the game is a way to escape reality and its hardships or to temporarily put the mind at rest (van Reijmersdal et al., 2013) by escaping to WoW's safe environment, which is welcome for everybody and in which real-life's pressures and concerns do not exist. Although escapism might seem to be closely related to immersion, players who are motivated to play the game for its escapism clearly use the game to escape real life problems and to relax and relieve stress (Yee, 2006a), whilst players motivated by immersion enjoy being pulled into the game's world and its stories, without necessarily escaping certain problems or stresses (van Reijmersdal et al., 2013; Yee, 2006c).

2.3.5. Competition

The *competition* motivation refers to players who like to compete with other players, surpass them and try to win (Hsu et al., 2009; Jansz & Neys, 2015; Yee, 2006a). For example, a player can have the desire to compete with others in having the best or strongest item pieces or the highest rank or title. MMORPGs like WoW also directly allow players to compete with others by engaging in Player versus Player (PvP) content, which allows players to kill other players (Hsu et al., 2009). Players can engage in this PvP content and collect points and gain ranks by winning these battles. Players with high scores in PvP content also gain certain titles, which show their position and power in the PvP environment of the game. Players are also offered competition with other players by gaining the highest item level of their armor or by having the fastest killing time of a boss on the highest difficulty.

Competition can also include domination (Yee, 2006a) in, for example, a player's rank or score in the game. In WoW, players can be part of highly competitive guilds that strive to become part of the top-ranked guilds of the server they play on. Players engaging in PvP content can even follow an online leaderboard which shows the top 1000 players that players dominate the PvP content of each region of the game ("PvP Leaderboards", 2019). When new content gets released, some players or guilds try to become the world's first in beating certain content, which also shows dominance. In contrast to the *challenge* motivation where players also like to collect the best items or kill the most difficult bosses, the *competition* motivation clearly focuses on trying to win and obtaining certain items, achievements or ranks in order to be better than or dominate the rest, instead of gaining these achievements just to challenge yourself.

2.3.6. Manipulation

Yee (2006c) presents *manipulation* as another player motivation and points out how some players are motivated to play a game to use and manipulate other players for one's own personal satisfaction and personal benefits. Players with a strong manipulation motivation gain satisfaction from scamming, deceiving, dominating, taunting or threatening other players (Yee, 2006c, p. 13). In WoW, this can manipulation can be gratified in various ways. For example, by "ganking" other players, which refers to a player showing dominance and power by constantly killing another player over and over again, making the other player unable to do anything besides being killed.

World of Warcraft has a large economy in which items can be traded or sold for gold to other players and on the market. The game's popularity together with its big economy, has created a broad market for scamming ("Scam WoWWiki," n.d.) by offering a lot of opportunities for players to take advantage of other players and deceiving and manipulating them in order to make a lot of money. This scamming often occurs when players manage to deceive others to pay too much gold for an item that

is worth much less, or by using and manipulation the market prices for one's own personal gains. Some scammers use exploits and hacks to track players and use and control their game's interface (Abrams, 2016). Thus, players who play the game in order to engage in these kinds of activities are strongly motivated by the manipulation motivation.

2.3.7. Interest

The final motivation to play a game can simply be an *interest* in the game. This refers to players who are curious and would like to know more about what the game or what the hype of the game is all about (van Reijmersdal et al., 2013, p. 2643), but also players who are interested in certain aspects of the game (Hsu et al., 2009) or simply curious about what playing a MMORPG is like. In WoW, players could be interested in the game and its large world, the many zones and areas to explore, its genre, a new expansion pack or an update, which will provide the player with new and surprising content, which can all raise the interest and curiosity to play the game.

Thus, previous studies have identified various different kinds of player motivations that can be relevant for understanding player motivations in *World of Warcraft*. By using and combining different motivations of various previous studies that are the most common for WoW or the most relevant for games similar to WoW, this present study will use this presented list of player motivations for the research of players' motivations to play and create the character in WoW.

2.4. Avatars

An avatar is the online embodied representation of the player and is the tool through which players are able to interact with the virtual environment in the game (Ducheneaut, Wen, Yee & Wadley, 2009, p. 1151; Turkle, 1997, pp. 72-73) and represent themselves to this world and to other players (Pringle, 2015, p. 1). This avatar can be seen as the key to MMORPG, as without these avatars, players would not be able to engage and interact with the game and its world. These avatars are the unique and own creations of its players (Pringle, 2015, p. 1) which they control and customize (Ducheneaut et al., 2009, p. 1151). MMORPGs usually offer their players a lot of freedom and options when it comes to the customization of these avatars (Chul-ho Paik & Shi, 2013, p. 312). This enables players to create their avatars in various ways and allows players to match the avatars with the players' motivations to play. This identification with the avatar involves the player taking to some extent the perspective or role of the character or sharing certain aspects with the character (van Looy, Courtois, de Vocht & de Marez, 2012). The way players identify with the character can help to explain players' motivations behind the character creation and the motivations to play (van Looy et al., 2012).

When you start playing games like WoW, you start by creating the avatar and deciding its gender, appearance, psychological attributes, race, class, professions, and role (Teng, 2010, p. 1549;

Turkle, 1997, p. 73). The avatar is then the "image" that presents the player to the virtual environment and that can be perceived by other players. As Trepte et al. (2009, p. 53) and can be seen as the self-presentation of its player (Dunn & Guadagno, 2011; Jansz, 2015; Klimmt, Hefner & Vordener, 2009; Teng, 2010; Trepte & Reinecke, 2010; Turkle, 1997; van Looy, 2015). This self-presentation can be very similar to the player when the player creates the avatar in a way that it shares similar attributes to the player or reflects aspects of the player's personality or interests (Dunn & Guadagno, 2011; Pringle, 2015) which would then make the avatar become more of a self-representation (Trepte et al., 2009, p. 53). Van Looy et al. (2012) identified this as similarity identification. Players that create similar avatars may identify with their avatars in a way that makes them feel like they actually are these avatars and adapt their avatar's identity (Hefner, Klimmt & Vorderer, 2007, p. 1; Teng, 2010, p. 1549). Teng (2010, p. 1549) argues that these players experience a strong feeling of "being there" and can thereby satisfy the need for *immersion*. Hefner et al. (2007) described that *escapism* can be a motivation for these players as well, as adopting their avatar's self and becoming one with their avatars can help them to temporarily forget about real-life's problems (p. 3).

However, previous studies have shown that when players create avatars that are similar to themselves, they often tend to create enhanced versions of themselves instead (Ducheneaut et al., 2009, p. 1151; Pringle, 2015, p. 3) by emphasizing and enhancing particular good characteristics (van Looy et al., 2012; Vasalou, 2008, p. 510). Players can also give their avatars certain features that the player does not possess him/herself to create an ideal version of the self (Jansz, 2015, p. 269). This form of identification is what van Looy et al. (2012) identified as "wishful identification" and involves the desire of the player to become more like his or her characters. Pringle (2015) explains that the use of an online game as a medium in which players are anonymous, makes it significantly easier for the player to create enhanced versions of the self than it would be in real life (p. 2). Players can freely create the image of themselves that they want to represent to the rest within the gaming world, which explains why they often use the avatar as opportunity to create an enhanced or ideal self. Players can also use this as an opportunity to become someone completely different than themselves and play as a different identity, such as a hero or a character with a different gender, appearance, age or personality (Chul-ho Paik & Shi, 2013, p. 310; Kafai, Fields & Cook, 2010, p. 25; Ruggiero et al., 2000, p. 21; Trepte et al., 2009, p. 66).

Thus, games provide players the freedom to perform different identities and enables them to identify with their characters in various ways (Jansz, 2015; van Looy, 2015, p. 1). Research by Turkle (1997) has shown that the virtual environments of games are therefore excellent places for identity experimentation for players, in which the boundaries between the self and the game become blurred. The players experience a sort of merging of the self with the avatar and regard the choices of the avatar as if they are their own (Jansz, 2015; van Looy, 2015). This way, a stronger emotional connection with the avatar is formed and since emotion and identity are interrelated with one another, the virtual gaming environment becomes a "laboratory" to experiment with different identities and test

these identities by playing different kinds of avatars (Jansz, 2015, pp. 274-276). Yee (2006c) adds that the exploration and shaping of identity via the avatar could even help to learn certain skills that can continue to be useful in player's daily life. Because these players strongly identify with their avatars, their player motivations may score higher on motivations like social interaction, escapism or immersion, instead of motivations like killing time or interest, which imply a weaker character identification.

Finally, players could also design their avatars in a way that is beneficial to them in-game and that helps increasing their chances and successes in the game (Trepte et al., 2009, p. 56). For instance, players could create avatars that can affect or threaten other players' gaming strategies or create the avatar in a way that fits the game environment or matches a certain role the best (Vasalou, 2009, p. 516). Even the experimentation with identity, such as playing as a different gender or race, could be for strategic reasons. Turkle (1997, p. 79) argues how some male players play as female characters, because it makes it easier for some to confront and interact with other players or take on a more aggressive attitude without getting the criticisms. Here, gender is not used to reflect the player's biological gender and should be understood as a way of expressing appearance or as a means to help completing the game (Chul-ho Paik & Shi, 2013, p. 310). The creation of the avatar is then based purely on rational and strategic choices to match certain gaming purposes or goals of the gamer, which matches with players with stronger challenge or competition motivations for playing (Vasalou, 2009).

Thus, avatars are key to a MMORPG and the way the player identifies with the avatar can influence the way the player creates the avatar and for which reasons. While on the one hand, players can create an avatar that strongly resembles the player, on the other hand, they could also use the avatar to explore and experiment with different identities by creating avatars that are different from the players themselves. Some players might create their avatars merely in a strategic way that will help them progress in the game and achieve their goals. Therefore, a need for identification can also plays an important role in players' motivations for creating the character.

2.5.   World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft is a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game developed by *Blizzard Entertainment* and offers a large fictional fantasy world called "Azeroth", consisting of 4 large continents, several islands, and even several planets where players can time-travel to. It is a huge world where thousands of people from all over the world create their own character and come together to play with or against each other or to just explore, hang out, socialize and have fun (Glas, 2012, p. 9). The game is a classic among the MMORPGs but still remains to be "the pinnacle" in the gaming history and can be considered the most successful, most popular and fastest-selling MMORPG of all times (Ducheneaut et al., 2006, p. 1; Glas, 2012, p. 9; Tan, 2017). The game is played by millions of players on a regular basis ("WoW player count 2015-2023," 2019) and keeps attracting new players

every day. WoW is known for its strong social element and big player community and fanbase that reaches even outside of the game (Ducheneaut et al., 2006, p. 4; Glas, 2012, p. 9), examples are Facebook groups, online forums, streaming communities, YouTube channels or gaming conventions. What makes the game even more special is the huge variety and diversity of the game, which is enhanced with frequent updates and annual releases of new expansion packs. This shows that WoW is not just a static game, but a highly dynamic and diverse game that is constantly in development. The game currently has seven expansions of which *Battle for Azeroth* is the most recent expansion that got released on the 14th of August 2018.

2.5.1. Character Creation

Characters in *World of Warcraft* are extremely important and creating one is the first thing players must do (Ducheneaut et al., 2006, p. 2). Only after this is done, the player can start to engage and interact with the world by beginning a quest, fighting creatures, teaming up with other players, exploring the large continents and progressing through the game by gaining higher levels (Bessière et al., 2007, p. 531; Ducheneaut et al., 2006, p. 2). Players have to create at least one character in order to play but do have the option to create more characters. While some MMORPGs offer players the complete freedom to customize their avatars to even the smallest details, like changing the shape of the jawline or the width of the nose bridge, WoW provides its players with a menu of set choices in which players can select and customize their characters (Kafai et al., 2010, p. 25).

WoW's character creation process involves decisions about the character's race, class, name and appearance, like the skin tone, hair style and color, face type, or additional features like earrings, horns or facial hair. Adding upon previous expansions, the newest expansion *Battle for Azeroth* now offers its players the option to choose from a total of 13 races and 11 classes (see appendices D and F for the full lists), and an additional 8 "allied" races (see appendix E). The latter can be unlocked with an existing maximum level character in the game and are not available to players who create their first character in WoW. Out of the primary 13 races that are available right away, 6 races belong to the side of the "Alliance" while the other 6 races belong to the side of the "Horde". These two sides are called factions and are in war against each other in the storyline of the game. One race remains neutral and can decide upon a faction at a later point in the game. All races vary a lot in appearance, size, color, strengths and weaknesses, even an own language. The races have their own background storylines and recognizable cultural traits that are immutable and make them easily distinguishable from other races (Langer, 2011, p. 83; Monson, 2012, p. 54). Each race also comes with its own unique predetermined set of racial abilities and customization options (Monson, 2012, p. 56) and starts in a different zone in the world.

Aside from race, the character's class will influence the type of role and position the character will have in the game and requires different behavior with the character (Nardi & Harris, 2006, p. 2).

Some classes are more aggressive, while others are more defensive or supportive. The classes that fight more up-front are called "melee" classes, while other classes that fight from a distance are called "casting" or "ranged" classes. Then, there are also "healing" classes that have to support and heal other players, while "tanking" classes have to defend other players. This shows how all classes have their own kind of role that comes with strengths and weaknesses. One class' weaknesses can be balanced out by another class' strengths. Therefore, when teaming up with other players, the kind of character you play and its race and class combination, can become very important (Nardi & Harris, 2006, p. 2). Thus, there are many elements to be taken into account when deciding upon a race and class in WoW which can influence the experience of the game (Monson, 2012).

Most players have one primary or "main" character, and some players also have several other characters, called "alts" (Bessière et al., 2007, p. 531). Previous studies have shown that players in WoW especially feel a strong connection to their main character and identify with this character the strongest (Bessière et al., 2007; Griffiths et al., 2004). This main character usually serves as the self-presentation of the player in WoW (Dunn & Guadagno, 2011; Jansz, 2015; Klimmt, Hefner & Vordener, 2009; Teng, 2010; Trepte & Reinecke, 2010; Turkle, 1997; van Looy, 2015). With the large variety of options for different races and classes, players of WoW could decide to play as a character very similar to themselves and thereby have stronger similarity identifications with their character or could play out different identities or enhanced versions of the self and thereby have stronger wishful identifications (van Looy, 2012).

Thus, the character in WoW allows players to construct a certain image or identity for themselves and enables them to express certain aspects of themselves that might not come to expression in their daily lives. The variety in customization options gives players the opportunity to express their different motivations to play through this character creation (Monson, 2012, p. 56; Shao, 2009, p. 18) and therefore the creation of the character in WoW is a motivated action in which identification also plays an important role.

2.5.2. Race and Class

The resemblance between WoW's world and the contemporary world can be seen in the depiction of race and class. "The first key decision a player makes in WoW is deciding which race and class to play" (Nardi & Harris, 2006, p. 2). Mosley (2010) describes this decision as a self-selection into racial and cultural stereotypes (p. 57). Although the races and classes in WoW are created by Blizzard and only exist within this virtual environment, Mosley (2010) and Langer (2011) argue that the in-game social interactions and social norms around these races and classes do show resonances with contemporary society and the portrayal of racial stereotypes. The depiction of stereotypes shows that there exist differences in power between race and class in the game, just like these differences exist in contemporary society where race and class continue to be highly contested concepts

(Dumitrica & Gaden, 2009; Nakamura & Chow, 2012). Monson (2012) further explains that *World of Warcraft* is characterized as a real-world race-based society, in which race plays a central role in the organization of the social and political structure in the game. While Huizinga (1938/1995) claimed that the virtual worlds of games exist in a magic circle, in which the rules of reality do not apply and are replaced by a fictional, fantasy reality of the game, this does not account for WoW. Even though the races in WoW do not seem to directly correspond with our contemporary world, they still represent a contrast between the general familiarity and superiority of the *Alliance* faction versus the foreign-ness and brutality of the *Horde* faction, which is very similar to the depiction of the wealthy West versus poorer and less developed countries (Langer, 2011; Monson, 2012; Mosley, 2010). Visions of our contemporary society become embedded and represented in a virtual environment like WoW, in which the world and its races and classes are structured by and the product of society's discursive practices around topics as race and class and thereby still show similarities to our real world (Dumitrica & Gaden, 2009; Langer, 2011; Monson, 2012; Nakamura & Chow, 2012).

To exemplify this, Monson (2012) pointed out that the way the Orc race is depicted in WoW looks very similar to the way Black people are often depicted in other forms of media. The Human race, on the other hand, shares many similarities with the depiction of wealthy White people. Dwarves are very similar to the Irish/Scottish, and even share similar accents and similar-looking areas in-game, while Trolls share many features with Jamaicans and also have a similar accent and live on tropical-looking islands (Monson, 2012). This shows that the depictions of the races in WoW are drawn upon stereotypical imagery from ethnic groups of our contemporary world (Monson, 2012). Langer (2011) emphasized the clear division between "(…) the civilized and technologically curious *Alliance* "us" versus spiritualist and savage *Horde* "them"" (p. 85). Races belonging to the *Horde* are thereby also depicted as evil and less-developed, while the races belonging to the *Alliance* are presented as technologically well-advanced, pure and superior (Langer, 2011), which can be drawn from the power differences between different races in contemporary society (Dumitrica & Gaden, 2009; Nakamura & Chow, 2012).

These differences in power can also be argued for class in WoW. Some classes are presented as superior, strong or mighty classes, while other classes are not and seem to belong to the bottom of the hierarchy. This is similar to the structure of different classes in contemporary society, where certain classes have more power than others. Monson (2012) explains that classes dealing with technology, developments and high skills are placed high in the hierarchy and represent the ruling classes with power (Monson, 2012, p. 50). In WoW, this would be the divine and pure classes, such as paladins, mages and priests. These classes are generally represented by characters that have an important position or a lot of power in the storyline of the game (Langer, 2011). Besides, NPCs (Non-Player Characters) belonging to the powerful classes can generally be found in important areas in cities, such as cathedrals, castles and the hall of the king. The simpler classes that require less skills, technology, or intelligence, are generally placed at the bottom of the hierarchy and are depicted as less

powerful (Monson, 2012). Examples are the "rogue" class, which involves sneaking around, pickpocketing and assassinating, which goes against the norms of society and is portrayed as an outlaw in society. The "hunter" class wears just a simple bow with arrows and has no impressive-looking spells. In contrast to the earlier mentioned classes, these kinds of classes do not have special magical powers and are generally not presented as ruling or powerful classes in the game's storyline. The NPCs that belong to these classes are often watchmen or guards of towns, which do not have a very powerful position in the game either.

The differences between the *Alliance* and the *Horde* can not only be seen by the differences in race but is also expressed in differences in class (Langer, 2011; Monson, 2012). In the storylines of the game, classes associated with the dark, death, corruption, necromancy and voodoo, often belong to *Horde* races, while the more divine classes that are associated to the light, science, pure magic, and nature, are often assigned to *Alliance* races (Langer, 2011). Thus, certain classes are often represented by specific races in the game. The strong and glorious classes generally belong to the races that are portrayed as superior and powerful, whilst the classes that belong to the bottom of the hierarchy often belong to the races that are portrayed as less powerful or evil.

World of Warcraft is a very differentiated world in which it is important to comprehend that race and class are not just fixed labels that exist solely within the borders of *World of Warcraft,* but are concepts that show connections to the wider social context and that share many similarities with contemporary society's structure and discursive practices around race and class. Races and classes in WoW are determining many factors that will influence the experience of the player and these choices are therefore very important. The power differences in the game's portrayal of race and class and its connection to the wider social context of contemporary society, can intersect with and influence players decisions for the character's race and class.

2.6.   Conclusion Theoretical Framework

This theoretical chapter has provided the theoretical basis for this study. The Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Self-Determination Theory are both theories that are used to study motivations. While U&G focuses on the individual's conscious role in selecting a specific medium in order to fulfill certain needs, SDT focuses on three psychological needs that influence an individual's intrinsic motivation for persistence in a certain activity. These theories have often been applied to games in order to analyze why people play games and will be relevant and useful for analyzing player motivations in *World of Warcraft*. These player motivations will help to explain players' motivations when it comes to the character creations, as motivations for creating the character are closely related to motivations to play. SDT will add to this by explaining players' persistence in playing WoW.

Character identification has shown to be important in WoW, as the way the player identifies can help to determine the way in which the character is created. WoW provides its players with a huge

variety very distinct and unique races and classes, which gives players the freedom to identify with their characters in various ways. This can influence players' decisions when it comes to choosing a certain race and class for their characters. Race and class are contested concepts both in the game's world as well as in contemporary society. The way the different races and classes are portrayed in WoW show resonances with contemporary society's discursive practices around these concepts and share many similarities with the depiction of different races and classes in contemporary media. Classes that are placed high in the hierarchy often belong to the more superior and powerful races, while the lower classes often belong to the less superior, weaker or evil races.

Altogether, this chapter provides the theoretical framework needed for analyzing players' motivations behind the character creations in *World of Warcraft*. The motivations to play the game together with a need for identification with the character will help to explain players motivations behind the character creation and the choice for a race and class. It is necessary to be aware of the game's differences in race and class that resonate with contemporary society, as these could play a role in players decisions as well. Persistence will show why players continue to play the game while at the same time fulfilling certain needs as well as conform to their motivations for the character and motivations to play.

3. Methodology

Different qualitative methods have been used for this study, because the aim was to collect rich data about player motivations of which deeper meanings could be analyzed. The researcher has conducted participant observations as preparation for the execution of 20 semi-structured chat interviews with players of the game. This chapter first explains why qualitative methods were used and continues with a description of the participants and the participant selection. The next section involves the operationalization of the theory into the topic list for the interviews, followed by an explanation of the data collection procedure and the use of thematic analysis for the analysis. The chapter ends with final notes regarding reliability and validity and the role of the researcher within this study.

3.1. Qualitative Methods

3.1.1. Participant Observations

The researcher first conducted participant observations of players to gain in-depth knowledge of the game's current situation and its players in a systematic way. The use of participant observations enables the researcher to participate in the same environment as the players, allowing for the most natural behavior of the players, as they are being observed in their most comfortable and natural setting (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). In the observations of the players, close attention was paid to the kinds of characters the players played and their behavior with these characters. The observations were done in 5 consecutive days and ranged from one to two hours per day. Participant observations have to be done in the action and context of large social settings in which many people interact with each other (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013, p. 76). Therefore, the first two days of observations were done in raids, which are large group-settings where players have to interact and work together constantly. The other three days consisted of observations in the two biggest capital cities of the game and the area surrounding these cities. These cities are the social hubs were many players gather and interact in various ways. These locations aimed to provide a great richness and diversity in observations.

In order to fulfill the role as a researcher, notes of the players and their behaviors were constantly kept. During the first two days of observations in the raids, the researcher paid close attention to the players' characters, their race and class, their positions and the way they behaved and interacted within the team. During the three days of observations in the large cities, close attention was paid to the again the players' characters and its race and class, players' behavior, as well as the interactions with and behavior towards other players in the city.

The notes were taken on a second screen, which enabled the researcher to pay full attention to the players on the first screen. In these notes, all observations were written down in bullet points and

organized per day and per setting. Afterwards, these notes were re-read and additional information was added if necessary. After all observations were done, the notes were thoroughly read while overlapping observations were merged. These final observations provided necessary and relevant knowledge that has been used for the construction of the topic list and served as knowledge that could be used in the interviews to address or elaborate upon specific issues. This knowledge was relevant to better understand the context and information provided by the participants in their answers and could be used to ask game-specific follow-up questions related to what has been observed in order to gain more meaningful information.

3.1.2. Semi-Structured Chat Interviews

The main aim of this study was to investigate players' motivations behind the creation of a character in *World of Warcraft*. A qualitative method was chosen to fit this research the best. Semi-structured interviews provide the participants the freedom to give their own answers in their own terms with any relevant context information without guiding answers into a determined direction by, for instance, using a survey as a method. Surveys could impose a bias towards the answers and would have limited the possibilities in the answers (Qu & Dumay, 2011) which does not fit the aim of this study as it aims to capture the richness in different motivations. While many previous studies on player motivations used quantitative methods, this study aims to take this research a step further by exploring deeper meanings in players motivations and therefore uses qualitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Schreier, 2014; Silverman, 2011). This was achieved by having in-depth conversations in which follow-up questions could help to find deeper meanings, as well as the use of thematic analysis which allowed the researcher to identify meanings that go beyond the surface of the data. Thematic analysis will be further explained later on in this chapter. Thus, as this study involves complex concepts such as motivations, race and class, which can be interpreted by individuals in different ways, using a qualitative method ensures that each participant's motivation and interpretation of this would be considered in the analysis. This ensures that the final results adequately describe the meanings in the participants' answers, which contributes to the study's validity (Schreier, 2014).

As this study intended to interview European players of the game, conducting face-to-face interviews was practically not doable. Having considered the different types of online interviews, such as e-mails or video-chats, the use of a chat for the interviews was aimed to fit the audience the best and lead to a richness in meaningful information. Research has shown that online communication has proven to be more comfortable for many people (Kirby et al., 2014; Walther, 2007). Many people prefer the anonymity of this online communication which allows them to be themselves without being judged by physical factors (Walther, 2007). It also enables people to spend more time in the formulation and expression of their messages and can result into greater intimacy between the researcher and the participants, which can increase their willingness to share rich information (Walter,

2007). The online chat is the world players of *World of Warcraft* live in and interact through and discussing the game within its natural communication tool can also contribute to their willingness to share rich information. Research has shown that ideally there should be low-inference during an interview in order to pay full attention to the interviewee without having too many distractions (Silverman, 2011). Using chat interviews allowed the researcher to fully concentrate on the interviews and the discussions without any disturbance by note-taking or the use of recorders, thereby conforming to the lowest inference possible.

Thus, the use of semi-structured chat interviews with mostly open-ended questions fits this study and its audience for these various reasons. This method brings more intimacy and a better understanding of the participants and their motivations (Hermanowicz, 2002; Walther, 2007). In this, the topic list served as a guide for the conversation to make sure each relevant topic is covered during the interview, whilst preventing the interview from limiting the interviewee in the information and the order given in the answers (Adams, 2015). This method is flexible and allowed the researcher to ask probes or follow-up questions, which were useful for guiding the interviewee in providing relevant information, by making the interviewee aware of certain topics that have not been covered yet or by gaining deeper thoughts about a specific topic (Adams, 2015, p. 494).

3.2. Participants

The units of analysis of this study are players of the game *World of Warcraft*. Most of these participants were recruited through the Facebook group "World of Warcraft EU", which is the main Facebook group for players of the European servers of the game. Three participants were recruited through the Facebook group "The Imperial Guard – EU Sylvanas", which is the Facebook group of the European server Sylvanas' guild called "The Imperial Guard". Participants had to be players of the European servers, regardless of their own country of origin, because the researcher only had access to these servers. The participant observations have therefore been conducted on a European server and to make sure that the participants for the interviews played the game in the same context as these observed participants, it was a requirement for the interview participants to play on the European servers as well. The discussions in the Facebook groups mostly involved game-related topics and no personal information about these members got provided. The researcher was therefore not personally involved with any members of these groups before the selection, which excluded any biases that could arise when studying people who are close to the researcher (Hermanowicz, 2002). A formal call was placed in both of the Facebook groups, giving a brief explanation of the study's topic and asking players who were willing to participate to respond to the call. A surprisingly large amount of over 40 respondents showed their interest in participating. Whilst age, nationality or gender were no prerequisites for the recruitment of participants, a diverse selection of participants was made by selecting participants with a variety in ages, countries and gender. Therefore, a purposeful sample of

diverse participants was selected, which could bring a potentially richness in information and findings for this study (Coyne, 1997; Boeije, 2002). This emphasis on diversity contributes to the reliability of the study. No distinction was made in the playing experience of these players, as long as they were current players of *World of Warcraft* and thereby have experienced the most recent content of the game.

A total of 20 participants was selected, with 10 being male and 10 being female. The ages ranged from 18 to 64, with most of the participants being somewhere in their 20s. The majority of the participants were students, graduates, or working people. The participants lived in various countries, such as Poland, Romania, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Scotland, Denmark, South-Africa, Switzerland, Sweden and several more. Whilst the amount of experience players had with WoW was not a prerequisite, all the participants had at least 3 years up to 16 years of experience with the game. See appendix C for a full overview of all the participants of this study.

After the selection, the participants were approached and thanked for their interest in the study after which the necessary contact information for the chat got exchanged. The participants were then added by the researcher and given an indication of when the interviews would take place. A weekly update about the study's progress was given, in order to keep the interest of the participants and to discuss the availability for the interview.

3.3. Operationalization

The theoretical concepts relevant to this study's research question were translated into a topic list that was used for the interviews. Mostly open-ended questions were asked in order to give the participants the freedom to answer questions on their own terms. However, several close-ended questions were also asked, as these questions could serve as gateways for opening up discussions by using probes as a response (Adams, 2015). These probes included questions such as "why?" or "how?" or "what do you mean?". The aim was to make the interviews similar to a conversation, which helps to create a greater intimacy with the interviewees (Hermanowicz, 2002).

Before the start of the interviews, all participants were asked for their consent to make sure both parties agreed upon continuing the interviews. After that, the interviews started by asking general questions regarding the participant's background information first, in order to get to know the participants better. Interviews should start in a positive way and present the light-weighted questions in the beginning of the interviews (Adams, 2015; Hermanowicz, 2002). Therefore, the second set of questions were general questions about *World of Warcraft* itself. Participants were asked about how they discovered the game, which generally made a positive and extensive entrance into the interview and the discussion of the topics. The other questions dealt with what made the participants play and what they like the most about the game. These questions were necessary to understand why players decided to play the game and what made them play this particular game instead of something else.

These questions could already uncover some important insight into the player motivations of the participants, which could then be elaborated upon and further questioned with probes and follow-up questions, in order to gain more meaningful information (Hermanowicz, 2002).

The next questions were about the participant's in-game activities and behavior in order to explore their motivations to play. These involved questions asking participants what kind of activities they usually do in the game and what they enjoy doing the most, as well as what kind of activities they do not enjoy doing. Understanding what players enjoyed doing the most in the game and how they behave in the game, helps to understand the player motivations of the participants, as enjoyment of the game is an outcome of the fulfillment of the player's motivations (Wu et al., 2008). In case more information about players' motivations was needed, players were asked about the activities they did not enjoy doing, because this made a clearer contrast between the motivations that did not apply to the participant and the motivations that did apply.

The third set of questions were expected to include some of the heavier and more confronting questions, dealing with the participants' characters and their identifications with these characters, and were therefore asked more towards the end of the interview (Adams, 2015; Hermanowicz, 2002). Participants were asked what kind of character they play, what its race and class is, and why they created this specific character, in order to explore their motivations for creating the character. Follow-up questions regarding the race and class, the class's role, or certain aspects about the race and class were asked to gain a deeper understanding of these motivations. For example, asking why the player decided to create a vulnerable class instead of a more powerful class. Participants were also asked if they relate themselves to their characters, if they feel like they become their characters when they play or whether they tried to create a certain image when playing their characters. All of these questions dealt with a need for identification and can help to determine players' motivations for creating their characters.

The last set of questions asked the participants about how long they have been playing the game, what makes them continue to play the game and if the game plays an important role in their lives. These questions were asked to explain persistence. Understanding persistence is relevant for understanding why players continue to play WoW while at the same time fulfilling their motivations. These concepts altogether form valuable information for providing an answer to the research question. The interviews concluded with the question asking participants whether the game has been worth their time and investments and if the game is important to them, ended by a positive note thanking the participants for their time and the interesting conversations, which was in line with Adams's (2015) and Hermanowicz' (2002) recommendations for a good closure of an interview. An overview of the operationalization of the concepts into the topic list can been seen in the Table 1.

Hermanowicz (2002) pointed out that a good interview study involves *piloting* in which the questions are tried out by conducting test interviews with a small sample of participants before continuing in the research process. In this study, a small scaled pilot study of three participants was

conducted, in order for the researcher to get used to the chatting process and to be able to evaluate the topic list and its questions. This way the researcher was able to assess if the questions indeed examined what they were intended to examine and if they gain relevant information for this study, which enhances the validity of the study (Schreier, 2014).

This pilot study turned out to be useful and contributed to the validity of the topic list. The pilot study showed that the initial topic list was already well organized and revealed a richness in information in the test interviews in which the answers contributed to the aim of the research. Therefore, with only several minor adjustments in the order of some questions, the researcher was able to move ahead with the research without having to apply major changes to the questions. The complete and final topic list can be found in Appendix A.

Table 1. Operationalization

Concept	What players were asked about	Examples
World of Warcraft	General questions regarding the game, how they started playing the game and what they like about the game	- What made you play WoW? - What aspects attracted you?
Player Motivations	Their motivations for playing the game	- What do you usually do when playing WoW? - What activities do you enjoy doing the most? - Do you like to play with others in WoW? - Do you play WoW to forget about real life problems?
Characters	What kind of characters the players play	- What is your main character in WoW? - What is the race? - What is the class?
Character Creation Race Class	Their motivations for creating the character and choosing a race and class	- Why did you create this character? - Why did you choose this race and class? - What do you like about it? - What did you take into account when deciding upon a race and class?
Identification	If the player identifies with the character and in what ways	- Do you relate yourself to your character? - Did you make it look similar to you? - Do you feel like when you play, you become your character? - How would you want others to perceive your character?
Persistence	Their motivations for continuing to play the game	- How long have you been playing WoW? - What makes you continue to play WoW? - Is the game important to you?

3.4. Data Collection & Analysis

The interviews lasted between one to two hours and a total of 20 chat logs has been collected and used for the analysis. The chat of the "Battle.NET" application was used for conducting these interviews. This chat automatically saves each chatlog and does not remove the content once a user exits the application, which allowed the researcher to always go back to the original chat whenever needed. This feature also enabled the researcher to copy all content of each interview directly into an external text file to save for later use for the analysis. This way, the chat logs present the most accurate and authentic data possible.

The data collected from the interviews has been systematically analyzed and evaluated using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be explained as organizing and analyzing the data by coding data extracts, given equal attention to each part of the text, to thereafter make sense of the data by identify patterns or themes, which enables a rich and detailed description of the data set (Boeije, 2010; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this process, the researcher takes an active role in assigning meanings to the data, identifying possible themes and deciding the final themes that are of interest and relevance for players' motivations and should be used and presented in the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) have stressed the importance of not ignoring or leaving out any tensions and inconsistencies that arise from the data, but rather include and report the outcomes that deviate from the main focus in the analysis, as they will enrich the research and its reliability. Therefore, the thematic analysis in this study is partially theory-driven, as the topic list used for the study is based on theoretical concepts whilst at the same time keeping an open mind for any inductive results that could potentially emerge from the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, thematic analysis was chosen for the analysis for this study, as its flexibility can capture the wide diversity and richness in player motivations.

The first step in the thematic analysis of this study involved the repeated close-reading of the collected chat logs, in order to ensure familiarization with the data. In this process, important sections were highlighted, and any emerging ideas about the recurring themes were written down. In the next step, the chat logs were coded by re-reading the texts and applying codes to extracts of the data that deemed to be relevant for the research question. In the third step, these codes were compared across interviews in order to identify similarities and determine which codes had to be grouped into overarching themes and which codes had to remain separated. The fourth step consisted of re-reading, reviewing and refining the codes and themes, by comparing the codes itself as well as comparing the codes with the data in the chat logs to ensure that the codes support this data (Boeije, 2002; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This also emphasizes how the use of thematic analysis enhances the validity of this study. This process resulted into the creation of the final themes, by merging as well as dividing certain themes based on their similarity. In the final step, the themes were assigned with appropriate names that supported the meaning of the themes and made them exclusive from other themes. These

final themes can be categorized under four categories: player motivations, character identification, character creation and persistence, which can all be analyzed in the context of players' motivations for creating the character in WoW. During the analysis process, a point of saturation in the codes got reached after the 16th interview by which no new codes emerged from the data. Deciding to include 20 interviews therefore gives confidence in the final results. The table below shows how several different data extracts were coded, put into themes and organized into categories:

Table 2. Data analysis

Data Extract	Coded For	Theme	Category
I liked the stories and the general way in which they fashioned the world. My arts and crafts are also with dragons and fairies and such. (Lex)	• Likes the stories in the game • Likes the fantasy elements of the world	Immersion	Player Motivations
I enjoy leveling up alts and doing achievements on main. Also the range of things I can go do, usually have a couple of projects on the go, maybe rep for a mount for example. (Gret)	• Enjoys progressing characters • Enjoys doing achievements • Enjoys collecting mounts	Challenge	Player Motivations
Yeah, was alot like me - but she was strong, it was like.. she could conquer anything, so why couldnt i. (Annabel)	• Character is similar to player • Character is stronger version of player	Identity Experimentation	Character Identification
pandaren- I love the whole mindset of the race itself and it resonates with me and my everyday life very much...the other twou I would have to say that I was always interested in druids (in all games and stories) and for the dk I have to say because of the whole lich king story. (Cyra)	• Likes aspects of the race • Race shares similarities with player • Personal interest in a class • Class matches a storyline character	Storyline Personal Interest	Character Creation
It's still interesting for me. I am very used to the game now after playing it for almost half my life. I don't have to learn new ways to play, which is a convenience for me. -Another reason is that my whole family plays this game. Brother, mother, step father. I like my guild, they're very friendly. (Alissa)	• Got used to the game • Knowing how to play is convenient • Whole family plays • Likes the guild	Competence Relatedness	Persistence

3.5. Final Remarks

Before the start of the interviews, all participants were asked for their consent in which the researcher ensured that all information from the interviews will be handled confidentially and that all names will be anonymized in order to ensure the participants' privacy. Participant were guaranteed that the content of the interviews will be used solely for the purposes of this study and that they were free to interrupt the researcher at any time to ask for clarifications or to prefer not to answer a question. Participants were then asked for their permission to make sure that both parties agreed with the continuation of the process.

Silverman (2011) stressed the importance to reflect upon the role of the researcher in research. In this study, the research has an active role in the analysis and the assigning of meaning to the data. The researcher is deeply involved with the game, which contributes to the validity of the player observations, the discussions during the interviews and the research as a whole. The researcher's expertise can help to raise the discussions in the interviews to a higher level, by better comprehending the information and context provided in the participants' answers and asking detailed and game-specific questions to get more meaningful information. However, the researcher's prior knowledge about the game and its players could lead to assumptions or biases in the interviews and analysis and could thereby impact the reliability of the research (Silverman, 2011). Therefore, the researcher aimed to remain as objective as possible, by letting go of any assumptions and personal involvements when conducting the research and analyzing the data, to ensure the validity and credibility of this study (Silverman, 2011).

4. Results

4.1. Participant observations

4.1.1. Observing Raids in WoW

The empirical part of the research started with observations of players in the game, in order to become familiar with the current situation of the game's environment and its players, which forms important basic knowledge needed for the conduction of the interviews. The observations of players throughout the game has shown a large variety in results in various different kinds of situations. The first observations took place in raids, because these settings contain many players and interactions at the same time which brings a richness in observations (see previous section 3.1.1.). These raids lasted about an hour per raid and consisted of a group of 25 players having to team up and work together, in order to beat strong and complex bosses that required a lot of focus, strength and tactical moves. The players of the observed group belonged to the Alliance faction and were players who have reached the maximum level with their characters. The group consisted of two players with a tanking role who had to lead the whole group and keep the boss from killing other players. These tanks were supported by four players with a supportive role, the healers, whose roles are to heal the tanks and the group. The rest of the raid group consisted of players with damage-dealing roles, who are divided into melee damage dealers who fight up front with weapons, casting damage dealers who fight with magical spells from a distance, and ranged melee damage dealers who also fight from a distance with weapons such as bows and guns. Their roles are dealing as much damage to the boss as possible and trying to keep themselves from taking too much damage.

The classes that belonged to the two tanks were a Paladin and a Warrior, and both were Dwarves as a race. These two players were running at the front of the group at all times and were the first to approach monsters and bosses. Despite the tanking role being assigned to just these two players, various other players were rushing forward and trying to be the first ones to stand at the battles as well. Most of these players were sharing similar classes to these tanks or were damage dealing classes with high mobility. The group of casting damage dealers contained a lot of variety in characters. Although these casters are the most vulnerable classes and supposed to stand in the back of the fight, many of them could still be seen very close to the fights. The casters doing this were often Druid classes with the Night Elf race, which is one of the tallest races. Some of the other casters were often running behind and standing in the back of the fight. These casters were mostly Mages and Warlocks with many of them having the Gnome race, which is the smallest race in the game. A few exceptions of races that were observed with these classes were Void Elves and Human races. Most of the Void Elf Warlocks wore dark and purple clothes which matches the class of these characters. The healers in the group were most of the times spread across the whole battlefield and varied a lot in race and class as well. Overall, there was a large variety in different kinds of characters and their roles,

classes and races. Strong and damage dealing classes and many taller races could be found in the front of the battles, as well as in the back of the battles. While the more vulnerable casting classes and the shorter races were generally keeping their distance, some of them behaved the opposite and stood very close to the fights instead. The strong and powerful tanks that are leading and defending the whole raid group were one of the shorter races in the game.

Similar observations were seen in the second raid. The construction of the group and the division of the roles was the same as the first group. In this case, one of the tanks was a small Gnome with a Death Knight class, while the other tank was a Human with the Paladin class. There were several other Human Paladins in the raid who joined the tanks with the battle in the front. Just like the first raid, there was a large variety in different casting classes and their races and some of them kept their safe distance from the fight while others were casting their spells nearby the enemies. This time, there were also several Rogue classes that were hiding in their invisible forms and sneaking around the battle, most of them being Night Elf races. The healers were also spread out across the area, some of them were seen in the back with the casters while others stood near the tanks and other damage dealers. Similar to the previous raid, there was a large diversity in different classes, races, roles, and behavior. The observations have shown a very diverse and dynamic group of players of which players did not all strictly conform to the assumed roles and positions their classes were supposed to have and behaved in their own ways instead.

4.1.2.   Observing Capital Cities in WoW

Outside of the violence and inside of the safe walls of the capital cities of both factions, a similar variety in player observations could be found. The cities in which players were observed are called "Stormwind City", which is the capital city of the Alliance faction, and "Orgrimmar", which is the capital city of the Horde faction. Both cities are a very busy, crowded and dynamic place at all times, where many players and social interactions can be observed (see explanation in section 3.1.1.). When observing players in these cities, it indeed quickly became clear that the capital city is *the* place where players come together for various reasons. Both capital cities were very dynamic and full of different characters pursuing different activities. Some were buying and selling items, finishing quests, changing their outfits, dropping items in their banks, checking the mailbox, getting a new haircut, socializing, showing off or just standing still and do nothing at all. The diversity in races was large, although the Night Elves and Humans for the Alliance, and the Trolls and Orcs for the Horde, slightly outnumbered the other races of each faction. The newly added "Allied Races" were found more often in these cities than they were in raids, although a bit more often in the Alliance city than the Horde's. Characters with these races were generally not a very high level in contrast to most of the other races found in the cities. Players of the Alliance faction that created one of the Allied Races, such as Kul Tirans and Void Elves, were often walking or jumping around on their horses or tigers in the most

crowded area of the city and tried to gain attention and show off these new races. A large fountain in front of Stormwind City's bank was a crowded place where players showed off their characters and their appearances. In Orgrimmar, a similar location in front of the city's bank served the same purpose. Various different characters were just standing around these places wearing impressive, beautiful or funny looking outfits, and some were intensively jumping around and shooting impressive magical spells in the air, gaining the attention of many other players and showing off. One character, a Monk class with the Pandaren race, which looks similar to a panda, was joking around and wore a dark outfit full of bones and skulls yet still wearing a cute little crown as headpiece and named its character Bandapear, similar to Pandabear. This character was a jolly appearance. Another character, also a Monk but this time with the tiny Gnome race, was walking around the crowded area on one of the largest mounts (creatures you can ride) available in the game, which looked very silly. Just like in the raids, the Void Elf race was spotted several times in combination with the Warlock class in the Alliance city. The same could be observed for a few other race and class combinations that were often matched together, such as Night Elf Rogues or Human Paladins, which was also observed in raids.

In contrast to players with funny, impressive-looking and active characters, some players avoided the crowd and could be found in the quieter areas in the cities. These players were mostly busy with certain tasks, like handing in quests or selling items, or were just standing still. Several Rogue classes of various races were seen in these quiet places of both cities or were sneaking around behind all the crowds, with some of them even vanishing away with their invisible stealth ability. In some areas within the cities, people were role-playing, hanging out with other players and having conversations. A small group of three players was sitting around a campfire in Orgrimmar, chatting and having a drink. Outside of the walls of both Stormwind City and Orgrimmar, large open areas can be found. These areas were full of players who gathered to have duels with each other, to hang out and to socialize. Outside of Orgrimmar, a large Tauren Warrior was jumping and running around in big armor and challenging other players to duel. The players around these areas were very social, open and friendly towards others and often started random conversations, while still showing off their characters' strengths by dueling each other.

The observations in both Stormwind City and Orgrimmar have shown that even outside of combat, there is still a wide variety of different kinds of characters doing various kinds of activities. Although some races or classes were a little more profound than others, the combinations of races and classes was generally highly diverse, ranging from characters that were having fun and joking around, to very well put together characters of which the race, class and outfit matched the character very well. While some players were pretending to be a certain persona by role-playing with other players, or showing off their outfits, other players avoided the crowd and social conversations and merely focused on completing certain tasks. The observations of players in different situations in the game has thus shown a large richness and diversity of characters in the *World of Warcraft*'s universe, which delivers

important information that will be used for creating of the topic list as well as for detailed game-specific questions during the interviews to make the conversations more in-depth.

4.2. Interviews

Questions sometimes led to participants already talking about their motivations without being asked about this. These answers sometimes preceded players' motivations to play and dealt with the features and characteristics of WoW itself. These players reported that what they like so much about the game is its large in-depth universe that offers the players a huge variety of different options and possibilities that matches many different playstyles. These players like that they can create their own unique character and that they have the freedom to be able to choose and control what activities they want to do without any time pressures in the game. These results have shown that the features of the game itself are already a huge attraction on its own and have contributed to the players' motivations to start playing the game. The upcoming sections discuss the main player motivations that resulted from the analysis of the interviews. Quotes used in this chapter have been adjusted for spelling mistakes but other than that remained fully authentic.

4.2.1. Player Motivations

Social Interaction

Social interaction turned out to be one of the most prominent motivations among the participants in this study, which is in line with earlier research (Ducheneaut et al., 2006; Fuster et al., 2012; O'Connor et al., 2015; Shen et al., 2014).

> *"Most of the time I go online to socialize." (Jenny)*

For the majority of the participants, the social elements in the game contributed to their motivations to play WoW, whether this was mere a small contribution or a large contribution to their player motivations. Although the need for social interaction mostly got gratified by playing the game over time and often play a role in persistence in playing the game, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, five participants did emphasize that it was the social element of the game specifically that made them choose to play WoW. These players reported that they like the idea of meeting new people online and forming new friendships.

> *"It is so amazing that you can meet so many incredible people from all over the world." (Roz)*

These players liked playing together with new people, having conversations or just hanging out together. They also enjoy grouping up and progressing through the game as a team, rather than playing

the game all alone. Other players pointed out that they started to play WoW so that they could play together with real life friends and family. Annabel mentioned that her whole family, including aunts, uncles and cousins, play WoW and that she joined them so that they could all play together. Gaz mentioned how all his friends played WoW in an internet café at the time and that he wanted to be part of the hype. He emphasized how he likes playing with the same people and experience the whole journey as a tight group. Most of the players who are motivated by the social interaction in the game, were also members of a guild and indicated that they sometimes log into the game just to socialize and hang out with the guild or to do activities together.

> *"The guild is always there to provide warmth." (Jenny)*

One player specifically has indicated that her main activity consists of helping other players find their way in the game and therefore decided to lead and manage a guild to help fellow guild members out and play together. She mentioned how the guild is so important to her, that she even lost some of her real friends by choosing the guild over them.

> *"[I like] helping new players find their feet. But at the moment I've been having my hands full with restructuring and managing the guild." (Roz)*

Players with a strong social interaction motivation viewed their characters as a virtual version of themselves and wanted to be perceived as themselves and not as just a character, which Gaz explains: "I try to present myself as real as possible", and adds that he wants to make other players feel as if they are hanging out with him in real life. Roz also stressed that "[she] is the same in game and out" and therefore tries to make her character look like her. Thus, players like Gaz and Roz who are motivated by social interaction, generally created a character that shared similar attributes to themselves so that they could present themselves as real as possible in the game.

Immersion

Immersion turned out to be another important motivation for 13 out of the 20 participants. Being immersed into the large fantasy universe of the game and feeling like being a part of this world, its extensive storylines and its fascinating environments is something many players loved doing and motivated them to play the game.

> *I loved exploring the world, taking my time to see all the things and do all the quests." (Ava)*

Players who sought immersion reported that they like the large world with a wide variety of different zones and wanted to immerse into WoW's huge and diverse universe. Louis explained how the mystery of this fantasy world has intrigued him to take part in this world and explore every bit of it.

Jasper added to this, as he felt thrilled to explore zones of the opposite faction where he was not supposed to be. These activities made the players feel completely immersed into the game's world and made them forget about their physical surroundings.

A great majority of these players has also reported that they enjoy the fantasy aspect of the game and all its storylines and different main characters as it intrigues players to take part and immerse into this mysterious new world even more:

> *"Well, in WoW you're "somebody"... I mean you're called a champion, you lead an army, you're important to the story. I like it very much. The world would have collapsed without you basically." (Ava)*

The game has a large main storyline as well was many different side stories, referred to in the game as "lore". Many players enjoyed delving into the storylines and learning more about the world, its background and its characters. Some players came to the game by playing its predecessor "Warcraft", hoping for WoW to continue upon this storyline. Other players went as far as to dive into these stories even outside of the game, by reading the game's books and comics or watching videos. These players generally also enjoyed doing quests, because these explain the stories and purposes behind the actions that players have to complete in the game and thereby help to fulfill the need to feel immersed.

> *"The thing I enjoyed most was being part of a story, a sense of purpose, we weren't just killing random things like shooting games, we were trying to achieve an objective. So it was a sense of purpose in the game – we wanted to destroy the enemy yes, but we also wanted to be part of a grand story." (Panda)*

Players who loved immersing into the game generally had a strong personal connection to their characters and felt like they became their own character when playing it. Alissa describes how she can get "too sucked in" into the game and that everything that happens to her character feels as if it is directly happening to her. While some players expressed to play as a character similar to themselves in order to get a stronger feeling of immersion, other players preferred playing as someone different in order to get a better feeling of the fantasy aspect or better fit the story of the game. Nicky, who is strongly motivated by immersion, explains this by arguing that:

> *"[I] feel the urge to be completely something different than being similar to me. More to get the fantasy feel going." (Nicky)*

These different ways of identification with the character are elaborated upon in the upcoming results in section 4.2.2.

Escapism

Several participants in this research have reported to play *World of Warcraft* as an escape from reality. These players use the game as a stress reliever and a way to put their minds at rest and have some time to relax.

> *"I play it to escape the harsh reality we live in and that it is something that helps relax me which brings me enjoyment." (Loz)*

Mick explained how after a long and stressful day at work, playing WoW brings him calmness and relaxation. Alissa also emphasized that WoW is a stress-free environment where she can just do whatever she wants without judgements. Mel stated that: "Real life is tiring enough, I just want my peace and fun in WoW."

While some players use the game to take a break from their daily lives and stresses, for some people the game has helped to get through a difficult period in life. Several players shared their stories of being bullied or going through periods of anxiety, depression or illnesses, and that at these times WoW was their safe escape in which they got accepted and in which the same struggles and pressures of their harsh reality did not exist:

> *"At that particular time in my life I needed an escape from the harshness of reality, I wasn't particularly happy and had a very stressful job. So I needed a really good escape to be something else - an outlet if you want to call it that." (Panda)*

For these players, the game offers distraction and helps to put the mind at ease. These players often experienced a form of immersion into the game as well, as they tend to forget about reality by fully immersing into the game's universe. However, their motivation to play WoW remains escapism, as these players specifically delve into this world in order to escape our real world, instead of for the immersion on its own. In this case, immersion was more of an outcome these players experienced by gratifying their escapism motivation. Several players using WoW as a form of escapism have reported that the game has also helped them with real life insecurities and led to a form of self-improvement:

> *"I used to be pretty shy, but actually this game has taught me a lot of social skills that I use in my daily life as well." (Louis)*

> *"Like, being bullied makes you feel insecure, and I didn't feel insecure when I went in game, I wasn't ugly, I wasn't dumb, not anything I was just one of the normal peeps there instead of the outcast, it made me feel a lot better." (Lynn)*

Players motivated by escapism, generally felt strong connections to their characters. They either created a character they could personally relate to, which made them feel like WoW was their

second reality, or they created characters that were better or completely different than themselves, in order to overcome real life insecurities or to rebel against reality. Natalia explained that creating characters that resemble the best aspects of herself help her tackle her anxiety:

> *"[A]nxiety is the hardest thing for me at the moment and [my characters] combat that by making me feel like I have control instead." (Natalia)*

This way of identifying with the character is elaborated upon in the results in section 4.2.2.

Challenge

Challenge has been identified as another motivation among the participants. Players who play WoW to seek challenge, were generally spending most of their time progressing their characters, defeating difficult content in raids or dungeons, obtaining achievements or collecting items and equipment. These players reported that they like to challenge themselves and test their own skills and that they like to work towards certain goals for their own personal enjoyment, instead of for the competition with others.

> *"I feel really happy when we kill a boss especially when you have had 300+ failed attempts and it is a great feeling to finally accomplish killing it." (Billy)*

Nicky stressed how he likes the challenge of leveling up a character and experiencing the struggles when fighting stronger enemies that required a lot of teamwork. He added that: "You know you would die if you were to fight two mobs at once, and then killing them both really felt like a big accomplishment." Ken also explained that he likes how raids require a lot of teamwork, tactical moves and an understanding of the mechanics.

While these players fulfilled their need for a challenge by mostly killing strong enemies, beating difficult content and progressing their characters, other players did this by collecting and achieving. Ava explained how she collects jewelry in real life and therefore set up a goal to also collect as many items as possible in the game:

> *"It's more of a "collector's goal": to have all the mounts and achievements available to me." (Ava)*

> *"It's the addictive collective satisfaction and sense of achievement over lots of things." (Gret)*

These players spend most of their time in the game trying to collect items, some of them being rare and very hard to get, or collecting achievements, as confirmed by Roz who explained how she obsessed with collecting achievement points and sees this as a great challenge.

Competition

The final motivation for participants of this study turned out to be competition, although this motivation was far less prominent than the previous motivations, which is in contrast with results of previous research (Hsu et al., 2009; Jansz & Neys, 2015; Yee, 2006a). Billy mentioned that "[…] there is always friendly competition between people", but that the overall focus seems to be more about having fun and enjoying your time whilst playing with other people. Gret also pointed out that she can be a bit competitive when it comes to collecting and achieving and that she constantly compares herself to other players, but adds that: "Other's figures kind of let me know where I am in the food chain and what I could aspire to." Comparing herself to other players helps to gain a better overview of her current position and progression within the game and is not focused on being better than the rest per se.

Only two participants have reported that they are highly competitive and expressed that competition motivates them to play the game:

> *"I love competing on the damage meters." (Rick)*

Rick is very competitive and always tries to get the highest scores when it comes to dealing damage in raids: "I like challenging myself and beating others." He spent the last year being in a highly competitive raiding guild that was part of the top 10 guilds of the server he played on. While Roz also plays the game for the social aspect and its challenge, she has reported to be very competitive when it comes to obtaining achievements:

> *"Achievements haha. I'm a little less obsessed than before but still keeping the number one spot in the guild. Verdius has been trying his best to keep up." (Roz)*

Roz keeps comparing her achievement points to other guild members to make sure that she dominates the top position with the most points. She is well aware of the fact that others are trying to keep up with her score and exceed it, but she keeps an eye on the scores of others and knows that "[her] spot is still pretty secure." Even though she does want to beat other players' scores, Roz as well as Rick mentioned that their competitiveness tends to cool down a bit now that they get older and play the game for a longer time already.

The players who have reported to like the competition in the game had to make sure their characters were strong and up-to-date, in order to be able to participate in the top-level raids and to obtain difficult achievements. Therefore, their characters were mostly created in a tactical way with the strongest and best options available, which will me further explained in section 4.2.3.

4.2.2. Character Identification

Emotional Attachment

Several participants have reported to feel an emotional attachment to their characters in the game in various ways. Many of these players feel connected to their characters, because they put a lot of time and efforts in them.

"[T]his character has become a part of my living legacy." (Louis)

Billy has collected many rare items with his character already and therefore feels a strong connection with his character. Nicky added that he definitely feels a certain attachment to his character, "since you have already achieved certain challenges or goals on that character."

Nicky as well as several other players mentioned that they still have their very first character, of which some are already many years old or have not been played for years. Still, players pointed out that they cannot let go of these characters, as they share many good memories and have experienced a lot of things with them. Ava explained how she put much effort in her character and has a lot of memories with it:

"I am a very sentimental person, I get attached to certain things and it's hard for me to get rid of [my character] at some point." (Ava)

Natalie also feels an emotional attachment to their characters and gives the example that losing her account with all her characters would feel like "[…] losing photographs of friends and such." Playing the game for a long time already makes the characters feel like memories of this whole period of her life. For these players, their characters and the memories attached to them, have formed an important part of their lives and contribute to their motivation to play the game:

"[I]f it wasn't for him, I feel like I wouldn't be playing as much, if not at all." (Loz)

Players who expressed to feel emotionally attached to their characters because of all the achievements and items they have collected with them, were mostly the players who play the game for its challenge or competition. The other players who reported to feel emotionally attached to their characters because of all the memories and experiences, were mostly the players who played the game for its immersion, escapism or social interaction. Many of the players also felt attached to their characters because of the time and efforts spent in them.

Self-identification

Self-identification with the characters turned out to be important for several participants of this study. These participants reported that they relate themselves to their characters and often create avatars similar to themselves or an enhanced version of themselves, which is in line with van Looy's (2012) similarity and wishful identification.

> *"Human was random or maybe not. I think I wanted her to look more like me. Just like when I play Sims. I always make my char look like me as best as I can." (Roz)*

Some of these players mentioned how they wanted to present themselves as real as possible and want others to perceive their characters as their real selves instead of as a game character. Therefore, these players behaved the same when playing their characters and created a character that looked similar or shared similar attributes to themselves. Roz' motivation to play WoW focused on social interaction and on how she enjoys helping people and behaves the same inside and outside of the game. She sees the game as her second virtual world and therefore wants to present herself as real as possible and describes her character as "the virtual version of me". She mentioned that her character even looks like her. Remaining the same person in the game helps with her interest in helping players and being a guild master, because: "[…] people find comfort in seeing that [my character] hasn't changed."

Besides the players who see their characters as a copy of themselves, a large part of the players reported that their characters share similar aspects to themselves, but that they did not look the exact same. Gaz explained this and argued that "[…] it's more like playing characters that I share attributes to in real life", rather than playing a character that is exactly like him. It became clear from the interviews that this is mostly due to the lack of customization options in the game and that players therefore try to create their characters in other ways to still represent themselves. Mick also pointed out how he regards his character as similar to himself by trying to make it look like him, but also tried to take the same roles and pursue similar activities with his character in the game as he does in real life with his job as a firefighter:

> *"Like if I save someone I take the healer role, escorting and guarding I take the Tank role, breaching a premise etc., "offense", I take the DPS role." (Mick)*

There were also several players studying nursery or working in healthcare, who created a character with a supportive role so that they could continue helping and healing people inside of the game. Natalia, Lynn, Gret, and several others, explained how they created a character similar to themselves by creating a character that shares their interests in animals and nature. This way, these players strongly identify themselves with their characters, even though they might not look exactly like them.

Players with strong self-identifications with their characters, were mostly motivated by immersion, escapism and social interaction. Gaz explains that playing as a character that matches

himself, helps him to feel more immersed into the game's environment and makes him feel like he is actually part of the game's storyline. Alissa also strongly identifies with her character and explains that: "[…] if something happens to my character in combat, or a storyline or something similar, I feel like it's directly happening to me." Mick describes that playing as a character that looks and feels similar to him, helps him to relax and forget about our real world. Roz stressed that playing as a virtual version of herself helps her to better connect with other players in the game and strengthens her position as a guild master.

Identity Experimentation

While some players enjoyed blending in with their characters by playing characters similar to themselves, other players preferred playing as an ideal version of themselves or as something completely different than themselves. These players liked to play out different personas or experiment with identities.

> *"In some way my character is something I want to be/grow to be." (Cyra)*

Cyra and Natalia pointed out that their characters are something they look up to and aspire to be. Natalia specifically explains how her characters "[…] represent an aspect of me that I like." In other words, her characters represent the best of herself and are an ideal version of her, as in reality she copes with a lot of anxiety which holds her back. She explains that with her characters, she can be the best of her and wishes to be like that outside of the game as well. Loz also describes his character as someone he wishes he could become in real life. Not only when it comes to appearance, because his character has "long hair and a good beard, which both [he] can't do in real life", but also because the role his character's class has. He studies nursery and enjoys helping people and regards his character as an ideal version of himself he aspires to become:

> *"I feel like if we could choose to be our characters, I would choose to be a paladin in real life. I would be able to heal people as well as protect them." (Loz)*

Panda reported that: "I made a character totally opposite to who I was in real life." He mainly played WoW as an escape from his daily life and struggles, and explained that he was not living in the best situation. Playing as someone different helped him forget about these struggles:

> *"[E]lves were always highly revered and considered intelligent, they were the superior race in my mind [...] I felt like I wanted to be a "superior" race because in real life, I was one of the minority races [...] So choosing Night Elf was a kind of rebellion against racial tension; a chance to say: "well we're the superior race now, what you gonna do about it?!" (Panda)*

He also adds that growing up in a poor black family and experiencing a lot of discrimination, he wanted to experience what it was like to be a rebel and have power in the game. Other players have reported that they like to become someone different in order to match the fantasy theme or the environment of the game. Nicky, for example, described how he created a different character and prefers to be part of "the underdog", in order to feel more immersed into the lore of the game as well as to make use of the possibility to become someone different than he is in reality. Annabel mentioned that she has always enjoyed making up personas for her characters.

These participants all pointed out how their characters are enhanced or ideal versions of themselves, or characters they look up to and wish to become, or how they just liked to experience what it was like to become someone completely different. Most of these participants played the game for its escapism and immersion, because some explained how their characters are ideal versions of themselves which helps them forget and feel better about their real-life situations or insecurities, while other players feel like becoming someone different helps to make them feel more immersed into the game's story and its fantasy aspect.

No Identification

Only four participants have reported to feel no identification with their characters. These players explained that, although some of them do feel emotionally attached to their characters because of the achievements and the investments, they do not identify with these characters.

> *"I am controlling a character that is portrayed, courtesy of Blizzard as pixels on screen."* *(Gret)*

These players do not feel like becoming their characters nor do they feel like their character represent (aspects of) themselves. They often pointed out that WoW is just a fun game and that their characters are just game characters that they created in a way that makes the game more enjoyable for them. Ken, for example, pointed out that WoW is just a game and that: "[…] while I do like WoW, I am not nuts about it." Playing WoW is fun for him, but he does not become as involved with his character that he personally relates to it. He expressed that he does not really care about his character or any connection with it. Gret also stressed that while she did create a character that she likes looking at and enjoys playing, she "[…] does not become the character." Lex added that her character is "totally a game character" and that she cannot imagine becoming her character while playing. To her, her characters are just her own fun creations without any personal identification and she compares playing these characters to reading a book:

> *"[…] I didn't do that playing-with-doll when I was younger either. I always played out stories with them being characters instead of them being me. It's like reading a good book."* *(Lexie)*

Rick plays the game mostly for its challenge and competition and explained how he does not feel like he becomes his character when playing: "I get more into the game than the character itself I guess." He pointed out that he just likes to mess and joke around with his character and have fun and did not seem to take his character very serious other than having to play the game through this character.

Players who expressed to not identify with their characters, were mostly players with stronger challenge and competition motivations, and therefore focused more on obtaining certain challenges and goals rather than forming a connection or relationship with their characters. Their characters served a strategical purpose or were just used for having fun. Although Lex does play WoW for the escape from reality and its immersion into the world, she pointed out that this is just for fun and to take her mind off her illness and stress and that she does not identify with her character.

4.2.3. Character Creation

4.2.3.1. Race

Appearance

A large part of the participants reported that they choose their character's race based on its appearance:

"For myself a big factor in what race I want to play is the models and how they look." (Nicky)

This could be based on various aspects of the race's appearance. For example, some players wanted to be a race that looked beautiful, pretty or strong to them. Ava pointed out how she chose a race that is tall and has "nice hair", which looked pretty to her. Jasper also preferred a tall and strong looking race, because he is short in real life and wants to be perceived as big and powerful. Annabel adds by describing her race as her standard of beauty:

> *"I wouldn't say they are the standards of beauty – but to me maybe they are. I've always been a shorter person in real life, and Night Elves are portrayed pretty tall etc." (Annabel)*

These players mostly created characters as ideal versions of themselves or to experiment with different identities, which for some players helped them to overcome certain insecurities and feel better about themselves. Roz, Gaz, and several other players who expressed strong self-identifications with the character reported a preference for the "Human" race, which looks the closest to real humans and therefore enables these players to make their characters look the most realistic and similar to themselves. This helped them feel more immersed in the game or present themselves as real as possible when interacting with other players, thereby matching their motivations to play.

Several players chose their race based on how much it matches the fantasy theme of the game instead of how realistic it looks:

"(…) why play a fantasy roleplaying game and choose human?" (Jenny)

Playing as a fantasy-looking race made these players feel more immersed into the game's world as these races match the environment of the game better or helped them to forget about reality even more, and was a way to experiment with identity and play out different personas. Overall, players for whom appearance played a role in their race decisions had various motivations to play, which turned out to mostly be immersion, escapism and social interaction.

Storyline

Another factor that turned out to influence participants' decisions for their character's race, is the storyline. This turned out to play a large role mostly for the participants who liked the immersion into the game and had strong identifications with their characters. When deciding the race for their characters, these players took the background storylines of the races or the races that appeared in the game's main storyline into account. Louis and Ken both described how they chose their race because it matches with a specific important character in the storyline which they liked, and thereby wanted to look similar to this character. Other players liked the background storyline of a race because they can relate to certain aspects of it. For instance, Cyra chose her race, because it was well known for its calmness and peacefulness which she could relate to herself:

"Pandaren – I love the whole mindset of the race itself and it resonates with me and my everyday life very much." (Cyra)

Panda has reported that he preferred his race and its story, because it was perceived as a powerful and intelligent race that belongs to the top of the hierarchy, and since his position in real life's society was not very high, he wanted to become the powerful and intelligent Night Elf in the game instead. Being this race helped Panda to forget about his real life and thus conformed to his motivation of using the game as an escape. Nicky also pointed out that he liked the whole story around the Troll race and their connection to voodoo and loyalty. He has mentioned before that he prefers being part of "the underdog" and since the Trolls have a long history of being kicked out of their homelands and becoming refugees who started to focus on the power of voodoo, this fits his preference for being an outlaw in the game.

Jenna pointed out that she changed her character's races several times, but that she always chooses a race that is part of the Horde faction. She explains that she prefers Horde races, because she has always been fascinated by "the dark side" and that she feels at home at the Horde:

> *"The Horde always seem to be a bit underdog: infighting, shack homes, stuff built with bones and mud. The alliance is just too pristine. The alliance would want me to conform to their standards; the horde accept you as you are." (Jenn)*

Alissa, on the other hand, preferred being a race that was part of the Alliance side, because she liked the stories of the races belonging to this faction better:

> *"I like the good guys always. Not the "dark and misunderstood" ones, not the outright evil ones. Playing the good guy gives me a good conscience and I cannot imagine liking the bad guys ever." (Alissa)*

Thus, various players chose their race based on the storyline, whether this was a storyline they could relate to or simply enjoyed, or whether they wanted to be part of the outlaws or the good guys. Most of these players were motivated by escapism and immersion and expressed strong self-identifications with the character or liked to experiment with different identities.

Racial Abilities

For several participants, the racial abilities of a race turned out to play a role in the decision for the character's race.

> *"I did quite competitive raiding and m+, realm top 10, so Night Elf was good to drop aggro mid-combat with Shadow Meld." (Rick)*

Rick plays the game for its challenge and competition and thus the performance of his character is very important. Therefore, he chose the Night Elf race because its racial ability called "Shadow Meld" would be very useful for the competitive raiding he did. Billy added that:

> *"The Humans had a really cool racial ability which would allow you to break free of stuns and traps which I thought was pretty cool." (Billy)*

Since Billy also plays the game mainly for its challenge, he chose a race that would bring him more advantages in battles during raids and thereby help him to achieve these challenges. These players thus made a strategical choice when it comes to their character's race, which strongly matched their motivations for challenge and competition. Most of these players did not express a strong identification with their characters.

Personal Interest

A small part of the participants reported that they chose their character's race based on a personal preference or interest in the race or specific aspects of the race.

> *"I just chose what I thought looked cool […] I just used personal preferences." (Billy)*

Gret pointed out that she has a dog in real life and likes dogs and therefore chose the "Worgen" race, which looks the most similar to a dog. Billy mentioned how he chose the "Human" race because he simply thought it looked cool together with the class he wanted to play. Natalia loves the nature and therefore picked the "Night Elf" race, because the characters starting zone looks like a big forest and the race's ideology is also focused around nature. One player reported that she does not really spend a lot of time thinking about what race she wants to play:

> *"[I] liked the looks on the hunter and I already had a Pandarian, Draenei and Night Elf […] It is not a very conscious decision to be honest, more like a spur of the moment one." (Lex)*

Lex' chose a race of her current main character, based on that she already had a lot of characters with the other races and wanted to try something new, and because she thought it looked good with the class she wanted to play. She added that she does not really take other factors into account when choosing a race. These players expressed very weak or no identifications with their characters.

4.2.3.2.   Class

Knowledge

When it comes to choosing a class for the character, several participants have reported that prior knowledge about a class influenced their class decision.

> *"I didn't even know how to make characters back then, I had no idea which realm I was choosing, so I was like "okay Night Elf look nice, and I know what druids are" and this is how my main was born." (Ava)*

Ava described how everything in the game was very new to her. She did not understand how to create a character and did not know about the many different possibilities for a class, so she decided to choose the class that was already a bit familiar to her and picked the "Druid" class, because she knew what druids were and did not know anything about the other classes. Lynn also already knew a bit about the class she chose, because her dad used to play the same class, just like Billy chose his class because his cousin used to play it. Thus, some of the players chose a class they already had some knowledge about and which was already familiar to them.

On the other hand, there were also players who picked their class because they did not have any knowledge about the class yet:

> *"I had my DK as my main and wanted to try something new. Never played Hunter so tried and fell in love with it and played it ever since." (Cyra)*

These players indicated that they liked a change and therefore liked to try out a class they have never played before. The players who selected their character's class for this reason often had very diverse player motivations, although, most of the players playing the game for its challenge or competition already knew beforehand which class would fit their characters best and thus chose a class they had more knowledge about rather than trying out a class they did not know anything about.

Performance

Most of the participants who are motivated by challenge and competition, chose their class based on its performance, just like they chose a race based on its racial abilities. These participants reported that their class decisions are strategical moves that help them to achieve certain goals or complete challenges.

> *"I really like the fact that I can use all my moves whilst moving and that I am able to survive pretty well alone as well, due to having a lot of survivability and defensive moves." (Billy)*

Rick explained how his class is very convenient and strong, as it can easily switch roles and is therefore very adaptable to many different situations, which is extremely useful for the raiding activities he does. Louis also mentioned how playing his class with its supportive role makes it "easier to demand a raiding spot". Healing classes sometimes tend to be scarce and thus the decision to play a class that is able to perform a healing role, makes it easier to join a group in a raid and is thereby a very tactical decision that helps the player to progress in the game.

Several other participants stressed that their guilds required specific classes which were needed for the guild in order to perform better and progress in raids.

> *"[I]t's what my guild needs as a healer." (Annabel)*

Thus, some of the players who enjoyed raiding and wanted to participate in raids, therefore often listened to the requirements of the guild and created a class or switched to a role that allowed them to join their guild in raids and thereby perform better in this challenging group content. While most of these players who choose a class based on its performance did not express very strong identifications with their characters, some did point out that they are emotionally attached to these characters, mainly because of all the spent time and investments and obtained achievements on their characters.

Storyline

Just like storylines can play an important role in deciding which race to choose, it turned out to also influence the decisions for class. Just like race, some participants pointed out that they chose a specific class that matches an important character in the game's storyline which they liked.

> *"I'm a Thrall follower for life so I guess that's where the Shaman love comes from." (Gaz)*

Gaz explained that he has always been a big fan of the storyline's great character "Thrall" and that he therefore picked not only the same race but also the same class as Thrall. He describes his character as a "wannabe Thrall". The same is done by Ken, who also picked his class, because he thinks that "it kind of goes with the lore" and matched his own character with an important character in the game's storyline.

The players for whom the storyline played a role in their class decisions, were the players who also had a large interest in the overall lore of the game and its important characters and for whom immersion into the world and its stories was part of their motivations to play. The identifications with their characters varied from players strongly identifying with their characters and its class to players who simply liked playing as a specific character in the lore and therefore copied it.

Complexity

A few participants reported to choose a class based on its complexity. Lex explained how she strives to become a better player and progress her character to a higher level, which is why she picked a class that was not too stressful or dependent and went for the "hunter" class which she knows how to master well. This way she can perform better and reach her goals easier.

> *"It is a bit easier to understand [hunter] than the rotation of shaman and paladin. And I am trying to get to a higher level in playing." (Lex)*

Grett explained: "I also looked at the fight style" of a class, because she wanted a class with a not too complicated fighting style. On the other hand, Rick explained that "mashing three buttons isn't fun either" and rather prefers a class that is a bit more complex and challenging instead, which matches his motivation to seek challenge.

Players who preferred a less complex class stressed that they come to the game to have fun with others and to relax, and do not want to experience too much pressures or stresses. Players who preferred a more complex class, were mostly the players who reported to like the game's challenge and wanted to test their skills by playing classes that were more difficult to master.

Personal Interest

Finally, several participants reported to choose a class based on a personal interest in specific aspects of that class. Some of the players who mentioned that they like helping people, chose a class with a supportive role in order to heal people in the game. Other players had a personal preference for a specific role for a class, because they were simply better in playing a particular role or not good at any other roles, which influenced their decision for a class:

> *"Even though I tried healing and tank, I was better at DPS." (Loz)*

Several others chose a class based on some aspects of that class that appealed to them. Annabel went for the "Mage" class and explained that "[…] it was the aspect of shiny magic coming out of her hands that drew me into it." Lex, Lynn and Gret all reported that they love animals and therefore went for the "Hunter" class, because this class gave them the option to have a pet in the game as well.

> *"My dad tried out the hunter class and I also wanted a cute little kitty running behind my back at all times." (Lynn)*

Louis chose his "Shaman" class, because he saw another player with this class performing a specific healing spell which appealed so much to him that he decided to also choose this class:

> *"When I saw a restoration shaman for the first time in Naxxramas 25-man (back in patch 3.0.1), I saw the chain heal ability, and that ability appealed so much to me. Its beautiful spell, that I was thinking: I want to be the one casting those chain heals." (Louis)*

As explained earlier by Nicky and Panda, some players wanted to be someone different in the game. Nicky therefore prefers a class that is a unique combination with his race. Going for a new class and having a different class and race combination is something that brings him joy, and he explains that "it's also about being different, doing something else than most of the people." For Panda, the game is his escape from reality and the struggles he experiences in society. While he picked his race for the reasons to become someone completely different with more power than he has in reality, he did the same when choosing his character's class:

> *"In the game I wanted more freedom to just do whatever I wanted. The rogue character was not expected to conform to any societal norms, you steal, pickpocket, sneak up on people and backstab them, all things that were deviant from "normal" - and at that time I wanted to have the freedom to be different, because I was living with my folks and feeling very stifled." (Panda)*

4.2.4. Persistence

Relatedness

Relatedness has shown to play a large role in the persistence to play *World of Warcraft* for many of the participants. 17 of the 20 participants have reported the importance of the game's social elements for their motivation to continue playing the game. For these players, the social interaction in the game has been important in various ways.

> *"My guild counts on me so I have to be there for them." (Ava)*

A large part of the players reported that it is their guild that motivates them to continue playing the game. Roz described her guild as "my family" and also explains that she "has made it too far to quit now", especially since she is the master of her guild and thereby responsible for the whole guild. The same is described by Ava, who is also a guild master and explains that there are many guild members counting on her. Roz and Ava also expressed that by being guild masters, they advance in the mechanics of the game and the role as a guild master, as well as take constant leadership and guide other players through progression. Thus, their roles as guild master also satisfies the autonomy and competence needs, which are further explained in the upcoming sections.

Besides the responsibility of being a guild master, many other players who were part of a guild reported that they enjoy playing together with the guild or socializing with fellow guild members. A majority mentioned how they are still in the same guild for many years already. Louis, who is still in his guild of 10 years ago, explains:

> *"The social aspect in the raiding guilds. The people I played with back then for years. That is the only reason why I continued playing this game." (Louis)*

Guilds make many players feel at home and motivate them to stay in the game.

Other players reported that they still play the game because they enjoy playing together with their friends, family or significant others. Panda still likes to play the game with the same group of close friends as before, as well as his wife. Annabel also explained how her uncle, aunt, dad, cousin and his wife, all play the game and that she likes playing together with them. Several participants also like that they can continue to meet new people in the game, which plays a role in why they persist to play. Ava shared how she made a lot of new friends in the game with whom she still loves to play, but also how she met "the love of [her] life", who is currently her fiancé, in *World of Warcraft*.

Thus, the game can bring people together and allows for new friendships to be made. Players can socialize, hang out, help others, and play together with relative others, with their guild, or with people they just met, which are all social elements many players seemed to like about the game and which motivated them to persist to play WoW.

Autonomy

The need for autonomy turned out to also play a role in persistence for the participants. Participants have reported that they enjoy how the game offers so many different possibilities and that players can choose what to do and when to do in their own terms.

> *"So I choose to play WoW because there is so much stuff you can do and the game is just the best game I have ever played over the years." (Cyra)*

Billy expressed that he likes how he is able to create his own in the way that he wants. Mick mentioned how in WoW he can "go on [his] own pace, no timer." Gret added how there are still so many aspects to explore and so many things left to do, to achieve and to collect. The game's vast open world simply allows these players to choose whatever activity they want to pursue without pushing them into certain directions, which is confirmed by Loz who explains that he enjoys "to play it the way [he] likes to." Players like being in full control of their journeys and activities in the game and being able to choose what to do completely by themselves, which motivated many players to persist to play WoW after many years.

Competence

Several players have indicated that competence also influences their long-term motivation to continue playing and thus their persistence with the game. Although not every player pointed this out literally, most of the players automatically do improve their skills of the game when playing it for a longer time and therefore the need for competence could have unconsciously played a role in persistence for more players. Alissa explained that she improved a lot in learning how to play her character and that "[she] is much more involved with [her] character now." Now that she masters the mechanics of her character's class, she is able to progress it and make it even stronger, which she could not do before. Natalia also described that she improved a lot with the game and understanding her character and that when playing her character, she now actually feels good at something. She expressed that this helps her forget about real life struggles and therefore is in line with her escapism motivation, as well as motivates her to continue playing the game:

> *Honestly, being good at something – that's the whole reason I came back this time. I was going through a rough patch with anxiety and I just wanted the simple pleasure of feeling "hey, I did a good job there, that's nice." (Natalia)*

For Natalia, being good at the game has literally been her reason to return to the game after having a break. For several other players, improving one's skills, comprehending the game and character and

advancing through new content, has made the game more fun to play and led to a stronger persistence in continuing to play it.

Several players also stressed how the game is in constant development, offering them new possibilities to advance in the game, which contributed to the persistence in playing:

"For now I'm waiting for the next patch, 8.2." (Kenny)

Kenny explained that he is currently waiting for the game's new update to be launched so that he can continue to explore new content and collect new items and achievements. He plays the game for its challenge and thereby persisting to play helps him to advance and get better and leads up to the satisfaction of his motivation to play. Gret described how there is always much more content to come, which motivates her to stick around. For Kenny, Gret, as well as several other players, the idea that new and unknown content, challenges, items, zones, and other features will be constantly added to the game, motivates them to persist playing WoW.

Meaningful Context

While SDTs three intrinsic needs turned out to be important for persistence to play WoW for the participants of this study, the interviews have also highlighted another important need that motivated participants to persist playing. When asking players whether the game is important to them, almost all players clearly answered with yes. Many players described the game as special to them or mentioned that it has become a big part of their lives.

"In a way it made me the person I am today." (Cyra)

[I] feel it's part of who I am, I'll always have a certain love for it, even when it gets boring quickly." (Lynn)

Some of these players made clear that they have already invested so much time, money and efforts into the game, that it is hard to let go of. Billy is motivated by the game's challenge and pointed out that by fulfilling this motivation, he dedicated a lot of time in the game and has already obtained a lot of meaningful achievements and items. This makes WoW very important to him and motivates him to continue playing.

Furthermore, other players added that they share many good memories with the game, just like Natalia mentioned earlier how the game and its characters are like photographs to her, which makes the game a meaningful part of the lives of many players. Lynn adds upon this and argued how WoW has become a part of who she is and that she simply cannot let go of it. For some of these players, the game has become a part of their daily routines which makes it difficult to quit, like Roz explained:

"I've made it too far to quit now. I feel that stubbornness has something to do with it." (Roz)

Since Lex has always had a major interest in the immersion into the game's extensive lore and spends a lot of time into reading about the lore even outside of the game, having to let go of the game and its interesting storylines is not an option. The need to hold on to something meaningful as well as her love for the immersion into the game's fantasy world and its characters, therefore contributed to her persistence in playing. This shows that WoW has formed an important and meaningful part of the daily lives of many participants in various ways, which is something they cherished and did not want to let go of and contributed to these players persistence in playing WoW.

Consequently, SDTs thee intrinsic needs of relatedness, autonomy and competence have shown to play a role in the persistence in playing WoW for most of the participants, for some to a larger extent than for others. The participants' need for a meaningful context was another important need that emerged from the interviews. Understanding persistence has shown why players invest their time and money into the game by fulfilling these needs, while at the same time gratifying their motivations to play and their motivations for their characters.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1. Main Findings

The interviews have shown that there is a large diversity in motivations for creating the character by players of the game *World of Warcraft*. WoW is a differentiated world with a large variety in different characters with different races and classes and which are played in different ways, which has been observed in the participant observations and has been elaborated upon in the interviews. In the interviews, players have expressed to have not just one single motivation, but generally a combination of motivations to play, which they tried to fulfill by playing the game and by creating their characters in related ways. The motivations to play turned out to be: social interaction, immersion, escapism, challenge and competition, and influenced players' decision when creating the character. The variety in motivations of the players can explain the great diversity in characters and behavior observed in the participant observations. In the character creation process, identification with the characters played an important role as well. Thus, while players motivations for creating the character can be largely explained by players' motivations to play the game, it is also determined by a need for identification.

Players with a strong immersion and escapism motivation to play, have generally expressed stronger identifications with their characters. This can either be self-identification, by which players have indicated that their characters are virtual versions of themselves which helps them to feel more immersed into the game or to forget about reality better, or identity experimentation, by which the characters were used to play out different identities or create enhanced versions of the player, which helps players to feel more part of the game's fantasy universe or to feel better about one's real life problems or insecurities. Therefore, players with these motivations generally created their characters by selecting a race and class that represented themselves or an identity they wanted to become, which related to van Looy's (2012) similarity identification and wishful identification. Players who reported to have stronger challenge or competition motivations, expressed weak to no identifications with their characters and generally created their characters by selecting a race and class that would bring strategical advantages or would help them reach their goals and achievements easier. Players with stronger social interaction motivations mainly pointed out that they wanted to present themselves as real as possible and thus had strong self-identifications with their characters and selected a race and class that closely resembled themselves.

Contrary to my expectations, discussions about contemporary society's depiction of race and class did not seem to play a significant role in the selection of a race and class for players of WoW and was only touched upon by one participant. The magic circle (Huizinga 1938/1995) is therefore relevant when dealing with race and class in WoW, as players' decisions for race and class are not influenced by the positions of race and class in the contemporary world. Instead, the characters were

created in a way that helped players to gratify their motivations to play the game. Overall, the motivations behind players' characters creations and thus their choices for a race and class, were in line with their motivations to play *World of Warcraft*. Fulfilling these motivations led to a lot of joy and positive consequences for the players of the game.

Important to note is that there is some variation in these patterns. A few players who reported to play the game just for its challenge or competition and not more than that, still expressed identifications with their characters and created their characters in ways that made them share attributes to the player or made ideal versions of themselves. Whilst some other players feel completely immersed in the game's large fantasy world and its compelling storylines, they have reported to not feel any personal connection to their characters at all and regarded it as being just a game character for fun. Thus, it is crucial to understand that there exists a large diversity and richness in and between player motivations for the character creations.

The final results regarding persistence have shown that there are four needs that players try to fulfill which explain why players persist to play *World of Warcraft*, while at the same time fulfilling their motivations to play as well as their motivations for their characters. These needs were SDTs three needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, and an additional need for meaningful context, which has inductively been discovered in this study. A majority expressed how the need to interact and play with others played a large role in their persistence to play, which refers to the need for relatedness. Being able to choose whatever you want to do on in the game on your own terms, as well as constantly exploring new content and progressing and advancing through the game, referred to the other two needs for autonomy and competence. Feeling the need to hold onto something meaningful that plays an important role in players' lives refers to the meaningful context need. For some players, some of these needs turned out to be more important for understanding why the player continues playing the game than for others, but overall all needs have played a role in explaining why players continue to invest their time and money into this game.

The character creations of players have also shown to play a role in players' persistence, as many players would not continue playing WoW if they did not create their characters in a specific way. Players selected their character's race and class in ways that helped to gratify their motivations to play the game and that matched a need for identification, and the gratification of these motivations brings players joy and motivates them to persist in playing. This altogether shows how all categories and themes of this study have shown to be relevant and interconnected.

5.2.   Theoretical Implications

Reflecting upon the role of the researcher in this study, all steps taken in the analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), have been made transparent and explained systematically and the produced codes and themes were constantly evaluated for its relevance to the research question, to improve the reliability and validity of this study. The researcher kept an open mind for any possible answers that were deviant from the main theory and tried to not steer the discussions and answers into determined directions. Including these outcomes enriches and strengthens the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, any unexpected outcomes were taken into account in the analysis of the data. Being inductively sensitive for the outcomes of this research has led to interesting and new findings that emerged from the data. The researcher's deep involvement with the game has positively influenced the research. The researcher was able to use her knowledge to take the interviews to a deeper level by asking detailed, game-specific and in-depth follow-up questions to raise the participants' awareness of certain topics and gain more meaningful information. In case certain topics were not covered during the interviews yet, the researcher took the active role to guide the focus of the discussions back to the relevant and important topics, by using probes or asking the participant specific questions in a natural way. Because the physical elements of a face-to-face interview got lost by the use of online chat interviews, the researcher tried to constantly respond to the participants by using a lot of prompts and smiley faces and by making sure to be able to reply quickly. The researcher sometimes deliberately waited before responding in order to give the participants more time to think and add information. This was positively perceived by the participants who have shown a willingness to provide rich and meaningful information.

The results of this study have shown that U&G provided a proper theoretical frame for exploring player motivations for *World of Warcraft* and players' character creations. Various different player motivations for games have been identified by previous studies (cf. Fuster et al., 2012; van Reijmersdal et al., 2013; Wu et al., 2008; Yee, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c) which turned out to be relevant for analyzing player motivations in *World of Warcraft*. However, several of these motivations turned out to not play a large role for the motivations of the players. The manipulation motivation did not emerge as a relevant player motivation, nor did the interest motivation. Although one participant did mention that he liked manipulating the game's economy and prices, this was just an activity that was the result of a different player motivation. The interest motivation was characterized by van Reijmersdal et al. (2013) and whilst some players mentioned their interest in the game and its genre, this had to do more with players' introduction to the game but did not seem to be players' motivation to actually select and play WoW. While enjoyment was regularly discussed, it could not be identified as player motivations for WoW either, as players expressed enjoyment as an outcome of fulfilling the player's motivations by playing the game, rather than a motivation to play on its own. Some player motivations of earlier research that have been identified as unique and exclusive motivations, quite

closely overlapped in WoW. The motivations immersion and escapism, and challenge and competition, tended to overlap, as players reported a combination of characteristics of both motivations. The differences between these motivations then had to be identified by the researcher in the thematic analysis. Overall, the main ideas of U&G are sustained in this study and most of the player motivations of the theory turned out to be relevant for guiding the interviews and for identifying player motivations in the in the analysis of the interviews.

The Self-Determination theory (cf. Gagné, 2003; Neys et al., 2014. Ryan & Deci, 2000) has provided a relevant and suitable theoretical framework for analyzing persistence for players of WoW, as the satisfaction of the theory's three intrinsic needs of relatedness, autonomy and competence, clearly played a role in players' motivations to continue playing WoW. Some participants did not always emphasize all three needs as clearly, which may has to do with the fulfillment of these needs being more of an unconscious process in contrast to U&G, which is more about the conscious selection and play of the game. Still, for the majority of the players all three needs turned out to be important for understanding persistence, with some of these needs being a bit more important for some players than for others. However, these three needs turned out to not be the only factors leading up to persistence in the game, as one additional theme in relation to persistence emerged from the interviews, which was the players' need for meaningful context. This shows that SDTs three needs alone were not sufficient to provide a complete understanding of persistence among players of WoW. Therefore, the researcher's decision to keep an open mind for results that might deviate from the main theory turned out to be a wise choice, as a meaningful result emerged inductively and would have gotten lost otherwise. While SDTs intrinsic motivations have certainly been useful for explaining persistence in WoW and while it has been interesting to see how players continue to play a classical game like WoW, SDT has shown to not be a very strong theory for explaining the specific behavior and decisions of players and their characters in WoW. For this, U&G turned out to be a better suiting theory showing that the creation of the character in WoW is a motivated action by which players consciously choose a specific race and class in order to fulfill their individual needs.

Previous research has shown that identification with the avatar is important and that avatars often are self-representations of its users (cf. Dunn & Guadagno, 2011; Jansz, 2015; Klimmt et al., 2009), which got confirmed by the results of this study and were in line with van Looy's (2012) wishful and similarity identification. Identification has shown to play an important role in the motivations behind players' character creations in WoW, thereby showing its relevance regarding player motivations in gaming and the importance to continue applying theory about character identification to similar future studies dealing with motivations in games. However, a strong identification with the character does not always have to occur, as several participants of this study have shown weak to no identification with their WoW characters at all.

Finally, while several studies stressed how race and class in the game show resonances with contemporary society's depiction of different races and classes (cf. Dumitrica & Gaden, 2009; Langer,

2011; Monson, 2012; Mosley, 2010), this did not seem to apply to players of WoW. For these players, the depiction of different races and classes and their power and position in the hierarchy were deemed to not play an important role in creation of the character's race and class.

5.3.   Contributions, Limitations & Suggestions for Future Research

This study has shown to be timely and filled in the gap in the academic debate by analyzing player motivations behind character creation in the most recent expansion of *World of Warcraft,* on which recent research had not been done yet. The study succeeded in analyzing motivations for a varied group of players of *World of Warcraft.* Players were willing to share a great amount of rich information that was all relevant to this research. A point of saturation got reached after the 16th interview which gives confidence in the discovered patterns of this study and its authenticity for players of WoW. The study emphasized that players take an active role in selecting and playing this game and creating a specific character, because players know in advance that this will help them to satisfy certain individual needs. In contrast to many negative assumptions around gaming and its problematic consequences on players and society, this study has shown that playing games like *World of Warcraft* can bring a lot of joy and positive consequences to its players instead. Many players have emphasized how playing this game has helped them get through hardships in life and helped them overcome certain difficulties and insecurities or explained that the game helps them to challenge their skills. Others have stressed how they have met many new people in the game and formed amazing friendships; of which one player has even met the love of her life in the game. All players have shown to have their own motivations to play which they try to gratify through playing the game and creating their character in a way that helps to fulfill their individual needs. This fulfillment is beneficial to the players and shows that gaming also has positive effects on players.

Although this study was executed with great care and consideration, several limitations should be addressed. From the interviews emerged that many players do not play just one main character, but rather switch between different characters that some regard as main characters too. Some of these players expressed to also identify with multiple characters and put a lot of time and effort in them. Exploring players' motivations behind the creations of multiple characters was not doable for this present study and the available time, although the topic did get addressed multiple times by participants during interviews. Therefore, exploring players' motivations for the creation of multiple characters and the differences and similarities between those, could be an interesting suggestion for future research about player motivations and characters in games. In addition, player motivations as well as identifications with characters often shifted and changed over time and in different situations of the player. Analyzing these changes did not fit the aim of this research and the available time, but could be another interesting focus for future studies and could possibly highlight how choices made regarding character creation are subject to the identification of the player depending on their life

situation of that moment. Finally, classes in *World of Warcraft* go beyond just the class selection in the character creation process. At a certain point in the game, players are offered the decision to choose a specialization for their class, which has a major influence on the characters' role and can change the gaming experience tremendously. Including all the different class specializations would have also been undoable for this study and the available time but creates new interesting openings for future research.

Overall, this study has emphasized that gaming does not have to be something negative or problematic and has shown that playing games like *World of Warcraft* can have many positive impacts and consequences on its players instead.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Topic List

Topic List	
General Background Information	1. How old are you? 2. Where are you from? 3. What do you do for a living?

World of Warcraft	1. How did you discover WoW?
	2. What made you play WoW?
	    a. Why?
	3. What aspects attracted you?
	    a. Could you explain why?
	    b. What do you like about it?

Player Motivations	1. What do you usually do when playing WoW?
	2. What activities do you enjoy doing to the most in WoW?
	    a. Could you explain why?
	3. What kind of goal do you have when playing?
	4. What do you not enjoy doing in WoW?
	    a. Why not?
	5. Do you like to play with others in WoW?
	6. Do you play WoW to forget about real life problems?
	7. Are you competitive in the game?

Characters	1. What is your main character in WoW?
	    a. What is the race?
	    b. What is the class?
	2. Why did you create this character?
	3. Why did you choose this race and class?
	    a. Could you explain why?
	    b. What do you like about it?
	    c. What role do you play?
	4. What did you take into account when deciding upon a race and class?

Character Identification	1. Do you relate yourself to your character?
	    a. How?
	    b. Do you feel a personal connection to your character?
	2. Do you feel like when you play, you become your character?
	    a. Could you explain how/in what ways?
	3. Did you try to make your character look a specific way?
	    a. Did you make it look similar to you (or not)?
	    b. Why?
	4. How would you want others to perceive your character when they see it?
	    a. What kind of image do you want to create?
	    b. Do you want to impress others?

Persistence	1. How long have you been playing WoW?
	2. What makes you continue to play WoW?
	    a. Could you explain that a bit more?
	3. Does WoW play a big role in your life?
	    a. How?
	4. Is the game important to you?

Appendix B: Coding Schemes

Player Motivations

Theme	Description	Codes
Social Interaction	Meeting people from all over the world and making new friends, as well as enjoying playing together or help other players.	• Playing together • Meeting new people • Helping others
Immersion	Wanting to explore and become part of the game's large fantasy world and being interested in the extensive storylines.	• Storylines • Exploration • Becoming part of the fantasy world
Escapism	Playing the game to relieve stress and to escape from reality into a safe environment in which everybody is accepted.	• Stress reliever • Forgetting about reality • Safe and accepted environment
Challenge	Enjoying completing difficult content like boss fights or dungeons, collecting as many items, obtaining the game's achievements and becoming stronger with the character.	• Completing difficult content • Collecting items • Obtaining achievements • Progressing the character
Competition	Being better than other players in collecting and achieving, having the highest scores or being part of a high-ranked competitive guild.	• Beating other players • Being at a high rank • Having the most items or achievements

Character Identification

Theme	Description	Codes
Emotional Attachment	Feeling emotionally attached to the character because of the memories or time and efforts put into the character.	• Memories • Spent a lot of time and effort • Having collected many items and achievements
Self-Identification	Regarding the character as the virtual version of the self or sharing many similarities with the character.	• Character looks like player • Character shares attributes to player • Player becomes the character
Identity Experimentation	Using the character to experiment with identities and play out personas that are different from the self.	• Idealized version of the self • Becoming a strong hero • Becoming a fantasy creature • Becoming an outlaw
No Identification	Feeling no identification with the character and seeing it as just a game character or as a character that should be useful for the gameplay.	• Just a game character • Character has to be useful

Character Creation

Category	Theme	Description	Codes
Race	**Appearance**	Choosing a race based on its appearance, such as how beautiful it looks, how tall it is or whether it looks more realistic of fantasy like.	• Beauty • Height • Fantasy looking • Realistic looking
	Storyline	Choosing a race based on its background story or its position within the game's world or because it looks like a main character in the storyline.	• Same race as a main character in the storyline • Background story of the race • Position in the game's world
	Racial Abilities	Choosing a race because of its strong or useful racial abilities.	• Strong racial abilities • Usefulness
	Personal Interest	Choosing a race because of a personal preference for certain elements of the race or because it shares similar aspects with the player.	• Appealing elements or characteristics • Shared attributes to player
Class	**Knowledge**	Choosing a class based on the prior knowledge or familiarity the player already had about the class or because the player has never tried the class before.	• Familiar class • Trying something new • Prior knowledge
	Performance	Choosing a class based on how well it performs on various aspects such as its strength or mobility.	• Strength • Flexibililty in roles • Mobility • Requiredness
	Storyline	Choosing a race based on the background storyline of the class or the position or power it has within the game's world, or because it is the same class as a main character in the storyline.	• Same class as a main character in the storyline • Background story of the class • Position in the game's world
	Complexity	Choosing a class based on how complex it is or how difficult to master.	• Easy to master • Requires a lot of skills
	Personal Interest	Choosing a class based on a personal preference for certain elements of the class or because it shares similar aspects with the player.	• Appealing elements or characteristics • Shared attributes to player

Persistence

Theme	Description	Codes
Relatedness	Persisting to play to maintain formed friendships or because of the player community or the guild the player is part of.	• Guild • Community • Friendships • Playing together
Autonomy	Persisting to play because there are many activities to do of which players have full control in deciding what to do.	• Control in deciding what to do • Doing activities at your own pace
Competence	Persisting to play because it feels convenient and enjoyable to have mastered the game and the character.	• Comprehending how the game works • Performing well with the character
Meaningful Context	Persisting to play because the game has become an important part of the player's life in which a lot of time and effort is spent.	• Having many good memories • Has become an important part of life • Dedicated a lot of time and efforts in the game • Hard to let go of

Appendix C: Participants Overview

Name	Age	Country	Gender	Occupation	Approximate gaming experience with WoW
Lynn	22	Belgium	Female	Studying nursery	14 years
Ken	31	United Kingdom (from Romania)	Male	Care assistant	15 years
Billy	18	United Kingdom	Male	Studying Maths, Computing and Business	6-7 years
Ava	27	Poland	Female	Full-time trade manager	3 years
Roz	34	Denmark (from South-Africa)	Female	Studying to become teacher's assistant	9 years
Panda	48	France (from South-Africa)	Male	IT expert	16 years
Jasper	23	Sweden	Male	YouTuber and streamer	16 years
Gret	64	United Kingdom	Female	Clerical worker from home	16 years
Gaz	25	Serbia	Male	Web developer	4 years
Annabel	18	Denmark	Female	Studying nursery	12 years
Mick	24	South-Africa	Male	Tactical, fire & EMS officer	15 years
Cyra	25	Slovenia	Female	Salesman	12-13 years
Louis	24	The Netherlands (from Belgium)	Male	Studying law	13 years
Jenny	36	Scotland	Female	Medical research assistant/lab manager	8 years
Nicky	27	The Netherlands	Male	Working for a pharmaceutical company	15 years
Lex	50	The Netherlands	Female	Teaching arts & crafts classes	6 years
Loz	24	United Kingdom	Male	Nursery Practitioner	15 years
Alissa	25	Switzerland (from Turkey)	Female	Studying Banking and Finance	11-12 years
Rick	23	The Netherlands	Male	Web developer	10 years
Natalia	31	United Kingdom	Female	Full-time caretaker	14 years

Appendix D: Core Races in WoW

Core Races in World of Warcraft

Alliance

Human
Humans are a young race, and thus highly versatile, mastering the arts of combat, craftmanship, and magic with stunning efficiency. The humans' valor and optimism have led them to build some of the world's greatest kingdoms. In this troubled era, after generations of conflict, humanity seeks to rekindle its former glory and forge a shining new future.

Dwarf
In ages past, the dwarves cared only for riches taken from the earth's depths. Then records suffaced of a god-like race said to have given the dwarves life... and an enchanted birthright. Driven to learn more, the dwarved devoted themselves to the pursuit of lost artifacts and ancient knowledge. Today dwarven archaeologists are scattered throughout the globe.

Night Elf
Ten thousand years ago, the night elves founded a vast empire, but their reckless use of primal magic brought them to ruin. In grief, they withdrew to the forests and remained isolated there until the return of their ancient enemy, the Burning Legion. With no other choice, the night elves emerged at last from their seclusion to fight for their place in the new world.

Gnome
Though small in stature, the clever gnome of Khaz Modan have used their great intellect to secure a place in history. Their subterranean kingdom of Gnomeregan is a marvel of steam-driven technology, and their skill at both engineering and the arcane arts has been a tremendous benefit to the Alliance across numerous campaigns.

Draenei
Driven from their home world of Argus, the honorable draenei fled the Burning Legion for eons before finding a remote planet to settle on. They shared this world with the shamanistic orcs and named it Draenor. In time the Legion corrupted the orcs, who waged war and nearly exterminated the peaceful draenei. A lucky few fled to Azeroth, where they now seek allies in their battle against the burning legion.

Worgen
The worgen were first unleashed upon the Eastern Kingdoms by Archmage Argal during the Third War. Primarily used as a weapon against the Scourge, the beasts soon proved to be a burden greater than the humans of Lordaeron could bear. A mysterious curse began to spread among those who fought alongside the wolf-men, causing them to become worgen themselves. The curse rapidly spread as it reached Gilneas, trapping its inhabitants behind the very walls built to protect them. The survivors of the curse now seek to find a new fate for their people -- their destiny unwritten...

Horde

Orc
The orc race originated on the planet Draenor. A peaceful people with shamanic beliefs, they were enslaved by the Burning Legion and forced into war with the humans of Azeroth. Although it took many years, the orcs finally escaped the demons' corruption and won their freedom. To this day they fight for honor in an alien world that hates and reviles them.

Undead
Once mindless slaves to the terrible Lich King, the gruesome Forsaken have overthrown his rule and now pledge loyalty to the wicked banshee queen Sylvanas. Under her reign Forsaken armies have reclaimed the ruined kingdom of Lordaeron. Every day is a struggle against vengeful humans who wish to wipe them out, and a constant battle of wills against Horde allies who distrust the sinister motives of the Undead.

Tauren
Always the tauren strive to preserve the balance of nature and heed the will of their goddess, the Earth Mother. Many of the nomadic wandering tribe of tauren have gathered together under a single banner to settle in the fertile plains of Mulgore. Were it not for the timely intervention of the orcs, the whole race may have been wiped out by marauding centaur. The tauren honor their blood-debt to this day, fighting alongside the horde to protect their land.

Troll
Once at home in the jungles of Strangletorn Vale, the fierce trolls of the Darkspear tribe were besieged on all sides by warring factions. The orcish Horde came to their aid, convincing the Darkspear to sail across the Great Sea and settle in the untamed lands of Kalimdor. Though they cling to their shadowy heritage, the Darkspear remain vocal advocates of a united Horde, lending the strength of their arms and powerful tribal magics to the common cause.

Blood Elf
Long ago the majestic high elves created the splendid golden city of Quel'Thalas, built around a magical fount of energy known as the Sunwell. When the Lich King destroyed their capital in the Third War, the survivors turned to the Horde for help. Now known as the blood elves, these refugees are all that remains of their glorious civilization. They strive to rebuild Quel'Thalas while struggling against a crippling addiction to the very magical energies that once built their empire.

Goblin
Originally the slaves of jungle trolls on the Isle of Kezan, the goblin race was forced to mine Kaja'mite ore out of the Undermine, deep in the bowels of Mount Kajaro. Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, the mineral had magical properties that caused the goblins to rapidly increase in both cunning and intelligence. Tinkering their own powerful artifacts of engineering and alchemy in secret, the goblins overthrew their troll oppressors, taking over the island that they now call home. Quickly rising to the prominence as masters of mercantilism, goblins and their global trade conglomerates dominate all commerce across Azeroth.

Alliance or Horde

Pandaren
Shrouded in fog for ages, the ancient realm of Pandaria has remained unspoiled by war. Now that it has been rediscovered, Pandaren heroes are stepping forward to declare their allegiance to either the Alliance or the Horde. The most advanturous of the Pandaren come from the Wandering Island, a mysterious land cut off from the rest of Azeroth and Pandaria itself.

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Appendix E: Allied Races in WoW

Allied Races in World of Warcraft

Alliance

Void Elf
Seeking to harness the corruptive magic of the Void, these outcast elves endured an unexpected transformation. They are determined to master their newfound powers and resist the whispers eager to lure them into madness.

Lightforged Draenei
Fighting a long, bitter war against the Burning Legion, these draenei soldiers were infused with the Holy Light to become living weapons. Victorious at last, these Lightforged stand ready to defend Azeroth.

Dark Iron Dwarf
Known for their fiery tempers and fierce determination, the Dark Iron have a history of strife with the other dwarven clans -- as well as their own kin. Queen-Regeant Moira seeks to unite her people and lead them in the fight to save Azeroth.

Kul Tiran
Kul Tiras was founded by fearless explorers who sailed uncharted waters in search of adventure. As a key member of the Alliance of Lordaeron, the Kul Tiran navy dominated the seas of Azeroth with its legendary fleet.

Horde

Nightborne
The nightborne of Suramar spent millennia isolated behind an arcane barrier, slowly transformed by the magic of the Nightwell. These proud, noble elves now seek to reclaim their place in Azeroth.

Highmountain Tauren
The tauren of Highmountain are devoted to the spirits of earth, river, and sky. After ages spent protecting their sacred mountain, they are now ready to venture out into the world beyond the Broken Isles.

Mag'har Orc
The orc clans of Draenor never drank the demon blood that corrupted their distant kin. Proud and defiant, they stood united as one tribe -- the Mag'har. With their unrelenting courage and fierce sense of honor, the Mag'har now fight to claim a new home on Azeroth.

Zandalari Troll
The Zandalari are a proud people whose origins date back to the early days of Azeroth's history. Their fierce warriors ride dinosaurs into battle, and they possess one of the most formidable naval fleets in the known world.

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Appendix F: Classes in WoW

Classes in World of Warcraft

Warrior
- Role: Tank or Melee damage
- Defend yourself and others with heavy armor and shields
- Charge quickly around the battlefield
- Unleash your rage to deliver devastating attacks

Warriors are plate-wearing fighters who strive for perfection in armed combat. As warriors fight they generate rage, which is used to power special attacks.

Mage
- Role: Ranged Damage
- Blast your enemies with powerful ranged attacks
- Wield powerful spells that can affect multiple targets
- Control the battlefield by freezing or polymorphing enemies

Mages are the iconic magic-users of Azeroth who learn their craft through intense research and study. They make up for their light armor with a potent array of offensive and defensive spells.

Paladin
- Role: Tank, Healer, or Melee damage
- Protect the weak with heavy armor, shields, and holy powers
- Wield your group with powerful blessings

Paladins are heavily-armored fighters and defenders who use Holy magic to heal wounds and combat evil. They can focus on two-handed weapons, shields or healing.

Warlock
- Role: Ranged Damage
- Summon powerful demon servants to do your bidding
- Curse, drain, and afflict your targets with corruption
- Burn your enemies with fire and shadow ranged magic

Warlocks cast Fire or Shadow magic to damage, drawn, or curse their enemy. They summon demons as servants.

Hunter
- Role: Ranged or Melee damage
- Harness the power of the wilds to destroy foes
- Gain beasts of your choice as lifelong companions
- Track, disable, and kill your prey

Hunters are at home in the wilderness and have a special affinity for beasts. They rely on their weaponry and their pet to deal damage.

Monk
- Role: Tank, Healer, or Melee Damage
- Master the martial arts
- Shrug off damage as you move quickly around the battlefield
- Use your mystical powers to heal your allies

Monks are known for their skill in hand to hand fighting, relying on their fists and feet as much as their weapons. Monks can also specialize in calling upon the restorative power of the mists to heal allies.

Rogue
- Role: Melee Damage
- Hide in plain sight with the stealth ability
- Control your enemies with underhanded attacks
- Combo melee abilities to deliver deadly finishing blows

Rogues often serve as assassins or scouts, though many are lone wolves as well. Rogues can often sneak around enemies or attack an opponent from behind to try and finish them off quickly.

Druid
- Role: Tank, Healer, Ranged Damage, or Melee Damage
- Shape-shift into the ferocious cat, ranged owlkin, or resilient bear
- Call upon the powers of nature to heal yourself and others
- Be a true hybrid, able to assume any role

Druids are shape-shifters with an affinity for the plant and animal kingdoms. Druids can specialize in healing, casting spells at range, or taking on the form of a cat or bear to fight in melee.

Priest
- Role: Healer or Ranged Damage
- Protect other with powerful shield and healing abilities
- Wield deadly shadow magic to destroy enemies
- Instill fear and control the minds of others

Priests are well-rounded healers with a variety of tools. However, they can also sacrifice their healing to deal damage with Shadow magic.

Demon Hunter
- Role: Tank or Melee Damage
- Embrace chaotic powers and turn them against your foes
- Vault, glide, or double jump in and out of combat
- Start at level 98

Demon Hunters are a hero class, which means they start at a high level. Demon Hunters are dark outcasts that use forbidden demonic magic to hunt and kill their enemies.

Shaman
- Role: Healer, Ranged Damage, or Melee Damage
- Enchant your melee weapons with spells
- Call on spiritual power to restore injured allies
- Use totems to disable enemies, heal, or deal damage

Shaman use the power of the elements to enhance their weapon damage or spells. Shaman summon totems in combat, small objects that disable enemies, heal, or cause damage to enemies.

Death Knight
- Role: Tank or Melee Damage
- Raise the dead to serve you
- Attack with melee weapons, spells, and disease
- Start at level 55

Death Knights are a hero class, which means they start at a high level. Death Knights are a melee class with an emphasis on causing diseases and using dark magic.

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