

# Social Systems and Communities Within MMOs

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# Project Concept and Background

- Look into the social systems and communities that arise and evolve in Massively Multiplayer Online games and environments.
- Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games and environments have become a big industry.
- World of Warcraft alone has over 10 million users paying \$15 a month for service (that's a lot of money!)
- Information about these environments will only become more useful as the industry gets even bigger.

# Initial Objectives

- Who are the people behind the characters in these games?
- How do communities form? How do they evolve?
- What are their goals?
- What are the relationships between players within a community? Between players in different communities? Between different communities in one game? Between communities of different games?
- How do players benefit from these communities, both in the game and out of it?
- Also examine negative aspects of communities.
- Games are now starting to provide official in-game support for these types of communities. Are companies beginning to realize the importance of these communities?

# Why Does This Interest Us?

- It takes a look at an enjoyable recreational activity and examines the underlying social framework that is often overlooked.
- Investigates the nature of human connections that occur without face-to-face communication, all in “extraordinary” worlds.
- All three of us have at least some experience with MMOs. Research is more fun when it’s about something you enjoy or participate in.

# Research Approach

- MMOs have become a big enough industry that there's actually quite a bit of information available.
- Use some objective statistical and psychological data
- Users are key in social systems, so get information from participants and players – player stories, blog posts, online forums, etc.
- Methods may evolve as research goes on.

# What We Expect

- Different motivations behind the formations of different groups and communities.
- Different social groups and cliques will come together to form communities reflective of their own ideas and goals.
- Social strengths of each group will most likely vary depending on the community's purpose (and possibly the game environment.)

# Major Challenges

- Compiling all the data into a coherent and useful picture.
- Finding quality user stories and first hand accounts may be difficult.
- May be difficult to track down information about smaller and lesser known communities. However, we still want to examine them, as they provide useful insight.
- Smaller games may have less information available about their communities.