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**The Game of (Family) Life:**

**Intra-Family Play in *World of Warcraft***

**Holly Peterson,**

MSc in New Media, Information and Society

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# **The Game of (Family) Life: Intra-Family Play in *World of Warcraft***

Holly Peterson

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## **ABSTRACT**

Massively multiplayer online games (MMORPGs) like *World of Warcraft* are played by millions of people around the world, and their use is growing. Much has been written about MMORPGs, including studies of children and families who play these games, and about the implications of these games on social capital. However, as yet, few studies have combined research on MMORPGs, family play and social capital, to see if MMORPGs are incorporated into family life, and if they affect socialization in families. This paper focuses on how the game *World of Warcraft* is being played by three families, and explores if and how this collaborative play increases intra-family socialization and social capital. The research outlined below shows that these games could be used as a way to increase family bonds, depending on existing family social capital and on how the game is used by the family. However, this is not a given, and the ways these games are used by families evolve over time as family relationships and the games themselves evolve.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Early in my master's studies, I was introduced to a massive multiplayer online game, *World of Warcraft* (WoW), by Tim and Rose Barnes, a husband and wife who play the game together. WoW is a fantasy-based online computer game in which players interact in real time. Having never played this kind of game, I was intrigued to learn about their friends the Smiths, a family in which multiple generations, including children, parents and grandparents, play WoW together. I also met Phil and Kyle Jones, a father and son who play the game as part of the same group as the Barnes and Smith families.

I saw that these families had integrated *World of Warcraft* into their lives as a mechanism for family interaction, and I decided to study this game, not as games are usually studied, in terms of addiction or media effects (Kelly, 2004; Taylor, 2006a), but through the framework of "everyday life," including concepts of domestication and social capital (Haddon, 2004; Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000). Today, when society laments parents' decreasing interaction with their children, can Internet-enabled games like *World of Warcraft* (re)create opportunities for family interaction? Could this game replace the family dining table? As Williams (2006: 15) asks, "what happens when families stop watching television....and start logging into *World of Warcraft* for 4 hours a night?" Can the family that "plays together stay together" (Haddon, 1988: 43)? This paper focuses on collaborative family play of *World of Warcraft*, and examines how families might use it as part of intra-family socialization. I argue that games like WoW can provide a medium for family interaction, if families choose to use them this way.

### 1.1 Online Games and World of Warcraft

Computer games, specifically massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), are increasingly a subject of serious academic research. Castronova (2005a) notes that research on games is generally looked down upon by the academic establishment, although the recent emergence of the journals *Game Studies* and *Games and Culture* provides for serious, grounded studies of games, including MMORPGs (see also Haddon, 1999; Fromme, 2003; Sotamaa, 2005; Taylor 2006b). MMORPGs (also called MMOs), like *World of Warcraft*, follow on from text-based, "multi-user dungeon" (MUD) games of the 1980s and 1990s (Mortensen, 2006). The new, graphics based games are also called "synthetic worlds" – persistent social spaces in which players create a "life" through their

online characters (Castronova, 2003: 1). Nardi and Harris (2006), Ducheneaut, et al (2006), Taylor (2006b) and Mortensen (2006) provide in-depth descriptions of MMORPGs.

These games have become part of "everyday life" for more than seventy-three million people around the world (Castronova, 2005a: 55); more than nine million people (larger than the population of London) currently play *World of Warcraft* (BBC, 2007b). "WoW is clearly the genre's first breakthrough hit" (Ducheneaut, et al, 2006: 407). WoW is a fantasy game in which one's character interacts with other characters, completing "quests" and joining "raids" to advance through the game. Many of these tasks must be done with other characters. Characters can also join "guilds", groups of characters who work together and communicate frequently. Many guilds communicate in game using a voice over Internet protocol (VOIP) system such as Ventrilo. "Playing" the game, therefore, includes not just manipulating one's character, but continual communication with other players, making the game inherently social (Nardi and Harris, 2006).

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW: Games, Social Capital, and the Family**

Despite the growing importance of games to everyday life, few scholars apply a domestication framework to the study of games. Much video game research focuses on media effects, particularly negative perceptions of games as addictive or as contributors to violent behaviour (Anderson, 2002; Squire, 2002; von Feilitzen and Carlsson, 2000). As Jenkins (2004), and Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone (2006) point out, many of the “effects” of video games were studied out of context, and may not accurately reflect the positive and negative implications of games in everyday life. Williams (2006: 15) argues that we must “keep our own ideological baggage out” of studies of MMORPGs, while Mortensen (2006: 339) argues that games are caught in a typical media panic cycle, in which “popular” media is at first rejected, but then studied and defended by reputable academics. Fromme (2003:1) urges researchers to “go beyond media-centred approaches and try to understand how computer games are integrated into the lives of children and young people.”

With that in mind, I set out to review the relevant literature on MMORPGs, particularly as related to families and social capital. Much research has been done on how children and families use video games (Livingstone, 2002; Fromme, 2003; Kolo and Baur, 2004; Bakardjieva, 2005) and MMORPGs (Jakobsson and Taylor, 2003; Kelly, 2004; Castronova, 2005a; Nardi and Harris, 2006). Much has also been written about the social capital implications of MMORPGs (Kelly, 2004; Castronova, 2005a; Taylor, 2006a; Williams, 2006; Nardi and Harris, 2006). However, there is little current research combining families, MMORPGs and social capital (some studies deal with games, social capital, and families, but do not generally combine their analysis). The aim of this paper is to weave together these related but as yet unconnected strands of research, as they relate to family play of *World of Warcraft*.

### **2.1 Games and Families**

Many studies are conflicted about whether the Internet (including playing MMORPGs) increases or decreases sociability (Turow, 2002; Jordan, 2002; Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). Historically, games and the Internet were seen as a private activity, while TV or radio were seen as communal (Livingstone, 2002; see also Wellman, et al, 2001; Fromme, 2003). von Feilitzen and Carlsson (2000) and Jordan (2002: 238) argue that “the Internet is less likely than television to be a shared medium”, and that “by adolescence,

children's and parent's interest in going online [including playing games] together will predictably wane" (ibid: 241).

This is in contrast to Squire (2002), Sotamaa (2005), and examples in McKenna and Bargh (1999), Bakardjieva (2005), Taylor (2006a), and even Turkle (1995), who argue that MMORPGs are designed to be social. "It is common for WoW players to play with offline friends and family" (Nardi and Harris, 2006: 5). Steinkuehler and Williams (2006: 904) note, "to argue that MMO game play is isolated and passive media consumption in place of informal social engagement is to ignore the nature of what participants actually do behind the computer screen." In some cases, MMORPGs increase (at least the opportunity) for family interaction by providing a common interest for parents and children. "Parents said they had more to talk about with their kids than just school when they played the game together," (Kelly, 2004: 95). This extended to Kelly's own daughter, with whom "conversations often revolved around a MMORPG we were playing together," (Kelly, 2004: 96). When families play MMORPGs, they may find that "now we finally have something to talk about," (Nardi and Harris, 2006: 5).

Figures vary, but between 12% (Fromme, 2003: 13), 29% (Livingstone, 2002: 185), or even as much as 60% (Castronova, 2005a: 57) of parents play a computer game regularly with their child (see also Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006). Fromme (2003: 18) notes, "playing computer games is not – maybe not yet – a common project of the family," but I argue that in 2007, four years after Fromme's study, games are being used in this way. Kelly (2004), Castronova (2005a), Nardi and Harris (2006) and Taylor (2006b) provide numerous examples of families who play games together. This includes parents who play with children who have gone to university or moved away (Taylor, 2006a; Nardi and Harris, 2006) and a mother for whom "playing WoW was simply another shared activity" with her children (Nardi and Harris, 2006: 5). One interviewee noted that playing WoW together was "like all being in the same room," and some characters even used names that identified them as family (ibid). Castronova (2005a: 265) argues that large family groups are already meeting in MMORPGS "just to keep up." Taylor (2006a) profiles a player who plays an MMORPG with 7 or 8 of his family, including father, siblings, uncles and cousins. Kelly (2004: 33) met a father, mother and son who played together and who "regarded missions as family bonding activity....it was their 'family time,' especially in the winter when the snow was too deep to play outside." For these players, there ceases to be a difference between interaction online and interaction offline; games become a way for families to spend time together (Castronova, 2005a: 121).

Taylor (2006b: 323) "was stuck by how many adults and kids played alongside each other" in groups that "spanned across generations;" she notes the need for "more cross-generational" studies of MMORPGs.

### *2.1.1 Generation Gap*

One of the main topics of interest of this paper is grandparents and grandchildren playing MMORPGs together, but there is little in the available literature about this phenomenon. Nearly two million users of online games in the UK are between the ages of 51 and 65 (Mortensen, 2006: 400); a percentage of these must be parents and grandparents (who may or may not play MMORPGs with family members). With current MMORPG players aging (Castronova, 2005a: 132), the number of players who are grandparents will likely increase over time. Nardi and Harris (2006: 9) note that WoW is especially well-suited to older players, who may use the game as "a subject of discussion with family and friends with whom they played... providing elders with fresh material for conversation" with family. Castronova (2005a: 257) argues that even his mother-in-law, an elderly woman without, as yet, a computer, might someday use these games as a space in which to connect with her children and grandchildren on a daily basis, instead of being able to see them only on holidays. This would allow them to spend time together in the game, even if they are physically far apart. As Nardi and Harris (2006: 1) argue, "many play WoW...with offline friends and family, so the game also appears to reinforce existing social ties for these players." The game therefore may serve as a mechanism through which grandparents can interact with grandchildren, providing opportunities (which would otherwise not exist) to build close family ties.

## **2.2 Games and Social Capital**

A number of scholars (Malaby, 2006; Nardi and Harris, 2006; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006; Williams, et al, 2006) have examined the implications of MMORPGs on social capital, building on earlier studies of the Internet and social capital (Katz and Rice, 2002; Kraut et al, 2002). "Social activity in World of Warcraft challenges discourse that asserts that the Internet leads to isolation," (Nardi and Harris, 2006: 9). The literature demonstrates that if there is existent social capital, games can be employed as a tool to maintain and increase connections.

### 2.2.1 Bourdieu and Putnam

Bourdieu and Putnam are among the seminal scholars of social capital. While an in-depth discussion of the differences in Bourdieu's and Putnam's theories is outside the scope of this paper, it is possible to derive from them a definition of social capital to which this study can refer. Bourdieu (1986: 248-249) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to....membership in a group." He further defines social capital as "durable ...subjectively felt" (ibid) "social obligations ('connections') between individuals and groups (ibid: 243). For Putnam (1995: 664-665), "social capital, in short, refers to social connections and the attendant norms and trust" or the "features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives." Many authors, including Edwards and Foley (1998), Siisiainen (2000), and Foley, Edwards and Diani (2001) have harshly critiqued Putnam's American-centric, moralistic perspective on social capital, preferring Bourdieu's focus on access to resources. For this paper, I draw on both Bourdieu and Putnam to examine social capital *inside* the family, and define social capital as the *connections and obligations, and the attendant responsibilities and benefits, conveyed by participation in a social group*, including a family group.

### 2.2.2 Players Don't "Bowl Alone"

Putnam (2000: 101) argues "virtually all forms of family togetherness [including family meals] became less common over the last quarter of the twentieth century." Because this was an important way in which social capital was built, social capital (including in families) decreased dramatically. Putnam (1995, 2000) blames this largely on the increase in television viewing and media use during this time period.

While (to my knowledge) neither Bourdieu nor Putnam has acknowledged the potential of online games for building social capital, a number of authors (Jakobsson and Taylor, 2003; Kelly, 2004; Castronova, 2005a; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2005; Malaby, 2006; Nardi and Harris, 2006; Taylor, 2006a; Williams, 2006; Williams et al, 2006) have shown how "the production of social networks and the circulation of social capital proves to be one of the most important aspects" of MMORPGs (Jakobsson and Taylor, 2003: n.p.). Taylor (2006a: 9-10) argues that "the social is not just an add on;" MMORPGs are "fundamentally social spaces," through which "families and friends bring social capital into

the game space through pre-existing relationships," (ibid: 53). Kelly (2004: 9) argues that an MMORPG "isn't a game at all" but a vast social space, designed to facilitate social interaction. According to Williams, et al (2006: 357), in MMORPG game play:

There is no doubt that social capital was created along the way. These players were not 'bowling alone.' We do not mean to suggest that MMOs are a panacea for civic revitalization. Rather, they appear to be a place where such revitalization is possible for some players.

They note especially the importance of the "large number of players with previous offline connections playing WoW" (ibid: 358). "As...Putnam would surely appreciate, 'It's kind of like a bowling team or softball league....I talk to these people several nights a week.'" (ibid: 347). Castronova (2005a: 117) explicitly answers Putnam's concerns that people socialize less via electronic games by arguing, "in online worlds, Society [sic] matters once again." The social capital that Putnam is seeking may not have disappeared, but may have simply moved into MMORPGs (Castronova, 2005a).

### 2.2.3 *Playing "Alone Together"?*

Ducheneaut, et al (2006: 410) have concerns about the extent of sociability in online games, particularly WoW. They argue that players play "'alone together:' *surrounded by others instead of playing with them,*" [emphasis in original]. "Playing WoW can be like reading a book in a densely populated café" where "one may not necessarily choose to interact with other patrons" (Ducheneaut, et al, 2006: 414; see also Taylor, 2006b). However, these authors focus on the mechanics of game play (i.e., numbers of players in guilds or groups), rather than on how the game enables informal interaction. This is harder to quantify and may therefore be difficult to study unless one plays the game. Using in-game typed or verbal chat, players talk to each other and therefore play "together" even when their characters are in different areas of the game (Williams, et al, 2006). This everyday socializing builds social capital by "intensifying already close social relationships," (Nardi and Harris, 2006: 8). As one player noted, you "cant [sic] feel lonely" while playing WoW (ibid). Nardi and Harris (2006: 1, 8) note that "even when players are competing," play is still collaborative, which is "the difference between a single player game and a multiplayer game such as World of Warcraft." The most important aspect of MMORPGs is therefore not the game itself, but the communication and chat taking place through the game (Williams, et al,

2006). With all this interaction going on inside MMORPGs, "how ironic that those who devote many hours to MMORPGs are considered social misfits," (Castronova, 2005a: 274).

#### *2.2.4 Bonding Social Capital*

Bridging social capital brings "together disparate members of the community" while bonding social capital reinforces "close-knit networks" (Norris, 2002: 1). I argue that WoW caters for both bridging and bonding social capital, by allowing interaction with people who can be of great physical and social distance from the player, and by allowing regular, in-depth communication with members of the player's existing community, including family members. I focus here on bonding social capital in families.

Bonding capital is reinforced as friends and family members chat during game play (Taylor, 2006a). Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) argue that bonding capital is harder to produce than bridging capital, but the guild structure in WoW requires, and builds, "social obligation" (Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006: 903; see also Steinkuehler, 2006; Ducheneaut, et al, 2006), including a "sense of duty and responsibility for the people in my group" (Taylor, 2006a: 16). "For many the guild was simply another way to maintain existing relationships with family;" it was used much as families use the telephone or email to keep in touch (Williams, et al, 2006: 351). This is especially useful for "geographically dispersed friends and relatives," for whom "bonding social capital was clearly maintained and reciprocated through gameplay," (ibid). In this way, as Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) argue, MMORPGs provide "spaces for social interaction" functioning like "pubs [and] coffeeshops" (Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006: 886) where friends and family can meet. Williams, et al (2006: 345) note that in their research, there were several examples of "real-world collections of friends or families playing together as a guild of their own or as a family unit with in a....guild" in which "social interactions in the game were extensions of real-world social bonds." These examples show that MMORPGs can function as a space in which social groups, including families, can bond and build social capital.

### **2.3 Games and Social Capital Inside the Family**

Putnam (2000: 103-104) argues that bridge and other card games, rather than collective media use (i.e., television viewing) are ideal social pastimes for family and friends because they encourage talk about things other than the game during play. He argues that

electronic interaction does not facilitate this kind of social talk, but, as can be seen in Kelly (2004), Castronova (2005a), Nardi and Harris (2006) and Taylor (2006a), social talk is a persistent and defining characteristic of MMORPGs. "WoW joins a long tradition of card and board games in which family and friends of different ages and genders may play together" (Nardi and Harris, 2006: 10); WoW may therefore be the "schmoozable" activity which Putnam (2000: 105) argues is needed to foster social capital in modern society. This study sets out to explore MMORPGs, family and social capital further and provide some insights on if (and if so, how) games might be part of social capital building inside the family.

### **3.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: Negotiation of MMORPGs and Family Life**

The main conceptual framework employed in this paper is domestication, the “complex social practices through which objects....find a place within the home” (Haddon and Silverstone 1994: 2; see also Haddon 1988, 1999, 2004, 2005; Hirsch, 1992; Silverstone, 2006), including how online games are incorporated into family life (Livingstone, 2002; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006). An in-depth discussion of domestication is beyond the scope of this paper; however, any discussion of intra-family gaming must examine how technologies are incorporated into everyday family life.

My focus is on how MMORPGs are implicated in the negotiation of family relationships, rather than on how the process of domestication changes the technology. “Information and communication technologies....offer a restructuring of the position of the household and its members...in the interrelationships they have with each other” (Silverstone, 2006: 234-5). To study this incorporation of the MMORPG into family life, I draw on concepts of “democratic familyship” outlined by Hartmann, Carpentier and Cammaerts (2007) in which children and parents use information and communication technologies (ICTs) (including computer-based games) to negotiate their position in the family (see also Livingstone, 2002; Bakardjieva, 2005); for example, children gain power in the family by knowing more about computers or games than their parents.

I also draw on Hirsch’s (1992: 210) concept of a “moral economy” within the family: “the acts of appropriation.... and the social relationships thereby sustained and constructed” through the consumption and use of ICTs (see also Hartmann, 2006). In these frameworks, ICTs (in this case, MMORPGs) are part of family negotiations of power and identity, and therefore of relationships between family members. As Morley (2006: 27) puts it, “the domestic arena itself has been simultaneously redefined in order to accommodate” ICTs. I want to see if and how the family “accommodates” and incorporates MMORPGs into their existing relationships, and if that incorporation is implicated in the building of social capital in the family.

Many studies of games follow on from studies of the Internet’s potential to build or undermine social capital (Haddon, 1999, 2004, 2005; Katz and Rice, 2002, Kraut et al, 2002; Bakardjieva, 2005). Researchers (Kelly, 2004; Kolo and Baur, 2004; Taylor, 2006a and 2006b) often apply the same frameworks used for studies of the Internet and social capital

to studies of games and social capital, without questioning whether these frameworks are appropriate. While MMORPGs share much in common with the Internet, they are specifically social (Nardi and Harris, 2006), rather than being based *either* on (solitary) information gathering or (interactive) communication (Katz and Rice, 2002; Kraut, et al, 2002). Therefore, while studies of the Internet and socialization are crucial to studies of games and socialization, studies of the Internet may not translate directly to studies of MMORPGs.

In light of the above research, which has studied how MMORPGs are implicated in the negotiation of family relationships and in the increase or decrease of social capital, this study sets out to answer the following questions:

#### **4.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES**

Could (and if so, in what ways) MMORPGs be part of daily family interaction? What implication does this have for family life, including social capital inside the family? Do MMORPGs assist with or hinder the development of social capital in the family? To what extent (if at all) can MMORPGs become part of the social ties of family life?

This study does not seek to answer these questions for all families, in all situations or cultural contexts. My study is conducted with British nationals, and the practices studied may vary in other cultural contexts. Rather, with this emerging topic, I seek to examine how the families I have studied incorporate one MMORPG into their family relationships, and how, in some ways, that has strengthened family social bonds. The value of this research comes from providing a new angle on the study of MMORPGs. It reframes the current media effects and addiction studies perspectives (Anderson, 2002, Squire, 2002; von Feilitzen and Carlsson, 2000). Just as Castronova (2005a) reframed research on MMORPGs in an economic perspective, this paper allows future researchers to see the potential importance of these games as part of the negotiation of family relationships through ICTs (Hartmann, Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2007), and as part of the moral economy of the family (Hirsch, 1992). Games like *World of Warcraft* have millions of users around the world, and their numbers grow each month (Castronova, 2005a). Clearly, further research on MMORPGs is needed as their popularity grows. Examining them from a domestication framework provides new insights into how they are actually used, and what MMORPG play means for the everyday lives of families.

## **5.0 METHODOLOGY: Choice of Methods**

The continually “changing context of games-playing” (Haddon, 1999: 322) makes it difficult to choose a research method when studying games such as *World of Warcraft*. Consalvo and Dutton (2006: 2) note that there is a lack of clear methodology in most studies of games, “other than the assumption that they were played and carefully thought about by the author.” I wanted to ensure that my study did not suffer from this lack of methodology. Squire (2002: 3) further argues that many studies do not examine “how gaming fits into people’s lives, and the kinds of practices people are engaged in while gaming.” To expand this knowledge, I wanted to gather information not just about WoW, but also about its social placement in the household.

To do this, I used both semi-structured interviews and participant observation (playing the game). Participant observation was used because it is only by participating that one gains an “everyday” understanding of the game (Kvale, 1996); researchers need this in order to understand the “social context of play,” (Williams, et al 2006: 342). Therefore, participant observation laid the foundations for my understanding of the game and its social context, and interviews provided the in-depth information about how the game is used by the three families who participated in my research. Kelly (2004), Castronova (2005a), Taylor (2006a and 2006b), and Nardi and Harris (2006) employ the same mix of game play and interviews in their examinations of MMORPGs, including *World of Warcraft*. Nardi and Harris (2006) also include chat logs of game play, which I did not use. Chat logs would have enhanced my data, but were not feasible given time and resources; interview transcripts and my field log provided sufficient material to analyse. Overall, the combination of participant observation and interviews best suited the “muddled and multidimensional process of actual research” (Schroder et al, 2003: 87), allowing me to see how the game was integrated (or not) into each of the families.

Schroder et al (2003) note the need to defamiliarize oneself from the context in which participant observation takes place. This research was undertaken in a doubly cross-cultural context: both in a game I had not previously played, and in a culture (Britain) which is not my own. This helped me keep some distance from the observations, although it made understanding some phenomena more difficult.

## 5.1 Sampling

Frankel and Siang (1999: 14) note the need to ensure that "subjects are selected for reasons directly related to the problem being studied instead of their easy availability." The impetus for this research was the discovery, through my informants, of families who played WoW together. Research into the literature confirmed that social capital implications of MMORPGs at the micro-level of the family have not yet been studied in depth. Therefore, I chose to examine this phenomenon, employing "snowball" sampling (see Singh, 2001), starting with my informants, and using their contacts to gain access to others. As Kayany and Yelsma (2000: 221) note, "interpersonal contacts may be a better strategy when trying to collect data from online users in households." My sample is biased; however, it was chosen specifically because those in the sample were the impetus for the study, not merely because they were available. If time and resources were not an issue, I would have surveyed players across all WoW servers to discover if intra-family play is widespread. With families identified, I would have employed stratified random sampling to select families for further follow up via interviews. Given the limited scope of time and resources for my research, I focused on those families to whom I had access. See Risko, Quilty and Oakman (2006: 274) for a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of controlled sampling.

Without further research, those I studied cannot be taken to be representative; participant observation "cannot tell the reader if the phenomenon uncovered are common or extremely rare," (Williams, et al, 2006: 342). Therefore, I am specifically not seeking to make generalizable claims of family use of MMORPGs. Because so little research has been done from this perspective, this study is akin to pilot research, to discover how games like WoW might be used by families. As Steinkuehler and Williams (2006: 888) argue, the interviews "were not intended to be representative, but rather to discover trends and norms" that can be examined further in future research. The families in my study might be unique, therefore making any wider study a moot point. However, they know other families who play WoW, so it seems there is scope to expand this research.

## 5.2 Participant observation

My intention was to play the game as a "process of registering, interpreting and recording" (Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955: 343) information about family play in WoW. Having never played the game (or any MMORPG) before embarking on this research, I began by observing game play in the home of Rose and Tim Barnes, who served as my chief "informants" (Jorgensen, 1989), "gatekeepers" (Schroder et al, 2003: 91) and "warm experts" (Bakardjieva, 2005) during this study. I then purchased the game software, created a character and began to play. I joined the "Kings and Queens" guild, in which my interviewees play, and which is managed by Rose and Tim Barnes and by Bonnie and Ted Smith. I played the game regularly over the course of six months, from January through June 2007, adopting the mode of "observer-as-participant (more a participant than observer)" (Jorgensen, 1989: 55). I kept a field log of my episodes of play, recording what occurred and my reactions. I also observed play on several occasions without participating and made notes. I mediated on these rough notes for a day or two before typing them. I then coded them in the same way as my interviews (see below).

My intention was not to reach a level of game mastery, as this can take years. However, I knew I would not be able to understand the social connections within the game if I did not understand the game itself. I also would not have received candid responses from my interviewees without the credibility of being a fellow player. Participant observation was thus a means to be able to gather information in interviews, and an information gathering technique in itself. Although a few observations made during my participation were helpful for discussion and analysis, participation primarily provided the context and background for productive interviews.

There are specific implications for online participant observation. As Markham (2004: 5) argues, "the absence of the body doesn't make the interaction less real....but it forces an adjustment of perspective." Therefore, I tried to take into consideration the mediated nature of interaction in the game during my observations. I viewed the game as a tool and space for interaction (Markham, 2004): a "world" (Castronova, 2005a; Malaby, 2006) in which real human interaction takes place. This is only one way of approaching MMORPG research, but it has been usefully employed by other researchers.

### 5.3 Interviews

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three families: Rose and Tim Barnes, Bonnie, Ted, Charlie, Sandra, Will, Pete and Brian Smith, and Phil and Kyle Jones (see Appendix E for an explanation of relationships). Most of these interviews took place in person. Phil and Kyle's interviews took place via Skype, although I had previously met Kyle in person to discuss the research. All these interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed (except Sandra's interview, during which the recording device failed; I reconstructed her interview via notes). I also did two informal follow-up interviews with Bonnie after she left and then rejoined the game. I developed the coding for the analysis by reading the interview transcripts to identify common themes. I then put these themes into a table along with interviewee names, and noted when the theme occurred in an interview. Most themes occurred in most interviews at least once. See Appendix F for this analysis.

Because most of the interviews took place in the participants' homes, the interviews sometimes veered from semi-structured toward unstructured. I interviewed participants, but also ate and socialized with them. This had the potential to lead to a loss of perspective, but it also allowed me candid access to their experiences and opinions. Provided that I, in my role as researcher, strive to maintain an understanding of my biases, this increased access can be a strength rather than a weakness.

I was concerned about "socially-desirable responding" (Kvale, 1996) in which interviewees provided the answers they thought I wanted, and I tried to ask a balance of questions in the interviews, including phrasing questions both positively and negatively. As Kvale (1996) and Holstein and Gubrium (1997: 114) note, the interviews were not extractions of information from passive "repositories" of information. It was clear that respondents had already thought about what it meant to play WoW with other family members; the interviews allowed them to continue to process this phenomenon. In this way, the interviewees actively constructed knowledge, thinking in new ways about their WoW experience as a result of engaging with the interviewer. Holstein and Gubrium (1997: 123) note that this does not taint the validity of the information, as long as the interviewer recognizes this process and does not "dictate interpretation." As Schwartz and Schwartz (1955) argue, I attempted to practice self-reflection to avoid bias in interpretation as well as in research gathering. For example, I made the assumption that there would be social play

in the game, based on reports in the literature. Although this was borne out in my observations, I needed to be aware of that assumption.

#### **5.4 Ethical considerations**

Ess, et al (2002) note the need for special attention to ethics, particularly the need to protect children and minors, in MMORPGs, which have only recently become sites for research. Although Kanayama (2003: 273) suggests that there are no risks to research subjects as long as their identities are protected, I was concerned about the potential ethical implications of my research, not least because my research included children as young as twelve. With this in mind, I followed Mortensen's (2006: 397) recommendation that "being open about the research solves more problems than it creates." My entry into the game and the guild was premised on my research. The guild leadership and most members knew that I was playing WoW as a researcher, and that I would be taking notes about game play which would serve as the basis for my dissertation. Those in the guild with whom I spoke and about whom I made notes were content to be part of my research. I was concerned about keeping the identity of guild members and the guild itself private (see Frankel and Siang, 1999: 8). All names, including the name of the guild, are pseudonyms. Players have "double" pseudonyms, in which their names are not connected to their real names or their characters' names. Identifying details, where necessary, have been changed. As Bruckman (2002) argues, it is particularly difficult to keep the identities of the participants concealed from other players; the Smith family is well known in the game. Because of the close social ties of the guild, it was impossible to prevent those who participated in this research from knowing the identities of the others who participated in the research. However, all the participants are aware that the other participants know their identities. As they have told me, they talk about this research between themselves when I am not present. This has affected which information (i.e., quotes from interviews) I have included in this paper. This may reduce the richness of the study, but is necessary to protect research participants (Bruckman, 2002).

I did not seek permission from Blizzard Entertainment (the creator of WoW) to conduct this research. I reviewed their usage agreement and terms of service (World of Warcraft, 2006a and 2006b), and they do not prohibit academic research about or in WoW, as long as the research has no commercial value. I discussed this choice with other researchers, and learned that Blizzard ignores requests from researchers (Williams, et al,

2006). As Nardi says, "they are very busy running a successful company and don't think they need research," (Nardi, personal communication, 13 July 2007). Ideally, I would have obtained their permission and engaged with them about this research.

## 6.0 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

This study focuses on the implications of family play of *World of Warcraft* for intra-family socialization and social capital. When I began this research in January 2007, my interviewees had been playing WoW together for approximately two years. Bonnie and Ted Smith and their sons Will (age seventeen), Pete (age fifteen) and Brian (age twelve) had been playing since the game's release in November 2004. Ted's parents Charlie and Sandra (both in their mid-sixties) started to play soon after. Rose and Tim Barnes started to play in early 2005, and met the Smith family through the game. They followed the Smiths when they started their own guild. Kyle Jones joined this guild via a friend, and brought his father Phil into the guild with him. All these players played WoW with their family members and with each other, and their interviews provided examples of how *World of Warcraft* enabled positive (and some negative) interaction between family members, which had implications for each family's social capital. While most examples and quotes are drawn from the interviews (see Appendix C for a sample transcript from Ted's interview), all conclusions were backed up by my own observations (Appendix A). Of particular interest from my observations was the nearly universal practice of using the game as medium for socialising.

### 6.1 WoW as Communication Medium

For all the families in my study, WoW was played as much "as a way to maintain real-world bonds...within families" (Williams, et al, 2006: 346), as for the game itself. Ted nurtured his relationship with his children by talking with them about and through WoW: "You can learn a lot about your boys through playing with them, whether it's playing football or a day out; you can learn again in game." In both families, parents did not think the game was the *basis* of the relationship with their children ("we're very close anyway" according to Ted), but they did use the game to strengthen bonds. Kyle "was brought up on games" by Phil, and these were important to father-son bonding.

*Phil says, "We played a lot [of games] and did a lot of things together anyway. So, no, I don't think it's improved [our relationship, but]....obviously when we are doing the same thing at the same time, there's more chance of us talking and getting on."*

Kyle said, *"if the game wasn't there, yeah, I think I'd be doing more with my friends, rather than with my dad."* Kyle thought it was *"pretty good to have a dad that plays games,"* because it gave them a common interest.

Turkle (1995) discusses concerns about our relationships *with* technology, as if users of ICTs relate to their computers at the expense of relating to each other. However, my research showed that, for most of my interviewees, the important part of the game is the relationship (positive or negative) with other family members and friends *through* the game, rather than the relationships *with* the game. Just as media researchers do not speak of relationships with the phone, but of how communication with others is mediated *through* the phone (Haddon, 2004), MMORPG research should focus not on how families interact *with* MMORPGs but rather examine how relationships are forged, maintained and mediated *through* these games. In this respect, MMORPGs such as WoW are not like video games, but are more "like the telephone," as Bonnie noted.

As Markham (2004: 11) argues, "small talk was both extremely time consuming and essential to conversations" online; it helps build social capital. The guild in which I played and did my research used a VOIP server (Ventrilo) to communicate. Initially, this was employed to coordinate raids, but it quickly became used for everyday chat; in some ways, it became a substitute for the telephone. Guild members began using Ventrilo whenever they logged into WoW, regardless of whether they were raiding. They would chat with other guild members, even if they were not actually playing together. As, Mortensen (2006: 398) argues, some of these online games are "mainly social spaces with very little that looks like gaming going on." As I observed, talk in WoW would sometimes be about the game, but more often it was about "real-life" matters, including making offline plans, making jokes, and even exchanging recipes; listening to the players was more like listening to a conversation in a pub or coffeeshop than one taking place inside a game (Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006). Rose and Bonnie found that they gained a sense of social connectedness from playing with others; Bonnie noted, "for me, the biggest part is, as a housewife, it's the social" aspects of the game that matter. As Ted noted, "you're not playing by yourself, even if you're all on your own [in the game]," because players talk to each other while playing.

For Bonnie and Rose, one game activity provided this excuse for conversation. Characters in the game needed to catch fish to make into items for raids, and Rose and Bonnie would often chat while their characters fished.

*There'd be like five or ten of us sitting round the same bit of fishing area fishing away and nattering about, you know, anything and everything. Sometimes game stuff, sometimes personal stuff; you know, what's going on in the world.*

Rose noted that she and Bonnie started doing this to "save our phone bills" because WoW and Ventrilo do not have a per-usage cost. Rather than use their mobile or home phones, they would use the game to chat. Ted also used the game to forge a closer relationship with his twin brother, who was in the guild. "We can speak to each other daily where before it was every three or four weeks we might ring...the communication is instant...where before you had to make an effort." They talk about the game, but also about their families. In this instance, the practice of playing the game led to an increase in social connection between the brothers.

Perhaps the most radical use of the game as a means of conversation were instances in which Charlie and Sandra, Ted and Bonnie, Ted's brother and several of the grandchildren would use the game to have a group conversation. Because each person can hear the others in Ventrilo and see what is being typed in the game, they could have a collective "family chat." Bonnie noted that this was often easier than making plans in a "round robin on the phone." In this way, the practice of playing WoW (including the use of Ventrilo) allowed for an entirely new form of family interaction.

Ventrilo, while not technically part of WoW, has become part of the everyday practice of playing the game. Ted said that players "rely on the voice communication system." They did not use Ventrilo outside the context of the game; none of the players logged into Ventrilo without also logging in to WoW. The importance of this voice communication has been recognized by Blizzard, the makers of WoW, who are incorporating a voice chat channel into the next upgrade (World of Warcraft, 2007). Therefore, I include Ventrilo as part of the everyday practice of game play.

## **6.2 WoW as Common Topic of Conversation**

As Nardi and Harris (2006: 5) argue, "WoW can be a topic of offline conversation for people who play together, and even for those who play, but not together." WoW became an important common topic of conversation in all the families I studied. Ted noted that, before they started to play WoW, his parents

*Could spend a whole evening and not talk to each other....now they're in the same world. They do talk more....they have more arguments, but....[they're] spending time together as a unit, rather than two, two separate units. So it's done them a world of good....they communicate, all the time.*

Charlie echoed Ted's assessment, noting that he and Sandra often play "of an evening....doing something together" instead of her doing needlework and he using the computer or playing chess. Charlie used to play tabletop wargames with the "menfolk" of the family, but not with his wife or daughter-in-law. In this way, playing WoW helped break down gender divisions, and brought the men and women of the family closer together. Sandra agreed, saying that she and Charlie "absolutely" spend more time together now than they did before starting to play WoW. It has also brought them closer to the other members of the family. According to Bonnie, Sandra (who lives in the same town) comes over for coffee almost every day, more often than before they began to play. Ted agrees:

*I actually think they come round here more than they would do if they weren't playing the game with us....I've got another brother who lives down the road [who does not play]. They don't pop round to see him as much.*

Ted further notes, "I don't know if it's brought us closer....but it's given us more of a talking conversation point."

Will enjoys having WoW in common with his parents; he says he does not have much else in common with them. "Warcraft really gave us something to talk about." Without it, "they'd probably never see me." As Livingstone (2002: 146) argues, in this case, games like WoW "may provide a new opportunity for father-son discussions that previously were relatively absent within the typical family." However, Will also notes that some of his friends' parents "watch Simpsons or whatever with them" so he is not unique in using media to connect with his parents. In this case, WoW is one more means through which children, parents and grandchildren can find a common topic of interest through which to bond; the game may provide more opportunities for in-depth interaction than television (see below). Whether or not the family plays together is therefore, in some ways, less important than the practice of talking about the game with each other.

### **6.3 Grandparents and Grandchildren**

Haddon (2004: 63) argues that telephone conversations often do not help grandparents connect with grandchildren, largely because they have few shared topics of conversation. However, For Charlie and Sandra, the game gave them not only a means of communication with their grandsons, but also provided this common interest. As Bonnie noted to Sandra, "it gives you that extra thing in common, doesn't it, with the kids?" saying, "the kids have always got something to talk to their grandparents about." While the boys saw their grandparents often (the grandparents visited the house several times a week) they did not generally interact with them directly, except when playing or discussing the game. Pete notes that he talks to his grandparents "only if they come up here to talk about" WoW. The game became an excuse for the children to visit the grandparents; Charlie often asked one of the older boys to help him with the game, or offered to help the youngest grandson with the game. In fact, the boys play WoW more often with their grandparents than they do with their parents. Will talks with them about the game, "especially my granddad." The boys thought their grandparents' were "pretty cool" because they play WoW.

Brian, the youngest of the children, plays with his grandparents, as does Brian's cousin, who is the same age. Bonnie said she does not know many "twelve-year old boys who sit and talk for hours with their grandparents." The cousins also used the game to chat with each other several times a week, despite living hundreds of miles apart. Sandra thinks that they would see Bonnie and Ted and the grandchildren as much if they did not play, but she does use the game to keep in touch with other grandchildren who live farther away and who, as a consequence, she does not see as often. She also uses the game to stay in touch with Ted's twin, who lives hundreds of miles away. She will type privately to him in WoW to "check up" on him and his wife rather than telephoning.

### **6.4 WoW vs. Television as a Family Activity**

Livingstone (2002, 169) argues, "happy families watch soaps together rather than playing computer games on their own," but Turkle (1995) and Castronova (2005a: 308) contend that MMORPGs provide opportunities for contact and emotion sharing in a way that is less "passive and isolating" than television. Many of the families in my study noted specifically that they interacted more with each other when playing WoW than they did when

doing other activities, including watching television, and that the quality of their interaction and conversation was richer. Ted noted that, without WoW, he and Bonnie would:

*Probably still spend the same amount of time together, but not interacting as such. You can spend a night in and watch three movies and have about six words pass between you, or you can spend a night for three hours on the computer and have full-blown conversations.*

Bonnie agreed with this, noting that she started to play MMORPGs not because of an interest in the game itself, but “to save me being a computer widow” on nights when “Ted and the kids would be sat round the PCs.” The family previously played *Diablo* (a different MMORPG), and at dinnertime, Ted and the boys “would be on about this game.” Bonnie joined them in playing *Diablo* so that she would not be left out, and the whole family moved to WoW together. “It is not at all unusual to find groups of friends move from one game to another. In such situations the game simply becomes a new environment for a pre-existing social network to inhabit” (Jakobsson and Taylor, 2003, n.p.; see also Taylor, 2006a). Now, Bonnie says, “I understand everything they’re on about, because I’m partaking in it, and I don’t think there’s many families out there with three teenage boys where they all interact.” Bonnie turns Livingstone’s (2002) quote on its head, noting, “at least we’re socializing with people whereas when you’re sat watching a soap or something, you’re isolated, aren’t you?” Ted would rather be playing WoW with his friends and family. “It also gets you to communicate with other people rather than just sitting....in front of the telly” and Charlie notes that playing WoW with others is “better than sitting looking at TV.”

Rose and Tim, a married couple, also play together several nights a week and state that if:

*We’re going to spend the evening together....one of the things we’ll consider doing [instead of watching television] is logging in two chars [characters] and playing together for a few hours....I really enjoy playing with Rose....it’s spending time together.*

In this way, these games are part of the establishment and maintenance of social capital, just what Putnam (2000) argues is lacking in modern society and family life. Putnam (1995, 2000) places the blame for this erosion of social capital on the increase in television viewing in the last 25 years. My interviewees played WoW precisely *because* it provided a better mechanism for family interaction than the television. Therefore, while there is much debate

about whether ICTs (including Internet-based media) help or hinder social capital (Putnam, 2000; Katz and Rice, 2002; Kraut et al, 2002) it appears that MMORPGs *could* (not necessarily in all cases, but at least with those I interviewed) be part of the positive development or maintenance of social capital inside the family (see also Williams, 2006; Nardi and Harris, 2006), especially when playing MMORPGs replaces television viewing as a family activity.

### **6.5 WoW and Anti-sociality**

Despite WoW providing a common topic and means of conversation, Pete thinks he actually spent *less* time with his family because they played WoW. He played less than his brothers and other members of his family, and joked that his parents “forced” him to play. “I don’t like playing with my family.” He says they did not interact with him unless he played, and they talked only about WoW when the family was together. He says he “didn’t want to be like them,” playing WoW instead of socializing in other ways. He has now quit playing the game entirely as he prepares to join the Marines.

Will revealed that, although he started playing WoW with his family, he quickly moved to a different server and after that played with them “very rarely.” He says that his friends think his parents are “cool” because they play, but “most of the time, it’s just their backs you see” at the computer. He notes that he interacted with his parents more when his computer was located in the dining room with their computers, but now that his computer is upstairs they see less of each other. He does place importance on the social aspects of the game, which he now plays mostly with friends. According to Will and Pete, WoW provided *less* of an opportunity for family interaction than other activities, in contrast to the parents’ assertion that it provide more opportunities for family bonding. Even Kyle, who plays many games with his father Phil, noted that playing WoW occasionally led to arguments between them. Kyle recently quit playing WoW, as he felt he was spending too much time in the game. Even though he no longer plays, he and his father continue to talk about WoW and other games. Phil still plays, but says he may quit soon too. If Kyle were still playing, Phil would continue to play, as he and Kyle were “having fun together” when they played the game. For him, the social bonds manifested in the game were more important than the game itself.

Rose noted that she enjoys playing WoW with her husband, but that playing together can also cause tension, "I can find it very frustrating to play with him....I love him very dearly, but on certain characters, it's easier if we don't play together." It can also be problematic if only one family member is playing without their spouse or children. According to Ted, "if you're not both involved, then it can cause problems in the relationship." Kyle's mother does not play WoW, but Phil would have liked to get her interested in the game so that they could have played together. Both father and son agreed they would interact more with her if she played games with them.

It is clear that the game is not always positive. Family relationships, both positive and negative, are manifested in game play, and it can be problematic if the game is used as a way to avoid, rather than enhance, family time. As with all activities, the quality of interaction is based on what families actually do when they spend time together, be it time spent in a park, in front of the television, or in an online game.

## **6.6 Evolution of game play**

One theme that ran through all the interviews and very much through my own observation was that the social aspects of the game led to real and important offline friendships. According to Rose, "Even before we met them in real life there were very, very strong bonds." While the topic of friendship building through games is not the focus of this study and has been covered by able scholars (Bakardjieva, 2005; Williams, et al, 2006; Nardi and Harris, 2006), the opportunity to build friendships continues to be important to players. It played a crucial role when my research took an unexpected turn.

Kings and Queens, the guild in which I played and conducted my research, was set up by Bonnie, Ted and Rose two years ago, following the breakdown of their previous guild. It was a robust guild, with over 80 active members, and they held large raids at least once a week. However, *The Burning Crusade* (TBC), an expansion for WoW, was launched in January 2007 (BBC, 2007a), just as I was beginning my research. According to Rose, the changes in game structure brought by TBC "fragmented many guilds" because it changed the raiding structure, which, in turn, changed the social hierarchy within guilds. In many guilds, members left, as they found they could no longer get a spot in the weekly raids. In Kings and Queens, this led to a failed "coup," in which some guild members tried to take over the guild. In the aftermath of this experience, Bonnie quit the game, Ted dissolved the

guild and set up a new guild for a core group: the people they “count as friends” inside and outside the game. They also cancelled the Ventrilo account.

As Bonnie had been one of the strongest voices in my research for the importance of WoW to positive socialization, her leaving the game came as a great shock. When I interviewed her again in June 2007, she said that it was the social issues which were the best parts of the game, but which also led to her leaving, in that she felt betrayed by those who had staged the attempted coup. She also said that the changes in the structure of the game had changed the nature of playing the game. When I interviewed her initially in March 2007, these changes were not yet apparent, but they became more problematic in the months following.

My other interviewees also noted that these changes to the design of the game undermined its social aspects. According to Rose, the game designers “have broken the community spirit” with the expansion. This raises questions about how game design impacts socialization and social capital in MMORPGs. There is not sufficient space in this paper to discuss these issues, but it is a topic about which more research needs to be done, especially as more and more people flock to games like *World of Warcraft*.

Interestingly, things changed again in late July, when Bonnie started to play WoW again. When I interviewed her in early August 2007, she said that now she and Ted “can have fun” playing together, because they are not burdened with the pressures of running a raiding guild. She plans to continue playing, but only for a few hours a week and in a much more casual way than before. She said she returned to the game mostly because she missed playing with Ted, and she missed the friends she had made in game. Now, instead of raiding, she says she’ll play with Ted and Charlie, or “sit in Iron Forge [a major town] and chat for two hours,” as a way of spending time with family members and friends. Although the changes to the game design changed how the game functioned as a social space, it is still the social aspects of the game, including the opportunity to play with family members, that have proved most important to players.

## 6.7 Summary of Findings

Although Bonnie thinks her family is “unique for the amount of generations” playing WoW, she knows other families who play; within the Kings and Queens guild, at least three families play together. Therefore, although not yet widely studied (see Nardi and Harris, 2006; Williams, et al, 2006 for early forays), family gaming could be occurring with some regularity. Each of my families had high levels of social capital before starting to play WoW. The families spent time together outside of WoW, including playing offline games. The parents were obviously proud of their children, and the children were fond of their parents. As Will and Pete’s responses demonstrate, the game does not always improve intra-family bonding, but I argue that the frustration the boys showed with their parents is normal; it is as much a reflection on their attitudes as teenagers as on the game. Charlie and Sandra’s comments show that WoW allowed them to forge a closer relationship with their grandsons by bridging the generation gap, especially as the boys grew up and grew away from their parents and grandparents. For example, WoW became the preferred method of communication for some family members because it was easier and cheaper than using the phone, and Bonnie joined the game so that she would have more in common with her husband and sons.

As Squire (2002: 3) argues, in some cases MMORPGs were “a positive force on family interactions” because they provided these opportunities for bonding. For these families, *World of Warcraft* was able, based on how it was used, to enhance already strong relationships and social capital by providing both a mechanism for family interaction and a common topic of conversation. This echoes Putnam’s (2000: 177) argument that “social capital may turn out to be a prerequisite for, rather than a consequence of, effective computer-mediated communication;” for the Barnes, Smith and Jones families, strong existing social capital allowed them to use *World of Warcraft* to enhance family bonds. When families (including spouses, parents, children, grandparents and grandchildren) played together, or talked about the game, WoW had the potential to contribute to the formation of intra-family social capital, but when families played in isolation from each other and did not use WoW as a topic of common interest, it detracted from family social capital. For these families, playing WoW at least provided more opportunities for togetherness than watching television. As can be seen by Bonnie’s experiences, some players initially find WoW a “better than real life” way of communicating with family members and friends. However, because, as Ted noted, “you are speaking to real people” in WoW, communication in game is fraught

with the same interpersonal issues as other forms of communication. The game provides opportunities for socialisation, but the outcome of those opportunities depends on the people playing the game rather than on the game itself.

This study is not representative or generalizable to all families who play MMORPGs, but, without being overly optimistic, it does lead one to wonder if, in a world in which more and more interaction takes place over computers and phone lines, these games could, *depending on how they are used on an everyday basis*, provide a means for enhancing family bonds. Whether positive or negative, playing WoW was implicated in the ways that family members negotiated their relationships with each other; it became part of Hirsch's (1992) moral economy of the family.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

Castronova (2005a: 252) argues that academics (and the public) should approach MMORPGs not as threats but as opportunities. He even argues for their use for political organizing. While that discussion is outside the scope of this paper, it is interesting to think about the implications of family use of these new technologies. For example, does cooperative family play fundamentally change the way MMORPGs are played? Are these games a "safe space" for families and children? If games are used for family socialisation, what implications are there for families who do not play together? Does this indicate a new kind of "digital divide"? Do the ways in which games are used in micro (family) socialization have implications for macro (societal) socialization and social capital? Might MMORPG use in the family influence larger social trends? Siisiainen (2000: 4), drawing on Bourdieu, argues that it is the micro-level interaction that leads to more macro-level social capital and trust; as Haddon and Silverstone (1994: 2) argue, "how objects are culturally defined and re-defined can reveal much about the society in which these objects are located." In other words, the household is the site of small, but persistent changes that have implications beyond the family (Hirsch, 1992, Silverstone, 2006). There is not sufficient space in this paper to deal with these questions, but I argue that asking these questions at the micro (family) level will lay the foundation for further study at the macro (societal) level.

This study also showed that family use of MMORPGs is not fixed, but evolves as games and the motivations and interests of players change over time. Rather than making these games less important, these continually shifting implications merit continued and careful study to understand the evolving implications of family play. Castronova's (2005; 2007) work addresses some of these shifting questions; I hope they will continue to be examined by other scholars.

Like Putnam, Castronova (2005a: 243) argues that the "strongest bulwark against falling into unhealthy environments is probably the family – a troublesome fact, given the chronic degradation of family relationships in contemporary society," but, unlike Putnam, he sees MMORPGs as providing hope for family socialisation. Putnam (2000) argues that families should play card games together; in today's increasingly mediated world, perhaps MMORPGs are the equivalent to bridge or Monopoly. Given that, shouldn't we be lauding technology that might provide families and close social networks with these opportunities to interact? This mediated interaction is likely not the ideal way to interact with family (see

Kraut, et al, 2002), but perhaps it is better than no interaction at all. As William Gibson noted recently, "we are getting to the point that a strange kind of relationship would be one where there was not virtual element...in a couple of years, we will be no more disturbed by our relationship with virtual worlds than we are by our relationship with broadcast television," (Adams, 2007: 8). Perhaps, as the Smith family shows, these games could be better for relationships than television.

Clearly, MMORPGs are not the final answer to the decline of family togetherness. But neither are they simply an evil, addictive obsession that isolates players, including family members, from each other. Rather, they can, in some cases, provide a medium through which parents and grandparents can connect with children, and spouses with each other, *if they so choose*. I argue that it is time to weave together these threads of research on families, social capital, and games like *World of Warcraft*, to achieve a nuanced view of these games as they become part of family life.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Participant Observation Log**

**21/1/07**

First time playing the game. It is a visually/sensory rich environment which requires players to internalize many skills (even just moving around) before play becomes ingrained – before one can focus on play rather than on skill acquisition – before “playing” becomes second nature. In short, it requires significant time and cognitive commitments. It also raises moral issues. For example, as a hunter (a type of character class), I can use a gun. However, I am opposed to guns in real life, so I choose not to have one in the game. Another moral issue – I tried to help an NPC (non-player character) as part of a quest, but because I did not have good command of the controls, I used the wrong key and ended up killing it instead of helping it. I felt guilty at doing so, despite the fact that it is an NPC.

The whole game vocabulary also needs to be learned. My socialization was immediate because I was a known entity outside the game (I came to the game with Rose and Tim, who are guild officers) and so I immediately had reputation capital as a player (although, not as a character – that I have to build up through the game). However, just because I had reputation does not mean I could interact with everyone. Like joining any new social group, I have much to learn, including just player norms and vocabulary. I definitely feel socially inept in this game at this time. For those wanting to join a game “cold”, having a friend or ally outside the game who can act as a guide is very helpful. In my case, it is crucial for effective access to the game, but even for my spouse, who is starting to play the game, it is good, as it overcomes the social barrier that he would otherwise find difficult.

**29/1/07**

My primary concern is not with the game itself – or with “succeeding” in the game – but with my interaction with other players. I am much more worried about being accepted socially in the group than I am about doing well and advancing my char [character]. I don’t want to offend or act inappropriate. My concern is not with the game, but with social aspects. I am also finding it difficult to “get to know” these new friends, as I’m unsure how much to talk in the Ventrilo server, and I want to be friendly but not pushy. It is harder to judge what is appropriate because I am lacking social cues like eye contact. I do have voice contact, which helps. However, I find it hard to distinguish some of the voices – especially those of the men, some of whom are similar in age and origin, and therefore have similar voices. I can pick out a few, but it is difficult. I also have little social context – how much can I say – how “like me” are these people? My spouse and I are the only Americans in the guild, so for that reason and because we are new we are easy for them to identify. It is a disconcerting feeling.

**3/2/07**

In this world, technology is the means, not the end. Players do not interact solely with technology (though they do of course interact with the game world and the NPCs and mobs) but with each other through technology. In many ways, the interaction seems to be akin to

walking together or mutual TV viewing – lots of casual conversation sparked by what one is seeing in front of one's char, but then that moves the conversation into the more personal or interactional realm. It is not "cocktail party" chat – more like chat at a dinner party of old friends.

**7/2/07**

My spouse also plays the game. He has the same reaction to social interaction in game play as he does to social interaction in real life. He wants largely to be left alone, but when pushed or pulled he will go into a social group situation and often finds this rewarding. He is used to being the quiet one in the group who has to be brought into the conversation, especially in a group where he does not know everyone well. He finds the social somewhat intimidating. In this case, he does not want to play collaboratively, preferring to play alone until he feels he has a grasp of how game play works. But he is pulled into groups by our friends in the game, and feels he should be social and play in groups. He enjoys and finds it frustrating, as he would while being shown any new skill by a good friend in front of whom you do not want to appear stupid.

**8/2/07**

I was helped by two of the guild officers, including the guild master, after they killed the boss I was stalking. I had killed all his minions and had turned to engage him when I realized he was dead. I mentioned this over Ventrilo jokingly, and then heard Ted say, "Where are you?" I replied, and he and Bonnie broke into laughter, as they were the ones who had "stolen my kill". We all had a great laugh about it and then they helped me kill him and complete my quest. I saw that they (their chars) were very powerful – killing things as we went along. I tried to say goodbye, but misspelled as I tried to type quickly in game, and missed it. I apologized on Ventrilo.

I would not have been able to have this interaction if not for Ventrilo. I would not have typed out my feelings about the boss having been killed, but I did feel I could mention it in voice. Ventrilo enhances socialization much more than if we were just typing. It is not part of the game, but has been added for just this reason – ease of communication. It was added mostly for ease of coordination of raids, but has become a social tool.

Interestingly, during this time another guild officer – Rose – was on Ventrilo but we could not hear her. We eventually noted this via Ventrilo to her, and she logged off and logged back on until she could be heard. It was important to have her voice contact to all members of the group who were also on with voice contact. However, the technical issues made this difficult until we noticed and until someone looked hard enough to mention it.

I logged back in after logging off to thank everyone and say goodnight. I realized after logging off that social norms dictated that I should do this. I am coming to learn that social norms in this group demand a high level of sociability – one who is not comfortable being very social may not want to join a group like this. For example, one needs to acknowledge when one is going offline or saying goodnight (we play mostly at night). We also give each other IRL advice. For example, one of the guild officers had a cold, and we all gave her tips on things that might help.

At times, I find this sociability a bit intimidating – do I want to socialize at night when I am tired and have been dealing with people all day? However, I feel socially obligated to go online, as my absence will be noted if I stay away. I feel especially obligated to keep up my social capital as 1) I am indebted to this group for being part of my research and 2) I was brought in by friends and I have an obligation to them to act appropriately.

## **12/2/07**

I was playing with Rose in a group, when we met a new char – Titan - in one of the towns. She buffed us (cast a beneficial spell over us) and then asked to join our group. She said she doesn't like soloing. She has quit WoW twice over her dislike of playing alone. She grouped with us all afternoon. It was interesting, but it was a bit like having someone we don't know well join us for a chat over coffee. It was not bad to have Titan along, but it was not the afternoon we would have had if it were just us. Interestingly, Rose and I were on Ventrilo so we could chat about our group member without her knowing. This made for an interesting dynamic. This is not something one could do IRL. It was a new way of socializing for me.

I spent the afternoon with Rose and others from the guild. I spoke with Kyle about the project, who I was and about speaking with his father to see if he wanted to be involved. I explained a bit about my research, which sparked some fun debate about my research topic among those on Ventrilo. We discussed whether the game was good for family socialization. One member noted that his partner did not like it that he played so much. We encouraged his partner to get involved but the player (who I did not know) said his partner would not be interested.

Rose and I spent a lot of time talking socially about real life issues and plans, rather than just about the game. This was similar to how we would speak if we were walking in the park or playing a card game. We commented on the action at hand, especially when something urgent or exciting came up, but we focused largely on ourselves/our lives outside the game. We talked a bit more about the game, but largely because she was teaching me – must as we would if she were teaching me to do any in real life activity (i.e., cooking a recipe, flying a kite, etc.).

Kyle left for a bit to take a call, and then came back to say his dad, Phil, had phoned to tell him to login as Phil's char and to take his skill up in fishing (by getting his char to fish). We joked that this was the new kind of doing chores for children – not taking out the trash but instead levelling his father's char. He laughed and said "my dad's cool like that." What does this say about the way the game is integrated into family life, or the way it becomes a new mechanism for the family?

It was strange to play in a group as I am just getting the hang of this. Everyone is being very nice – I suspect because I am a newbie but also a newbie with an introduction from my informants. But Rose had to leave our group, and I was left playing with Bonzer, who I don't know. At the time, I did not know who he was in real life and had to ask Rose later on for clarification. It was like being introduced to someone at a party and then the host going off and leaving us to chat. We had to make small talk and learn to get on, but it was socially uncomfortable, especially for me as he was also at a much higher level than I was (15 compared to 70). Still, he was very nice and even gave me 5 gold (I think b/c he felt sorry for me!). My informants have also given me gold to help me get started.

I feel I need time in the game to play with others and learn from them about what to do. I need time to make use of that knowledge – either alone or in small groups with them, so that I don't feel lost and stupid in front of others I don't know well. I feel intimidated by level 70s who can do so much more and so much more quickly than I can. I feel I slow them down. But I am glad of the help – I just need some social time in game and some "on my own" time in game to learn how to catch up.

This is similar to feelings I had when I joined a real life social group to which my spouse belonged. People were very nice, but I felt a bit of an outsider for some time before I felt a member of the group on my own. I'm not sure if this is complicated by the lack of face to face. In some ways, Ventrilo helps, as it is much easier to communicate. However, Ventrilo means there is more pressure to be social than there would be if it were just the text channel for communication.

\*\*\*Did not play for four weeks as was very ill\*\*\*

### **13/3/07**

I feel a bit intimidated about logging on again after being absent for so long. Because of the social connections I have in the game, I feel as if I've been a bad friend or delinquent in-group dynamics for being gone for so long.

I was a bit relieved that no one else was on at first. Then Bonnie and Rose came on, and we got to chat briefly about coming up for the interviews, which made me more confident about that. I feel I have a bit of a social capital debt in the game, and that I need to work it off by playing more. I feel this especially toward Bonnie (and, to some extent, toward Ted, but more toward Bonnie as she is the social connection to the family), as she is organizing/allowing me to come up and interview the whole family. I will try to play more.

### **19/3/07**

When I logged on, I discovered that Ventrilo server was down for maintenance. It is strange to play without it, as that voice component has become such a part of game play for me. Even if I am not playing with the people on the Ventrilo server, it's nice to hear them: to have a sense of collective play, and to be able to interact. I also ask questions of them quite a lot, so it will be strange not to have that resource to hand if I need it. In a way, thought, tonight I almost do feel it's easier, as I just want to pop on briefly to do a few things. I smelted some ore, sold some items, and picked up a few more quests to do later. Another character (who I had never met) asked if he could join our guild, saying he knew some people in it. I told him he'd have to ask the officers. He then asked me if I could tell him their names. I felt he was being a bit pushy, so I did not respond to that. It is definitely a different way of interacting. I do feel slightly at a loss here, because I don't know how to respond, and I can't read this guy. Also, I know guild membership is closed and is available only on reputation. I think if this player had good rep, he would have been able to get in the guild already. He then asked me to join a group with him so that we could play together. I said no, and explained that I was about to go offline.

It felt a bit like being picked up in a bar. It's a bit less threatening, but because I don't know the game well, I do feel vulnerable and unsure of how to respond (which is not as I am in real life, so that is disconcerting). I am also aware that I have my guild's reputation to keep up.

It's interesting. I would not play this game without my friends, and even though I did not expect them to be on tonight, it felt a bit lonely without them to talk to on Ventrilo. I almost can't play without listening to their chat. It's part of game play for me.

### **22/3/07**

Played tonight, mostly to get back into it after being away so long with being sick, end of term, etc. Observing the forums (for my research methods assignment) has made me NOT want to play, as people are so nasty on the forums. They are a sort of lowest social common denominator. But today online was good, if a bit lonely. I ran around and got caught up on a few quests and other things. However, I find it lonely/frustrating to play when none of my friends is on, and I feel like I am on when they are not lately. I'm sure it's just bad timing, but it is frustrating. Even if we are not grouped up, it is nice to listen to them chat and be able to ask for advice. I feel I've moved up a bit from total newbie to slightly better player. I do OK on my own, but I'm not yet good playing in groups. I need more experience, playing with people I know, so that I can ask questions. They also don't mind if I do silly things, because they know me and know it is just inexperience in the game, not me being obnoxious. I can't play in just a random group, as I feel like I'll mess up and then they will be frustrated with me. I need a level of comfort to play in a group. Perhaps when I talk with Rose tomorrow we can schedule some time to play together. I'll also talk to other guild members about it when I meet them next week.

### **26/3/07**

I started off this evening playing by myself. But then Tim came on and we played together in a group for a while. I started out just getting myself sorted and doing some in-game "cleanup". I think this sort of thing is boring to many players: just running around talking to trainers, cleaning out your bags at the merchant, fishing, cooking, etc., but I don't mind it. It's sort of the same idea as cooking or taking care of plants at home – a small but rewarding sense of accomplishment. When I logged on, a few people I know were on, but they were raiding so I decided to stay out of their channel so as not to distract them. I went off to clear out a few quests on my own. Tim joined the game an hour or so into my session, while I was doing an interesting but challenging underwater quest. He logged on to the Ventrilo server, which was great, but I couldn't talk much right away as I was trying to figure out the quest (it was complicated to both swim and fight – at least for someone at my level of play. It's easy for him). But we chatted as I got through with the quest, and he came up to where I was to play with me in a group for a bit. He helped me, with his level 70 (highest level possible) character. But then he wanted to duel – his level 70 against my level 18. It is a bit strange for me to duel, as I've never liked PvP (player vs. player) or first person shooter games. I would not have duelled with anyone I did not know, but I trusted Tim to be nice to me. As we started to duel, it became more of a teaching tool – a way to show me what happens at higher levels. It was great. We'd play, he would kill me, and then resurrect me, and then he'd explain what happened and give me some tips. It feels like I have more knowledge now, if not yet more skill. As I explained to him over the voice

server, it was much the same as when a friend taught me how to fence with two weapons in real life. I was already a good fencer with one weapon, but he taught me sword and dagger. At first, this felt like trying to eat spaghetti with two forks – a simple task, but made very awkward. But after a few months of my friend's (very patient) teaching, I got the hang of it. I understood it intellectually before I could do it physically. Although WoW is in the computer, the same is happening here. I can see what I need to do, but I can't yet coordinate my actions with the keys and mouse to do what I want to do. I am a fairly proficient computer user, so this is not a computer skill issue, but a game playing issues. Like all skills, it takes time to develop.

We also "hugged" in game before we signed off. Tim is one of my friends in real life, and this is a nice way to spend time with someone I want to spend more time with. I feel like even though we were not physically together, we did spend time together today, and it builds our friendship. We talked about offline plans for later in the week before signing off. I don't think this should be the only part of our friendship, but it is a nice way to spend a few hours together when we are too busy to actually get together. We live on opposite sides of London, so this is easier to fit into our hectic lives.

### **29/3/07 – 2 hours**

Played tonight. Was in a bit of a bad mood, and I hoped playing would help. I also felt as if I should play – I wanted to be productive, and because I didn't feel as if I could write the essay on which I was working that perhaps I could at least play and make notes, which would make me feel as if I had accomplished something. The playing went reasonably well, but not perfectly. I finished two quests, but I did not feel inspired – it wasn't that much fun. Bonnie was on (on her alternate character) when I logged in, and I asked (via the in-game text) if I could join her Ventrilo channel even though she was raiding. She said of course, although she was playing without any headphones and so was not talking. I ended up joining another channel, in which some guildmates were playing together, just to have them as "background noise". Unfortunately, the only interaction I had via Ventrilo was when I leaned on my microphone's "on" button by accident and everyone told me (very nicely) to stop.

I realized a few things: 1. I am not very good at the game yet. I don't really have a sense of what to do or how best to do it, and I rely heavily on friends or on online help ([www.wowhead.com](http://www.wowhead.com)) to help me figure out the quests. 2. Playing in groups is good, but when I played with Rose I didn't get a sense of what I was doing/where I was going (I followed her) so I feel a bit lost when I try to go back to those areas of the game. I need to pay more attention and go slower, even in a group, so that I really learn as I play. I also wish I could play with my spouse. We have only one computer, so we can't play at the same time. I think it would be more fun to have a companion I felt completely comfortable playing with (as I would with him), and who was at about the same level, so that we could help each other out, but not feel dumb in front of our friends. I also picked up a group quest, which is fine, except that it is hard to find someone to do it with me. I asked one person who was also doing the quest (you can tell, as this quest changes the look of your character). However, he was already finished, so that did not work. I find it hard to play without my guild/group, but also hard to play with them because many of them are on at different times, and we are at such different levels. I need to figure out how to resolve this, or the game will not be fun for me.

**31/3/07**

We visited Bonnie and Ted's home today, so that I could interview them. After we completed the interviews, I watched as Rose, Bonnie, and Ted raided. It was interesting to see the amount of teamwork involved in this kind of play. It was a 10-man raid, and the actions of each persona were very important to the outcome of the group's efforts. Some group members were adults and others young teenagers, but each was expected to play well and conscientiously. The younger players are expected to act in game as the adults do (or, in some cases, better than the adults as some adults – young men in their early to mid twenties – are often badly behaved). They comment was made that some of the younger players are the better players and better to deal with than players in their 20s.

In the raid, Bonnie was the healer, and she had to keep track of what was happening with each character so that she could heal them all as needed. It was a timed raid as well. It was very intense and stressful, but also very interesting to watch. It will be a long time before I get to that level of play.

By far the most interesting aspect was the communication and teamwork needed to set up and manage this raid. Everyone had to listen, follow instructions and work together. I realized why these games are used for military training. Although war itself requires different skills, such as expertise in weapons, etc., this group has learned to work well together and this kind of training in coordinated attack situations would probably help them if they had to fight in a group for real. It certainly teaches how to coordinate group action, account for each group member, work together to take down an enemy, etc. And this is not even a set group of players, but a group from within the guild. It could easily have been other guild members playing, and each would be expected to act in much the same way. All members of the guild learn to work together so that they can come together in any combination. I understand group play much better now, especially group play in high stress situations like raids. I also have a huge amount of admiration for the skill in coordinating these sorts of instances. I have reservations about learning to make war like this, but these skills could be applied for other group activities.

**7/4/07**

Logged on as a break from transcribing interviews. Everyone seemed to be on alt chars tonight. I didn't realize that Sandra and Charlie were on until right before I logged off because they were using their alternate characters. But I said hello to them briefly, which was good. Bonnie and Ted were on each other's alternate characters, which was doubly confusing. I tried to get on to Ventrilo, but couldn't get on initially until I logged into WoW and found out that the password has been changed. I couldn't figure out how to change it, so I typed to Ted and he told me how to do it. When I changed it and logged on I talked with him and others who were on. He told me that that "some Russians" had found the server so they had to change the password. Apparently our Ventrilo server was hacked!

Play itself was fairly "normal" – I just finished a few quests and picked up some new ones. What was interesting was that this was the first time I really played since meeting Bonnie and Ted and the family. It was nice to reconnect with them, now that I can put faces and real people with the names and voices. I enjoyed it. I wish Bonnie had been on Ventrilo, as I really like speaking with her. But she was not actually playing – Ted was levelling her chars. I had emailed thank you notes to everyone, and got email back from Bonnie, Ted,

Charlie and Sandra, but not the boys. Glad to be on. I was a bit nervous to “see” them all again, but glad to reconnect.

The game itself is starting to feel a bit of a chore. I feel I have to log on, or I feel guilty for not being more social. I also feel like the game is not much fun as I am off on my own, and I have to write and then type notes whenever I play. This is likely because this is dissertation research, but I’m not sure I’d play were it not for my research. I really like Bonnie, and I like Ted and the boys, but I don’t feel connected enough to the game or the group to play a lot without additional motivation. I like it, but not that much. I find it interesting, but more as a phenomenon than as a game. I do feel a very deep sense of obligation to my game friends/interviewees, so that keeps me involved. I wonder if this is same sense of obligation that fuels participation in other civic organizations – I feel much the same sense of obligation as I do for the voluntary organizations I belong to. I like them, and I like many of the people involved, but sometimes I wonder why I do it, as it takes a lot of time, and I have so little time as it is. Maybe it’s for the same reasons – to feel a sense of connectedness, to fill time, etc.

### **13/4/07**

Played a bit. Feel like I should log on. Because of essays and illness I have not played in a while, and with my nephew coming, I probably will not play very often while he is here. So I logged on. But amazingly, when I logged on, almost no one was on. There was no one I knew well logged into Ventrilo, and almost no one I know at all playing. I saw someone I thought was Tim talking (found out later it was not him) but he was in another part of the game. It did remind me that I need to txt him about offline plans. So I played for an hour, completed two quests, and then logged off.

I’m finding that, without Tim and Rose playing with, or at least talking with, me, the game loses some of its appeal. I find it fine, but not something to keep my interest for its own sake, now that the newness has worn off. To stay interested, I’d need to find new challenges in the game, or maintain social connections with others. I might find it more interesting if I did not have an active offline social life, but I find I don’t have much time to play with all my school and work obligations, and the game on its own doesn’t pull me in. I have so much “screen time” with work and essays that I usually just want to get away from the computer and not use it for leisure. I need to feel a real pull to use it for non-work, school, or email purposes. I find the games fascinating, but for the social interaction, not for themselves.

### **17/4/07**

Logged on to check email – to see if one of my interviewees had gotten back to me. Said hi to Sandra and Charlie, who were playing, then decided to play for a few minutes. Ended up playing for 45 minutes or so. Enjoyed it this time. I’m struggling to complete one of my essays and some interview transcriptions, so it was a nice break. I complete a few quests, picked up a few more, and chatted with Sandra before going offline. It was good. Oddly enough, I didn’t go on Ventrilo, but it was nice to chat with Sandra when otherwise I’ve been home alone all day. I wonder if I like the game for itself after all?

**9/5/07**

Have not played in a while, but two important things have happened recently which affect my research. First, about two weeks ago, the guild was disbanded. There had been some internal social strife. It was a breakdown because factions emerged in which some fairly influential members of the guild wanted to the guild to be run in a certain way, in opposition to the way the guild master and officers were running it. These members staged a sort of half-hearted coup attempt, which failed. They were subsequently asked to leave the guild. One of the officers (the only officer from outside the UK, who had not met the other officers in person) went with them. These members who wanted to take over the guild were also from outside the UK, though not from the same country as the non-UK guild officer. Soon after, it was decided that the guild was suffering from internal fractures, (none of which I have witnessed personally) in which some guild members were wanting different things, or were acting in a way which was not consistent with the guild philosophy (wanting to be hard-core raiders instead of being more relaxed about the game) so the officers made the decision to disband the guild. A new guild was immediately formed, and most of the core members from the old guild were invited into the new one, including my character and my spouse's character. The new guild was meant to be much more casual. It is more an association of the friends from the old guild than an organization with a specific purpose.

When this happened, I was not online, but Tim phoned me and asked me to go online briefly to get my character into the new guild, and to sign the new guild charter for the Horde guild (we have parallel Alliance and Horde guilds, with many of the same players in each). I went on briefly and did that, then logged out again. A few weeks on, this seems to be working well so far, in that those in the new guild seem to be enjoying it.

Today, I found out that one of my main informants, the mom of the large family, quit the game. She said she was bored of it, I have not spoken with her, but I hope to soon, and I hope to re-interview her to find out more. I know this will impact my research findings, but I'm not sure how. I'm looking forward to finding out more from her about her motivations, and to see how this affects the others in the guild (will the family play less?).

**14/5/07**

Finally, finally logged on to play again. It is so different without the guild, or rather, with the new, more sparsely populated guild. When the old guild disbanded, a new one formed, but many of those in the old guild left the server to do more "hard core" raiding, or left the game altogether. Even Bonnie has not yet responded to my text [she responded shortly thereafter]. I think she needs some time out from the whole crowd. So when I logged in, no one was on Ventrilo, and only one person besides me from the guild was online, and he is someone I don't know well. Kyle has quit the game, too, although his dad still plays.

I can see how different my results will be now than if I had finished the dissertation in February (for example). When the expansion came out, it really changed the game, in many ways not for the better (as I understand it). That, and the social interaction/social conflict have really changed since I started to play in January. It's very much not the same game from a social point of view, at least in the way that I play, and in terms of those I play with. In don't think I would take this on as a dissertation, knowing what I know now. That said, the changes do have interesting implications for claims of social capital, and in some ways this makes the research more complex and interesting.

I also realized I was a bit bored with the game itself. I'd been spending a lot of time in the same area, and it was lonely and getting a bit dull. So I left that area and went off to a new (for me) continent and am exploring there. At least that makes it more interesting – new things to see, new places, and new characters. So that was interesting. But it felt a bit isolated, playing without the chatting, without knowing others were there to answer questions if I needed them. Once Tim and Charlie came on later, it got a lot better, and I enjoyed it much more. Then I felt disappointed to get offline, which I needed to do to sleep. But even though we weren't playing together, we were chatting, which felt more like the way I played when I started, which was nice.

### **16/5/07**

Rose suggested I go online with her today for a few hours, and that I make a new character to run around a new area with her. I had to create a Tauren (cow) character, which was fun. I also picked a Shaman, which I haven't played before, so that was fun. I haven't played communally in a long time, so that was fun. We went on partly because we were both feeling a bit down, and it was nice to get away from the rainy weather (though it was also raining in game) and focus on doing stuff together. We talked a lot about non-game stuff, which was nice. It was much the same as if we'd met to go shopping, except that our conversation was interspersed with discussion about what we were doing in the game, instead of what we were seeing in the shops.

Playing collaboratively is different than playing on my own – not just the social but also the manner of game play, you work as a team, and take turns looting. The game forces the turn taking, but there are other things that the players have to do collectively, such as act as a team to kill mobs (monsters), etc. As a less experienced player, especially as someone with less experience playing in a group, I followed Rose's lead, learning how to share quests, help out when needed or stay back when she could do things on her own, etc. We had a very nice time playing this way. It cheered us up to do silly things like run around "mooing" at one another (the cow characters have a "moo" function). It was much like having a good long phone chat or a short visit, even though we were in our respective houses. Being on Ventrilo made a big difference. It would not have been the same experience if we had not been able to chat about non-game stuff, or if we'd had to type it all out.

### **17/5/07**

Rose and I played again collectively today. We were supposed to have coffee, but, due to mobile phone problems (missed calls and texts) we did not actually meet up. Since we could not meet up in person, we decided to "meet up" in game. In many ways, like yesterday, it was as if we'd met for coffee, as we talked about the same sorts of things we would have talked about over a coffee. We also made offline plans for later in the week.

As for game play itself, it was much like the previous day. We ran around together doing quests. At one point, I had to go off by myself to do a quest, but I got in trouble, so Rose came and rescued my character so I could continue.

We stopped a bit abruptly (though we'd been planning to call it a day) so she could go offline to talk to a friend who had arrived unexpectedly at her house. This was fine, because I will see her tomorrow.

**16/06/07**

Today I watched Rose and Tim play together. Her character needed to do a group quest (at a higher level than my character) so he went with her to assist. They play very well together (having done so for over a year), coordinating in a way that seems to come from this long experience of playing together. Each seems to anticipate what the other will do. They also seem to enjoy playing together – it's a way to spend a Saturday afternoon with each other (and with us, as we can enjoy watching them play for a bit). It's sort of like playing cards or a board game together, but instead we're all playing a computer game together. I also sense that Tim likes helping out and being able to share his skill and knowledge of the game.

They also share expressions of love (or annoyance if one does something that isn't exactly what the other wanted) easily. In this case, they are also co-located, so instead of speaking over Ventrilo, Tim and Rose just speak directly to each other. It does remind me very much of playing cards with friends of ours who don't play WoW but who do enjoy playing offline games together.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Interviewees And Topic Guide:**

#### **Interviewees**

##### **Family 1**

Husband:

- Tim Barnes

Wife:

- Rose Barnes

##### **Family 2**

Grandparents:

- Charlie Smith
- Sandra Smith

Parents:

- Ted Smith
- Bonnie Smith

Children:

- Will Smith
- Pete Smith
- Brian Smith

##### **Family 3:**

Father:

- Phil Jones

Son:

- Kyle Jones

#### **Topic Guide:**

- Demographic/background:
  - Character name
  - Age
  - Relationship to others in game
  - How long have you played the game?

- How did you get involved in the game (i.e., suggested by friend, partner, child)?
- How much time would you say you spend playing a week?
- Guild
  - Why did you form the guild?
  - How much do you know personally about other guild members/officers?
  - How important are other guild members (esp. other officers) to your offline social life?
  - Have you met them IRL? Before or after forming the guild?
  - Is there a "core" of guild members who often play together? Size of this group?
  - Would you count them as "real life" friends?
  - What is the geographic spread of the guild?
  - What is the gender mix of the guild (players and chars)?
  - What is the age range of guild members?
  - Do you see differences in play patterns based on ages of the players?
  - Structure of guild or playing experience differently because there are children in guild?
  - How much time spent on social vs. raiding or other "serious" game play.
- Ventrilo
  - How did you decide to use Ventrilo?
  - How important is Ventrilo to interaction in game/group dynamics?
  - Is the whole guild on Ventrilo or just a selected group?
  - Is Ventrilo used mostly for raiding or for social purposes?
- Family/Friend Relationships
  - Do you see a difference between "real life" and "in game" friends?
  - How did subsequent members of the family get involved/did you get involved as a result?
  - Do you play together?
    - How often?
    - For how long at a time?
    - Do you quest or raid together, or do other activities in game?
    - What is the percentage of your play with members of your family?
  - Is playing online a significant part or factor in your family interaction?
  - Is playing together important to you?

- Do you play physically co-located (same room) or are you in different locations (different rooms or different houses/towns)?
- Do you supervise younger children in game/are you supervised in the game by family/others?
- Do you talk about WoW in offline family life?
- Do you talk about offline family life in game?
- Are you concerned about violence in the game?
- Do you see any positive/negative outcomes in your child/in your development as a result of the game?
- Do you feel the game enhances/detracts from your family life/interaction?
- Does the family spend more/less time together since starting to play WoW together? Offline or online, or both/neither?
- Do you count time spent playing the game together as family time?
- If not playing together, would you spend the same time on other family activities, i.e., watching TV together, going for a meal, going to the park, going out?
- Do you like gaming with your children/parents/grandparents, or would you prefer to game separately from them?
- Do you always game in the same group as your children/parents/partner, or do you sometimes game separately (in a different guild or group or on your own)?
- Any additional information you'd like to share about your experiences in WoW, especially with your family?

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Sample Interview Transcript**

Interview with Ted

31 March 2007

INTERVIEWER: So I'm curious, about, you know, general stuff, and then we'll move, sort of, into more specifics

TED: Yup

INTERVIEWER: Like, what got you into playing WoW and starting the guild and all of that sort of thing

TED: (laughs) Um, playing WoW. Well, we – I got started off playing Diablo which is another Blizzard game, coincidence or not, but they play – they do make very good games. And, um, the next step from Diablo, cause they weren't doing anything else, so it was obviously another multi – multiplayer game

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: and WoW I'd read about and seen on the website through the adverts and things and waited patiently for two and a half years.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: for it to come out. And getting the wife involved in Diablo was a big step, so obviously, because she liked playing then and having to build one of the computers to accommodate her, and, um, it just moved on from there. Ah, it's a great form of cheap entertainment. And, um, relieves the boredom of repeats on television. It also gets you to communicate with other people rather than just sitting in and, um, being a sad git with a can of beer in front of the telly. (Coughs). And it gets you involved and gives you something to think about. Um, whereas making the guild we actually joined the guild when we first, first started playing WoW with a group of friends we'd met in Diablo

INTERVIEWER: OK

TED: Um, but that guild, or the guild leaders, I, or we, felt, cause we made the guild between us, weren't – weren't leading us on to do anything in the game. They were quite happy to go around and kill things, but there's a progression in the game which you obviously want to get through. You want to get to see the end-game instances and things. And so the decision was made to actually move on and start our own guild, with the idea of getting to the end-game instances and – I mean, it was an idea initially to only have, um, 20, 30 people in the guild. But as you find with any online game you need more than that because not everybody's available at the same time.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

TED: You need 20 people on a Saturday night, some have got birthdays, some are going out, and you ended up with six or seven which happened in the first guild. And they were not interested in getting more people in and such, you were stuck with what we had, so the progression was, "OK, we're going – we've got our 30 core members, obviously, let's move on, we've got to expand." It wasn't everybody's idea to expand, but they made me guild leader, so (laughs) "We're expanding!"

INTERVIEWER: How did you become guild leader?

TED: I got bullied! The women picked on me! (Laughs) Um, I got guild leader, basically, I think because I led the raids in the other guild. And, I could – I could lead people on. They'd do as I told – they'd do as I said, basically. "Right, we're gonna do this and this is how we're doing it. Let's take it down this way." But I also had the ability to listen if people had other suggestions, 'cause I was doing it wrong, then I would change tactics and adapt to the way that it works for those as well as myself and we could actually get the job done and so, - I don't know whether it's a guild leader or more of a coordinator. I coordinate people to actually work together rather than - You know, I'm leading them, "this is what we're doing. Now, OK, guys and girls, what do you want to do, how do you feel about doing it this way." And we moved on from there. You know, it's – we found that we, we got a lot more done than we had in previous experiences. So um, I know, we are – today we've got 87 members, so obviously we're doing something right because they're quite happy to stay with us.

INTERVIEWER: Did, did you guys – how did you decide to start using the Vent server?

TED: It's a must. Um, we – doing five man instances in the initial World of Warcraft was quite simple, once you knew the tactics. Um, but some of the instances as you progressed in the game were more complicated and, um, we actually needed to voice our commands quickly rather than typing. In the middle of a fight with three bosses,

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: You can't stop and type.

INTERVIEWER: Right, there's no way to say

TED: There's no way to communicate

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Unless you've got a macro, but you don't know what you're gonna set that macro for at the beginning. A macro is something that you set a key for and it tells a command, it tells people what to do, or it does an action. And, and every time you go in an instance it's different. You can't guarantee you're gonna use that macro so you need a faster way of communicating - and there was teamspeak, which is one we trialled first, on a free server. Um, you could only have so many people on, once you got too many people on it got crackly and nobody could hear, so actually, um, I hire this Vent server from a place in London, but it's a worldwide – they've got servers all over the place, in New York, and Paris and whatever, but obviously London's the local one for us. It costs about £7.50 a month, and it can accommodate 100 people.

INTERVIEWER: So do you guys pay for that?

TED: I pay for it.

INTERVIEWER: OK

TED: But, it's also cheaper than a phone call.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I was gonna say, by the time

TED: 'Cause, um, my brother uses it and either he'd phone me or I'd phone him. If he wants me, he's on Vent, if I'm on Vent. Um, my mother, um, various family and friends have got Ventrilo details. So if they want to use it, have a chat, pull them into a private channel, and you can talk while doing other things. Um, and it doesn't cost a penny, apart from the initial £7.50 a month.

INTERVIEWER: So it ends up being less expensive for you anyway to communicate with your family and friends, so regardless of the game, it's money well spent.

TED: So it's more economical for me to actually use Ventrilo.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: And, obviously it's a benefit for the guild.

INTERVIEWER: So,

TED: But we actually lost – Ventrilo went down a couple of weeks ago,

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: They were moving servers and things,

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Um, updating – oh, god, was the guild lost! (Laughs)

INTERVIEWER: I logged on, and I was like, "there's no Vent! What, what do I do?"

TED: (laughs) the guild was lost! "Oh we can't talk" And you can't, you can go in instances, but to progress through that instance quickly, is very, very

INTERVIEWER: yeah

TED: You can't do it without – you rely on the voice communication system.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: And, um, it's got to be done.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I – it was very weird, I have to say, when I logged on I was like

TED: Playing the game without someone yakking to you

INTERVIEWER: yeah

TED: Ah – You gotta have communication, and, um, I – you do tend to rely on it. You know, it's – whether you're actually using it, you might have logged on – you're listening.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: Um, you might not be using it, I mean, you log on, you don't always talk, but it's nice to have that – I don't know, you're not eavesdropping as such, but you're listening, and you can learn and you can have a laugh at other people's expense and things, but people don't mind, because they know you're in the channel, they know you're there.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: If there's anything people want to talk about without anybody else, then they can always move channels, you know, there's passworded channels for officers, and so on, so nobody else can get in them,

INTERVIEWER: I, I, it was funny because I logged in and I was like "there's no Vent server" and I'm just used to listening, 'cause I don't talk very much in Vent.

TED: No, you don't.

INTERVIEWER: But I'm used to listening to people, even if you guys are off raiding or something,

TED: Yeah

INTERVIEWER: And I'm not with you, just to hear you there, it's like, it's not – you're not playing by yourself, even if you're all on your own.

TED: That's right, and if you do – (inaudible) in a situation by yourself, if, if "oh god, can you help me, guys.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: "I need to know, or whatever." Then it's instant.

INTERVIEWER: Or, "somebody's just killed my boss" (referring to an incident, documented in field notes, where Ted and Bonnie killed an NPC I was trying to kill)

TED: (laughs). That's a prime example.

INTERVIEWER: (Laughs)

TED: "oops, sorry that was me" (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: "Can you come back and help me"

TED: (laughs) "oh, we'll wait for him to respawn. Hang on" (laughs). I was, I was pissing myself "ours, ours!" And Bonnie was "oh, you can't" "No, I didn't that was hers"

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: "I saw her earlier killing somebody else." Didn't realize they were clearing the way to the boss, you know. "It'll respawn by the time they get there, let's go and kill it, quick" you know.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: Um, which is, you know, it's the nature of the game.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: You see something, you want it, you go and get it.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Um, some people are considerate; an example would be a mine. Now, you've fought your way to that mine. You want to mine that mine. And you've killed four mobs to get there, and then some bastard comes along, mines it and buggars off. You think, "you sod"

INTERVIEWER: Yup

TED: you know, some people are considerate and say "oh, sorry." And you actually see in game where they say, "Were you going for that," and you say "yes" and they say "fair enough" and they'll sod off. So you do get the nice, friendly players, but then there's the selfish, "I'm having that, sod you, I don't care"

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Sort of attitude, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Do find more of one than the other?

TED: Um, there's more and now especially with the flying mounts, which give people a great advantage. If you've spent 5000 gold on a super-fast flying mount, you can fly around with your "spot mines" or "spot herbs" on your mini-map. You see one, you can swoop down, land, pick it, fly off again. Now, there might be some poor sod on the ground, running on his not-so-epic mount towards that same mine, by the time he's got there, the person on the epic mount, fly in, swooped in, picked it, and off he'd gone, so it's an advantage for some people, it's a disadvantage for others. Not everybody's got 5000 gold and 5000 gold can take a hell of a long time to collect. Um, there's more of it now, because of that, I think, than there was before. They're more thinking of themselves, 'cause, I think, with the

economy in game, there's more of a need for things. And people are aiming to get – I don't know - they got more selfish in some respects.

INTERVIEWER: Do you – I mean, so much of what I'm looking at is sort of the social stuff in the game

TED: Yeah

INTERVIEWER: and you know, how this all works, and, and, especially, I'm interested in it as much from the family point of view

TED: (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: But I am interested in how that all works in the guild. And it's been interesting to hear you guys talk about sort of guild management stuff and how that all works

TED: Oh yes, it's very

INTERVIEWER: And, 'cause it seems that you've got a lot of people who you're friends with in real life in the guild as well, and then some people who are less

TED: Well, we met, I mean, some of the people in game to the likes of Rose and Tim, we met online. And it's coming together through guild meetings. Um, unfortunately, some of the guild members live abroad, in – we have Iceland, Sweden, Norway, um, France, Israel, they're from all over the world. So, except America. We did have one or two from America who'd actually bought the UK version of the game cause they used to live in England, and they've got brothers or whatever, so they bought the UK version to actually play on the UK servers. So, yeah, there's members from across the world. And, we have actually met people from Holland and things, because they've made the effort to come over and join the guild meetings. And socialize on a person-to-person basis rather than just a voice over the Internet or a little toon waving at each other, in the game. So, um, you can – I haven't had any experiences yet where we've met people in real life from the game that have turned bad. They've all been good, and they've come across as, they might not look like you think.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: But, in personality-wise, they're exactly the same as they come across in game.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think most people are the same, personality-wise, or different?

TED: No, there's a – I, I think there's some people who play the game – I myself I, I'm in game, as far as I can see, the same as I am out of game. The only change for me in game is I'm more commanding and forceful, if you like, when we're doing instances. 'Cause if you've got 40 men following you, and you've got to try and get that little bit more respect from people to actually do as you tell them, because if they can't do as you tell them, and you can't come across as a leading, commanding sort of person, then you're not going to get anywhere in the raid. If you can't lead 5 people, let alone 40 people

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: to do a boss

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: Then you shouldn't be a guild leader, or a raid leader, I mean, some guilds don't have their guild leader as the raid leader. They have a specific raid leader who takes over the running of the raids. I'm in the position where I used to do the raids anyway, I got made guild leader – well, not made as such, but we made the guild and I was put forward for that position, and um, gone on from there, so – Yeah, as in, people you meet on game and in

real life, any I've met so far have come across as much similar to the actual characters they play, or

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: the voices and they – their actions and things are very, very familiar to actually their real life.

INTERVIEWER: So you feel like, if you're interacting with someone in the game, despite the fact that it's their char, you're really

TED: Yeah

INTERVIEWER: interacting with them

TED: Yeah, interact with them. You are actually interacting with them, rather than a toon on a plasma screen or whatever

INTERVIEWER: Right, right

TED: Um,

INTERVIEWER: Do you like that aspect of things, the sort of social interaction, or do you like the game, or is it both?

TED: I love social interacting. I've been in the pub – pub management - run pubs and supermarkets for 20-odd years, so I'm a very act – I'm a people person. I like talking, I like communicating with people. I wouldn't have been in the trades I've been in if I –

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: I couldn't have survived

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: if I was, ah, standing behind the bar hiding behind the pump. But, yes, so I love the interacting, interaction in the game as much as, um, in real life. Because, at the end of the day you are speaking to real people and

INTERVIEWER: yeah

TED: some people don't realize, "hang on, there's some other person at the end of this toon," you know, I'm human as well, and um, yeah, you, you've gotta, you've got to accept that you're playing with real people. And some people try and walk all over you. And in real life, they might be puny little gits who don't have, you know, an overbearing personality or whatever, but they perceive themselves as something completely different in game. "They can't see me, I can be who I like" sort of attitude. Um, I've met a couple of those in game, you think to yourself, "well, meet you face to face and then see what it'll be like" because, I mean, I dunno, I've read people quite well and looking at them, you think, "no, if you bumped into them in real life they wouldn't be nothing like that at all."

INTERVIEWER: So you think

TED: That's my – my stance

INTERVIEWER: They're putting on

TED: They're putting on a face, because, um, yeah, I believe a lot of people put on a face playing the game because they can get away with a whole lot more than they can in real life.

INTERVIEWER: But sounds like you're saying that some people do that, but most of the people that you sort of

TED: A lot of the people I've met and played with in game

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah

TED: are quite genuine people. Um, and the age group is completely, you know, upward from 14 years old to

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: 70, you know. Um, I don't think – the game is playable for all ages, and it's, it's an active game, it keeps your mind thinking. It does keep you alert. Um, which I, I think it helps in certain situations. Our next-door neighbour has a learning difficulty. And it was recommended that she play an online game, to help her coordination and interaction with other people.

INTERVIEWER: I asked Bonnie this as well, while we were talking about things and it sort of – 'cause she said similar things, sort of, that being in the game helped with socialization

TED: yup

INTERVIEWER: and social skills and stuff. Do you see that in your own kids as well?

TED: Brian is very quiet and Will, Will also - in real life Will's a lot quieter than he is in game. He's – if he's in a crowd of people he knows, he's fine. If he's in a crowd of people who are strangers to him, he's not so open and he's very quiet and reserved. Get him in game, and his face is behind a wall, as such, and he'll give as good as he gets and he is such a different character. He's – he's one of these – he changes. You know, whether he's got some self-conscious thing about himself in real life that he needs to grow up out of or whatever, and he wants to be like the person he is in game. I mean, he is coming out of himself a lot more. It might have to do with us moving jobs so much, or moving house – whatever, 'cause in the pub trade you tend to move every three or four years, so he's had to start his friends again, and this, that and the other, so it might not have helped him in a way, but I see Will in game, I think yeah, he is a completely different person and, um, I think he perceives himself as that. If you talk to him about him being different in game and he'll deny it. But, as a parent – and other people have noticed – that he is two different people, one in game and one in real life. Which isn't a bad thing, um, because he'll – he can learn from

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Especially if you talk to him about it, he can learn from how he is in, real, real – in game, sorry. And Will'll help anybody who's got questions, and he's, he's a mine full of information. And he is very helpful. He's helpful in real life, but he won't put himself forward in real life, where in the game, he'll put himself up for various things.

INTERVIEWER: So, it's sort of like he's got more, more – a position of, of respect or whatever in the game.

TED: Yeah, he's, oh, I'm trying to think of the word, yeah, he's – the word's gone, come back to me – I'll wake up at two o'clock and email you

INTERVIEWER: That's fine. That's fine

TED: But no, he's more um, ah

INTERVIEWER: More confident, more?

TED: yeah, he's more confident in game

INTERVIEWER: yeah

TED: Um, outgoing, as such, you know. He's more of an extrovert than, than he is – I mean, I've got a twin brother who plays – you've probably met him in game. Um, we're

completely different. He, he is a natural introvert as such, where I'm the extrovert. We're both – we're twins. And we're completely (gestures to show difference)

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: I'm right handed, he's left-handed. [Section deleted as divulges some personal information and is not relevant] But in game as well, he's a bit quiet. You know, now he doesn't change in game at all.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: whereas Will, in game is quiet, sorry, in real life is quiet, in game he's loud,

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Whether it's a self-confident thing, again, I don't know, but that's the way he's always been.

INTERVIEWER: Do you talk to your brother more because you play the game with him than you would otherwise?

TED: Yes, yes, we do a lot – a hell of a lot more now. We can speak to each other daily where before it was every three or four weeks we might ring. You know, the communication is there, it's instant, it's, it's, you're always connected, where before you had to make an effort. You might not have anything to talk about, "oh, I'll ring him later" you know,

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: but now, it's you got something - you're online and you'll talk about the game but that'll come – other things will come out of it, you know. "How's the wife?" duh, da da duh. So you'll talk about family and social lives as well as in game. It's, it's a, yeah, an instant communication. You find you haven't got to make an effort to actually contact somebody.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: Just that contact is already there, and you just happen – you go and speak to them. Same as your parents (laughs).

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Mum and Dad for an example. Charlie's a chess champion; he plays chess, blah, blah, blah, sits at this end of the room. Mother, plays – this is pre-WoW – mother sits that end of the game – room – playing solo computer games. He might play command and conquer, and she'll play something else, but they're both – no interaction! Dinnertime "let's go and eat". Um, "Guys, come and play. Come and play WoW." Charlie started, he said, "oh, this is quite good. Mum, you'll love this because you can do any – you can play with other people." They both got WoW. They couldn't wait because they – all the shops had run out. They bought them off eBay for twice the prices you would normally pay.

INTERVIEWER: Yup.

TED: Now, they argue like fuck and it's great! They communicate, all the time.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Where before, they could spend a whole evening and not talk to each other, because they were both engrossed in their own little worlds. Now they're in a bigger community and they're in the same world. They, they're actually – they do talk more and they interact a lot more. They have more arguments, but that – you do, you get older, you have more arguments, but the end of the day, you still love each other. But you're talking and discussing and

INTERVIEWER: Spending time

TED: Spending time TOGETHER as a unit, rather than two, two separate units. So, it's done them a world of good. By bringing them more together with a, um, a topic of conversation as such. Where, Charlie'd talk about chess, mum "oh, what's he talking about?" and so on. You know, they've actually got a topic, which again will bring out other conversation points rather than just in game. It's the same as talking to your brother online. It does extend a

[Bonnie enters room]

BONNIE: Can we just interrupt? Because we need an officer photo.

TED: You do?

Bonnie: Rose wants one for the website.

TED: Cardboard cutouts are us, if you go online,

[Paused recording for photo.]

INTERVIEWER: OK, so you were talking about sort of, um, playing with your parents and your parents playing together.

TED: Yeah

INTERVIEWER: Do you find that you, I may have asked this already, do you find that you interact more with your parents because of the game than you would otherwise? Because they interact more with each other, you said.

TED: Um, they, they find it now as an excuse to pop in.

INTERVIEWER: OK

TED: OK, they don't need an excuse to come in the house; they only live down the road, but, um, but Charlie'll pop round with the excuse "need to talk about the guild" – he, he comes around for a coffee. I mean, most parents should do like that. I think it's encouraged them more to pop round. I don't know if they – I know we moved away for five years and so on so we didn't see a hell of a lot of them. Um, but I, I actually think they come round here more than they would do if they weren't playing the game with us if you know what I'm saying. They've got – I've got another brother who lives down the road. They don't pop round to see him as much. So yeah, I, I think it has – I don't know if it's brought us closer. You can be close and friendly and whatever in any family situation. But it's given us more of a talking conversation point. Um, rather than the mundane things you talk through in life, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that, on that same note, do you spend more time with Bonnie than you would otherwise because of being able to play together?

TED: Yeah, um, I think so. We've got, we've got a great online community and we both complement ourselves I think in the game with bickering and passing comments off each other

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: which is all fun. You can do that in private, but I don't think it has the same effect as, as if you're actually doing it with an audience. You're having a - you're more able to laugh at yourself, with other people, um, than actually just laughing among the two of you. Ah, if you know what I'm saying. Um, we've always worked, and lived together obviously, for 22 years – we've been married 23 this year, I think. Better check with the missus on that one.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) I think that's what she said.

TED: Yes, but um, what did she say (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: No, she said you'd been married for 23 years when it came up.

TED: No, um, yeah, this year September sometime. Um, yeah, we've got a lot more, um, I should imagine what – I mean, we haven't really changed in a way because we've always lived and worked together in the pub trade. There've been a few jobs where I've done and she's done something completely different, um, but at the end of the day, I mean, it's very hard for a couple to actually live and work together. You, you either can or you can't and it makes or breaks the relationship and we've been fortunate in the situation where we have been able to work and live together. Yes, you have your fallouts, you have your arguments, but, and in game as well. Bonnie is more fiery in game, "ar, ar – he's doing me head in," blah, blah, blah, but she'll leave it to me. She will say things where I'll think "don't say that, don't say that". I find it hard to say, "don't say that" because she is an officer as such as I'm a guild leader, but they have as much say in the way the guild goes as I do, and I'll always back them up, be it my wife, Rose, Tim, whatever, they're officers for a reason, to make their choices and decisions. But fiery temper doesn't always help it, being an officer. And Bonnie can actually fly off the handle at the smallest of things, and regret it later, where I'm more of a laid back, "I'll sort it out, just leave it with me. I'll sort it out, don't worry" before you cause eruptions everywhere. So, yeah, we have our fallouts every now and again, but I think a little, not falling out, but yeah, you know, as any situation in life, I think, it's something else to, um,

INTERVIEWER: So do you, I mean, do you feel like you, if you weren't playing the game, would you be spending that time together?

TED: We'd probably be spending that time together but not communicating.

INTERVIEWER: OK

TED: You'd be watching the television or I might go down the pub with me mates or she might go to somewhere with her mother or whatever. We'd probably still spend the same amount of time together, but not interacting as such. Where you can spend a night in and watch three movies and have about six words pass between you.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: Or you can spend a night for three hours on the computer and have full-blown conversations. So, communication-wise, it has a great benefit. As long as you're both playing the game. If you're not, example a couple of our guildies, their wives don't play. "Gotta go, the wife's nagging" "Gotta go, I'm gonna be in trouble" "I managed to sneak on for a hour, she's gone to bed" You know what I'm saying, it's – if you're going to play an online community game, you need the backing and cooperation of a partner. Because it can lead to a fall down in communications and obviously a breakdown in relationships. Um, there's quite a few people I know who haven't played for a couple or three weeks because of problems with their partner. "You play too much" "You're not spending any time with me" and his answer or her answer "All you do is sit and watch telly." They're not communicating. I mean, it's a great social life without going out and spending a lot of money down the pub. You know, and um it does, I think it has – it can help a relationship obviously if you both get involved. If you're not both involved, then it can cause problems in the relationship.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think of it sort of along the same lines as if you were to go down the pub together?

TED: If we went down the pub together, yes, a social life out together communicating, having a laugh and such. If I went down the pub on my own,

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: It's like playing the game on me own. You might be in the same house playing the game, but you're not actually with your partner.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: The same as, you're down the pub, you're not with your partner. You are involved in a different community. And your wife or partner is an outsider to that community.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: She might come down the pub now and again with you, she might come and play the game now and again with you, but that's just like a night out as a couple, playing the game as a couple or socializing down the pub as a couple. So in a way it is the same. Yeah, it's an escape out the house for you both.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: Or out of watching telly or out of sitting doing nothing. It is, it is a night out. You're going to different places; you're going to Azeroth

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: You're going – you know, "where should we go today? Should we pop down to Netherfields or somewhere..." you know, it's um

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Yeah, it's a night out, it's a it's an escape. The same as going to the pub is an escape from the same dreary Monday and things you do in the house. If you didn't have the computer game, you'd be watching telly, you'd go to bed at whatever time and you know, so. It gives you something to do.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it changes the way that you guys play that you play physically quite closely, because you sit at a big table?

TED: It, it wouldn't make any difference, I think if she was playing on the computer upstairs and I was on the computer downstairs because of Ventrilo and in game, yeah,

INTERVIEWER: As long as you were both on same Vent server

TED: You're communicating. You know, you communicate, if you're both playing the game together, as such. I mean, there's times where Bonnie's doing one instance and I'm doing something completely different. But you still communicate through typing, in game messaging, Ventrilo and so on, so I don't think it matter where – I mean, Tim and Rose are both in different parts of the house.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: Zipper and Pradesh, in Holland, I think, they're in different parts of the house (inaudible). And you can tell they're talking – they're talking to each other.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: You know,

INTERVIEWER: I mean, do you guys ever sort of talk to each other without talking through Vent, or looking at each other's screens or whatever?

TED: Yeah, we talk to each other all the time.

INTERVIEWER: Because you're sitting next to each other while you're playing.

TED: Yeah. I mean, you have, well we're always calling each other names.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) names

TED: in fun. You know, um, but I think, if we were in different rooms, then, um you'd lose that. But you've still got your – you're still connected. And you can actually whisper them privately you know

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Your thoughts on things, rather than turning round and talking to them. I'm sure Rose and Tim whisper each other all the time. Zipper and Pradesh whisper each other all the time, even though they're in different rooms they're still communicating on a person to person basis, rather than, "I'll just ring the missus" in the pub, you know, so to speak. You've still got communication options there, but you're both in different worlds, whereas in game it's

INTERVIEWER: So instead of turning and saying something to Bonnie if she was upstairs you'd just whisper her on the server

TED: I'd just whisper her, yeah. "What do you think of..." da, da, da, and you still have, you can still have the ongoing conversation as if you were actually sat next to each other.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Without the entire community finding out what you're talking about. You know, they've built – they've built that into the game, so you know, it's very good design for that or whatever, it's there for communications, you need private communications, you know, so, whether it's with your partner or somebody halfway across the world, it doesn't matter. You know, you can actually communicate with other people on a one to one, rather than globally (gestures)

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: Rather than yelling out, "I love you darling!"

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: "you talking to me?"

INTERVIEWER: to the world

TED: Yeah, you know, so

INTERVIEWER: What about with the boys, how do you find it playing with, when the boys play?

TED: They've all got their own styles of playing. Pete, as you know, is very outgoing. Um, ah, you can learn a lot more about your boys through playing with them, whether it's playing football, or, a day out; you can learn again in game. Pete, you.... I found out more that he loses interest very quickly if he's doing repetitive things. He's going – he's got to go and kill that, now he's gotta do that – he hates doing repetitive things. You find that more so – you found that out in game, and then you look at him, out of the game, and it is exactly the same. He'll do it for so long and then, "oh, I can't do this anymore, I gotta do something else." And, so yeah, I learned that in game, and you actually step back and look at him in real life, and you see that. You know, before the game came along obviously we spent a lot of time with the boys, taking them out everywhere and whatever, but you're doing different things all the time. Learning that, after 20 minutes, he doesn't want to do that anymore, he wants to do something else. So, with Pete, unless he gets – he wants, Pete wants to be the centre of attention all the time. Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: Oh, as you'll have noticed

INTERVIEWER: I have.

TED: Brian, Brian is aspiring to be that person.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: He wants to be – he doesn't know how to be quite so loud, and he's a little bit quieter, obviously he's younger, um, and he'll grow out of that, obviously he's a bit self-conscious. [Section deleted as divulges some personal information and is not relevant]

INTERVIEWER: Yup

TED: Pete was exactly the same. Same as Will. [Section deleted as divulges some personal information and is not relevant] But Will, he – he's a great communicator, and he needs to actually bring that into real life rather than in game. He can talk to people, he can communicate, he can explain, he can lead people. In real life, he's got that quite self-conscious thing where he needs to be encouraged to do it.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: Where in game, it's a natural thing for him.

INTERVIEWER: So do you think that the game develops those skills, or (inaudible)?

TED: It has developed. I mean, Will, we saw a completely different side of him when he started playing. It was the outgoing nature that he wasn't showing in life. Um, so he needs to actually see what he's doing in game and actually adapt it and actually put it into practice in real life. I suppose I was the same, very much so in pub management. It wasn't until I had to stand in front of a group of 20 people and do a talk on such, you found that you could do it, you know, you're thrown into a situation where Will was thrown into the situation – by choice – in the game, and now he's got to bring it out of the game and actually do it in real life. Now you go ask Will to speak in front of 20 people, "No." You ask Will to lead 40 people in a raid; he's the man to do it. He'll tell them what to do and he'll expect them to do it, and so on.

INTERVIEWER: I heard that he sometimes comes and leads raids if you're out.

TED: If I'm, if I'm, especially the 40-man and whatever, if I wasn't there, Will would lead them. And people respected Will, because they knew he could do it. So they would follow his lead as if they were following my lead.

INTERVIEWER: Are you proud of him for doing that?

TED: Yeah, I'm very proud of him for that. And he, he can teach me a lot about the game, obviously there's things I don't know everything about and then I'll always ask him for advice. And I think he feels, ah, "I showed my dad that." You know, he's proud of his achievements in that. And my feeling is that he's got to bring it out, more of himself into real life, rather than just the game side of things.

INTERVIEWER: Are you, do you think you're closer to him than – to the boys that you would be if you weren't playing the game with them?

TED: I don't think so, no, I mean, we've been very close anyway, and

INTERVIEWER: Because, I mean, you seem a very close-knit family

TED: Oh yeah, yeah we have, we have a lot of laughs. We're, we do, and I'm quite a laid back sort of person, in life as well as in game.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: You know, and it – I let people get on with their lives, with a guiding hand where the kids are involved, obviously. You know, you try and steer them the way you can, whether it's in life or in game, you know. There's things in game I see Pete doing which I wouldn't expect him to do in life so I wouldn't expect him to do in game. You know, he'll call somebody this, the other, "Pete, you don't do it to your next door neighbour, you not going to do it to them." You've got to respect people for who they are not, you know, so ...

INTERVIEWER: So there's an opportunity to use that as a teaching tool for him.

TED: Yeah. With them – it's – they all love it. But they'll play other things. I won't make them play a game if – they've all got other games they go and play, you know. Like the one they're playing now against (interviewer's spouse). They like the interaction side of computers with other people. Rather than solo games. Very rare they'll play a game without interaction with other people. Um, they used to, but obviously once the Internet became more widely used and we've got broadband and the actual ability to actually communicate and play with other people, they haven't looked back. They won't go back to single player. If I cut the kids off the net they'd think their heads had been chopped off.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: "Oh my god, what we gonna do?" They'd be nervous wrecks. It can dominate your lives, a little, I think. And we do insist they have a break from it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you, it seems like from what the boys are saying that they play less now, or less now together, as a group, than they used to.

TED: Yeah, they've all gone off and done their own things. Um, Will's in a different world.

INTERVIEWER: Right, cause he plays on a different

TED: Server.

INTERVIEWER: with a different guild, oh, on a different server, oh OK.

TED: He's on a different server now. Cause the guild he was in, a lot of them moved server because of the queues and things to get on [server name] before they'd sorted it all and whatever. So they all went to a different server, so he's gone on. He's still got a char on our server, and he'll still play with us. But obviously his guild's doing well where it is, Pete is, Pete's found – WoW was taking over his life a little bit. And his mates were out doing this, and so he took – his own decision to take a step back from the game, and go out and play. And now he's got other aims. He wants to go into the Cadets and the Marines and so on. He'll still come home and relax and play, but it hasn't taken his life over, as it did when he first started, because that's all he wanted to do. He'd get up at 3 o'clock in the morning when we'd gone to bed to play. But now he's grown out of that stage of it, and "yes there is a life", beyond WoW, and he's accepted that himself, we haven't forced that into him, you know, we haven't said, "you're not playing," because we know at the end of the day he will. Will still plays a little too much, I think, for our liking. But he's started now, now the weather's getting better, you know, he starts to go out a bit more, so.

INTERVIEWER: How much do you think he plays?

TED: Will'll play – about 4 hours a day, I should think. More, if you'd let him, but we try and keep him occupied, giving him other things to do.

INTERVIEWER: mm

TED: Brian'll go on for an hour. If there's nobody [else] on, I'll go and do things with him, or not. He can stay on a lot longer - sometimes he stays a bit longer, you know. Um, Pete'll stay on for quite – he's more into the MSN and listening to music at the moment.

[Section deleted as divulges some personal information and is not relevant] INTERVIEWER: He's a good kid, they're good kids.

TED: Oh, they're excellent kids, and they might not always do as you ask them at home, but they're – I'm proud to say that wherever they go, if they're not with us, then we get very good reports about them. They're well behaved. Which is more than you can ask for. If they were like they are sometimes at home when they went out, then I'd strangle the little sods, I would.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: But in general they are very well behaved and very polite, and so

INTERVIEWER: I mean, even

TED: Quite proud of them for that.

INTERVIEWER: Even Pete, when he was being sort of, sort of, cheeky, he's very polite, he's cute – just kind of...

TED: He's polite about his cheekiness.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. It's cute and friendly as opposed to being, sort of, you know,

TED: At home, he sort of doesn't always know when to stop, but when he's out, he's very controlled, so he's got to have a release. You don't want him to do the same – you don't want him to release when he's out.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: You'd rather take the brunt of it at home. And respect him for it, for when he is out, he's good, so. Anymore?

INTERVIEWER: I think this is good. I think you've covered pretty much everything I –

TED: If you have any questions, you know where I am.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I'll – I'll get you on Vent if

TED: Yeah

INTERVIEWER: if I need anything else. Thank you.

TED: No, just pull me up [on Vent].

INTERVIEWER: I can't, I can't tell you –

[Skips ahead to tape restarting for supplemental question.]

TED: Community-wise, Pete, Will and Brian, you know where they are.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: you know, help on [server name]. And, you're not spying on them, but sometimes you think, I wonder what kids get up to when they're out. And we will never stop our kids going out, um, but you know where they are if they're on the computer. Um, I mean, the computer's got a lock so they can't access all sites and such, you know. You have to be very careful; you don't want bugs downloaded and things. They had a problem on one upstairs the other day, that took me forever to get off. God knows where they got that one from. But um,

INTERVIEWER: (Laughs). I mean, do you think that if, you know, if they're on the server, and you know sort of where they are on the server, or what –

TED: Doesn't matter where they are on the server, doesn't matter where they are – they could be anywhere on the server –

INTERVIEWER: It's safer than being just on the Internet, sort of thing.

TED: Yeah, yeah, I mean, because – a lot of people know, I mean, there might be 8, 10, 15 thousand playing on that server, but we've been on that server since the beginning, and they all know who our sons are, or most of them do, who are – they know not to mess around on the game, because they know it will get back to us. One way or another, or it'll go on the forums, if you know, some asshole, "blah, blah, blah" "That's my son," you know, but no, you don't use it to spy on them, but I think subconsciously you know they're safe, you know where they are. You know, they can go out with their mates, they say they're going somewhere, but they don't go there and you begin to wonder, really, where have they gone?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: We've all been kids, we all know we've told our mum's we're going somewhere and end up somewhere else. And kids will carry on doing that. But there are times in your life when you know your kids are safe, you know where they are, and I'm quite happy to let them play, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: But, yeah, I think you've got to say, you know, "enough, enough. You've played enough for this week" and so on. I try to make sure they all have at least a day off, um, voluntarily or non-voluntary. "No, you're not playing today, because you need to get a social." Go out, and socialize in real life, as well as, you know.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: In the summer, they are pretty good. They do go out a hell of a lot more, obviously with the weather we have and such.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: So, yeah, let them play a game like this. They're still communicating, they're still talking, so, it does enhance skills in that way. Also, typing and keyboard skills, and computer usage. Um, Pete can out-type most people. You know, his typing speed is phenomenal. So, without computers he wouldn't have been able to do that.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: You know, he beats me and I, I learned to type, basically

INTERVIEWER: and he just picked it up, playing

TED: He just picked it up by playing. So it's benefited him in that, it's benefited the kids because they've had the involvement, Will more so than the others, in actually building the machines.

INTERVIEWER: Right

TED: "There you go, Will, there's a box of parts, put it together"

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

TED: Cause you'll be playing it.

INTERVIEWER: So put it together right.

TED: Put it right, it's your computer. I've guided them along the way, I've showed them so, they've got more of a respect for the machines as well, because, they're, they're not fragile, but in some respects they are. You've got to be careful with them.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: And if you don't plug it in right, it's not going to work. The same with the car or anything else, so it has helped them in other skills besides communication.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

TED: Typing, coordination, hand to eye coordination, forward planning. You need to plan ahead. To what, "what do I need for that instance?" "What do I need to do for that" and you know, it's, it's got them thinking, something.

INTERVIEWER: Strategy, sort of, stuff, so that they're

TED: OK?

INTERVIEWER: Great. Thank you so much.

TED: My pleasure.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Interview Consent Forms**

Consent form (Adult Participant)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in research on family use of World of Warcraft, conducted by [Researcher Name], an MSc candidate in the Department of Media and Communication, The London School of Economics and Political Science. The project is under the supervision of Dr. Bart Cammaerts. The purpose of this research is to develop new understandings of how families might play collaborative online games together, and the implications of this phenomenon of collaborative play.

My participation will consist of one interview (with additional follow up questions as needed), which will last for approximately one hour, and which will take place on \_\_\_\_\_ (date). I can choose the methods in which the interviews will take place, which may include audio recording or note taking.

I understand that since this interview may deal with personal opinions and information, if it becomes apparent to me, or to the Researcher, that this is causing discomfort for me, the interview will cease. I have received assurance from the Researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these occurrences through sensitive questioning. If, at any time, I am uncomfortable with the audio recording, I am free to ask the Researcher to stop. I am also free to withdraw from the project at any time, (before or during an interview), and I am free to refuse to participate and to refuse to answer particular questions.

The researcher will also be participating in World of Warcraft, and some of what she learns playing the game (including with me) and talking to me and other members of our guild on our VOIP server may serve as part of the research.

I understand that the contents of this research will be used by the Researcher only for the purposes of academic research, including sharing with colleagues at academic conferences and in academic publications. I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I share will remain strictly confidential, and that my anonymity will be respected (real names will not be used in the research dissemination nor will any personal details be revealed that could compromise my identity). Anonymity will be assured through the use of

pseudonyms in research analysis and in publications and academic presentations of this research. Audio recordings of interviews and other data collected will be kept in a secure manner.

Benefits of the research: This research will examine the experience of families playing World of Warcraft together, and potential implications of this phenomenon.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

If I have any questions about the conduct of the research project, I may contact the Research Ethics Committee at the London School of Economics and Political Science. More information can be found at: [http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/researchAndProjectDevelopmentDivision/research\\_ethics\\_policy.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/researchAndProjectDevelopmentDivision/research_ethics_policy.htm)

I can also contact the Researcher at:

Department of Media and Communications  
London School of Economics

Researcher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Research Subject's signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Research Subject's address

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Research subject's email address \_\_\_\_\_

Consent form (Parent)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to allow my child(ren) to participate in research on family use of World of Warcraft, conducted by [Researcher Name], an MSc candidate in the Department of Media and Communication, The London School of Economics and Political Science. The project is under the supervision of Dr. Bart Cammaerts. The purpose of this research is to develop new understandings of how families might play collaborative online games together, and the implications of the phenomenon.

My child(ren)'s participation will consist of one interview of up to approximately one hour in length, during which I will remain within the house where the interview with my child(ren) is being conducted. The session has been scheduled for 31 March 2007. My child(ren) and I can choose the methods in which the interviews will take place, which can include audio recording, or note taking.

I understand that since this interview may deal with personal opinions and information, if it becomes apparent to me, as a parent, or to the Researcher, that this is causing discomfort for my child(ren), the interview will cease. I have received assurance from the Researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these occurrences, through sensitive questioning of my child(ren). If, at any time, my child(ren) are uncomfortable with the audio recording, my child is free to ask the Researcher to stop. My child(ren) are also free to withdraw from the project at any time, before or during an interview, refuse to participate and refuse to answer particular questions.

The researcher will also be participating in World of Warcraft, and some of what she learns playing the game (including with us) and talking to me and other members of our guild on our VOIP server may serve as part of the research.

I understand that the contents of this research will be used by the Researcher only for the purposes of academic research, including sharing with colleagues at academic conferences and in academic publications. I have received assurance from the researchers that the information my child(ren) and I will share will remain strictly confidential, and that my and my child(ren)'s anonymity will be respected (real names will not be used in the research dissemination nor will any personal details be revealed that could compromise our identity). Anonymity will be assured through the use of pseudonyms in research analysis and in

publications and academic presentations of this research. Audio recordings of interviews and other data collected will be kept in a secure manner.

Benefits of the research: This research will examine the experience of families playing World of Warcraft together, and potential implications of this phenomenon.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which my child and I may keep.

If I have any questions about the conduct of the research project, I may contact the Research Ethics Committee at the London School of Economics and Political Science. More information can be found at: [http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/researchAndProjectDevelopmentDivision/research\\_ethics\\_policy.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/researchAndProjectDevelopmentDivision/research_ethics_policy.htm)

I can also contact the Researcher at:  
Department of Media and Communications  
London School of Economics

Researcher's signature

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Date

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Research Subject's name

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Research Subject's Parent's signature

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Date

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Research Subject's Parent's address

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Consent form (Child, aged 13-17)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in research on family use of World of Warcraft, conducted by [Researcher Name], an MSc candidate in the Department of Media and Communication, The London School of Economics and Political Science. The project is under the supervision of Dr. Bart Cammaerts. The purpose of this research is to learn more about how families might play World of Warcraft and other games like it, and how this might change ways in which parents and children interact in real life.

I understand that the research will consist of me being interviewed once, for up to one hour. This interview is scheduled for 31 March 2007. During this interview, I will be asked questions by the Researcher about how I play World of Warcraft, especially how I play with other members of my family and with other people, including people in my guild.

I may choose whether I want to be audio recorded. If, during the course of the interview, I feel uncomfortable about any questions that are asked of me, I can refuse to answer at any time during the interview, or ask for the interview to stop. I am under no pressure to answer all of the questions, and I have been told by the Researcher that I can stop at any time.

The researcher will also be participating in World of Warcraft, and some of what she learns playing the game (including with me) and talking to me and other members of our guild on our audio server (over our headphones) may serve as part of the research.

I understand that the contents of this research will be used by the Researcher only for the purposes of her academic research, including sharing with colleagues at academic conferences and in academic publications. I understand that my interview and identity will remain confidential, and that my anonymity will be respected (my real name will not be used, and no personal details will be disclosed that could reveal my real identity). My anonymity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym (a made-up name) in the analysis of this material and in publications and conference presentations of this research. I understand that audio recordings of interviews and other data collected will be kept in a secure manner.

Benefits of the research: This research will examine how families play World of Warcraft together.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which my parents and I may keep.

If I or my parents have any questions about the conduct of the research project, we may contact the Research Ethics Committee at the London School of Economics and Political Science. More information can be found at:

[http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/researchAndProjectDevelopmentDivision/research\\_ethics\\_policy.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/researchAndProjectDevelopmentDivision/research_ethics_policy.htm)

I can also contact the Researcher at:

Department of Media and Communications  
London School of Economics

Researcher's signature

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Date

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Research Subject's signature

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Research Subject's Parent's signature

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Research Subject's Parent's address

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Date

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Consent form (Child, aged 9-12)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, and my parents agree that I can participate in research on how people in families play World of Warcraft, conducted by [Researcher Name], an MSc candidate in the Department of Media and Communication, The London School of Economics and Political Science. [Researcher Name] wants to know more about what families do when they play World of Warcraft together, and how this might change how parents and kids talk to each other and play together in real life.

The talk with [Researcher Name] will last for up to one hour and will be on Saturday 31 March 2007. She will be coming into my home and asking me questions about how I play World of Warcraft with my family and with other people, including people in my guild. My parents and I can choose whether I will be audio recorded during the interview. If I ever feel uncomfortable about any questions [Researcher Name] asks me, I don't have to answer them. I can also ask for the interview to stop at any time. I am under no pressure to answer all of the questions.

[Researcher Name] also plays World of Warcraft, and some of what she learns when she plays the game (including with me) and talks to me and other members of our guild through our headphones may serve as part of the research.

I understand that my real name will never be used. [Researcher Name] will use a made-up name to describe me when she writes and talks about her research on World of Warcraft.

Benefits of the research: This research will help [Researcher Name] see how families play World of Warcraft together.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which my parents and I may keep.

If I or my parents have any questions about the conduct of the research project, we may contact the Research Ethics Committee at the London School of Economics and Political Science. More information can be found at: [http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/researchAndProjectDevelopmentDivision/research\\_ethics\\_policy.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/researchAndProjectDevelopmentDivision/research_ethics_policy.htm)

We can also contact the Researcher at:

Department of Media and Communications  
London School of Economics

Researcher's signature

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Date

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Research Subject's signature

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Research Subject's Parent's signature

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Date

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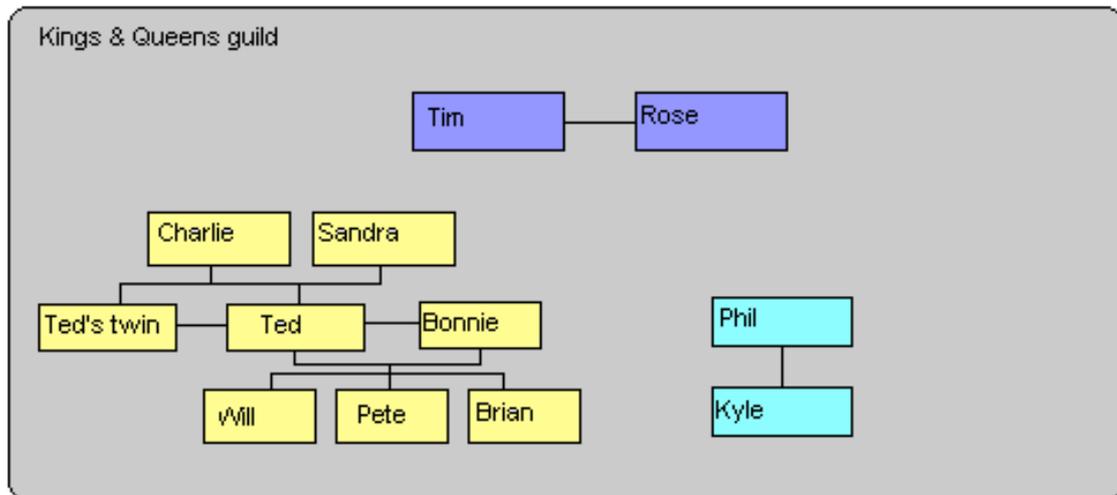
Research Subject's Parent's address

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## APPENDIX E

The Game of (Family) Life: Intra-Family Play in World of Warcraft  
Appendix E - Relationship of Interviewees



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