

Exploring the Qualities of Life of World of Warcraft Players and College Students

Jonathan Kinney and Joseph Theisen

Writ 1133 - Dr. Richard Colby

University of Denver

Abstract

There is a continuously growing number of both World of Warcraft players and college students, both populations being involved in something that influences the rest of their lives. This study looks to discover how both these experiences affect people's lives overall and how that quality of life can be maximized. A short survey of bubble fill-in and free response question was administered to college students at the University of Denver campus and on social media. World of Warcraft in-game interviews were conducted with real players. Academic articles regarding college life and gaming were gathered and analyzed. The research found that both college students and World of Warcraft players encounter similar influence and pressures from being involved with each respective experience. People that were able to find a healthy balance between the varying elements of their lives and habits were the people who achieved the most satisfying quality of life.

1. Introduction

Every day, thousands of people log into World of Warcraft to delve into the endless possibilities of the fantasy world. Whether for adventures, battles, relationships, or achievement, there are countless reasons behind why people choose to play the game (Yee, 2006). Yee showed that not only does the game provide an extraordinary variety of opportunities, but it also appeals to a large demographic of people. With a total of six content expansions, Legion having been most recently released on August 30, 2016 (Blizzard Entertainment), World of Warcraft continues to expand and grow as an MMORPG (Massively Multiplier Online Role-Playing Game). Given Yee's (2006) findings regarding the variety of different players and demographics that participate in World of Warcraft, it is necessary to analyze how the content and interactions of the fantasy world impact the quality of life of players outside of the game. Prior research done

by Yee on gaming's impact on people's lives focuses on positive and negative effects such as stress relief or time consumption. However, playing the game has a large combination of influences on players that are not always cut positively or negatively. For example, a player may use the game as a release from their real-life stressors, but if they begin to play too much, they may lose track of their priorities and find themselves under more stress than before (Yee, 2006). Regardless of the player, World of Warcraft undoubtedly impacts its players in some way. The interactions in the game contribute to a positive quality of life, but can negatively affect people if their habits go unmanaged, much like for the lives of college students.

There are similarities between the effects of playing World of Warcraft and being a college student on quality of life, most of which revolve around the management of time and leisure. College students in America are exposed to many interactions in the real-world that affect a variety of aspects of their lives (Misra, 2000). Transitioning from their nurturing homes to a new life of individuality, there are many new things that college students need to adapt to. New students must deal with achieving success academically, adjusting to new social situations, maintaining their health, and much more, all while being on their own for the first time (Misra, 2000). According to Heckert (1999), one of the largest sources of stress for college students is changing sleeping patterns, meaning sleep plays a large role in the quality of one's life. All of these stressors are a part of students gaining an education to further their future lives. Though college is meant to be beneficial, students must be able to manage the stressors and new responsibilities or else the net effect will be negative on their livelihood. There are many ways students can lighten the stressors of college life such as exercising, going out with friends, skiing, fishing, or even gaming (Misra, 2000). Whatever it may be, it is important for students to have an activity or hobby to go to for release from the intensity of college. Improper management of

work and leisure can also result in a net negative impact of college, with 30% of students dropping out in their first year (Beckstead, 2017). Given the nature and intensity of college life in America, it is important to understand how stressors and leisure balance to impact students' lives.

Given the large population of both World of Warcraft players and college students, it is crucial to explore how people's habits are affecting their condition of living. Behaviors and lifestyles such as playing World of Warcraft and being in college have more than a clear positive or negative influence on peoples' lives and it is important to understand the total effect on the overall quality of life.

2. Method

A mixed method was used in conducting research. A survey of college students was conducted and interviews within the World of Warcraft game were recorded.

2.1 Survey

A survey was designed to collect data from college students regarding general life routine and habits such as study time, sleeping time, organization, stressors, leisure activities, and gaming. Survey response fields were open-ended except for gender, the likert scale organizational rating, and a question asking whether or not the respondent played World of Warcraft. The subjects were selected from groups of students around the University of Denver campus. The survey was also administered through a link on social media to reach a wider demographic of college students. The survey received 31 responses. Three participants' responses were omitted from the data as outliers. There were both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the survey as it was designed to gather data on time spent and attitudes towards different aspects of college life.

2.2 In-Game Interviews

Seventeen interviews were conducted with players in the World of Warcraft game. Players were chosen randomly using the “/who” command in highly populated areas in the game. Players were asked through private chat if they would be willing to answer a few questions about playing World of Warcraft. If they volunteered, the interview would be conducted. Interviews were conducted on the Kel’Thuzad realm on both Alliance and Horde subjects. The interview questions were designed to ask players about their World of Warcraft playing habits, how they feel about their playing, and if they would change anything about their gaming. The questions were open-ended in an interview format. This was both quantitative and qualitative research as questions were asked about players’ thoughts around the game and also numbers about their playing habits. Interviewees were allowed to elaborate on their answers as much as they wanted.

3. Results

3.1 Survey Results

Of the 31 survey responses, the responses of 3 participant outliers (9.7%) were excluded from the data because of the survey questions not being answered seriously. It is possible that this can be explained by the administering of the survey through social media, as not all participants may have cared to answer honestly.

All participants used in the survey acknowledged being a student. The average age of respondents was 19.32 ($N = 28$) and, as shown in figure 1, 21 of 28 (75%) of the respondents were either 18 or 19 years old, meaning the majority of respondents were the age of most typical college freshmen.

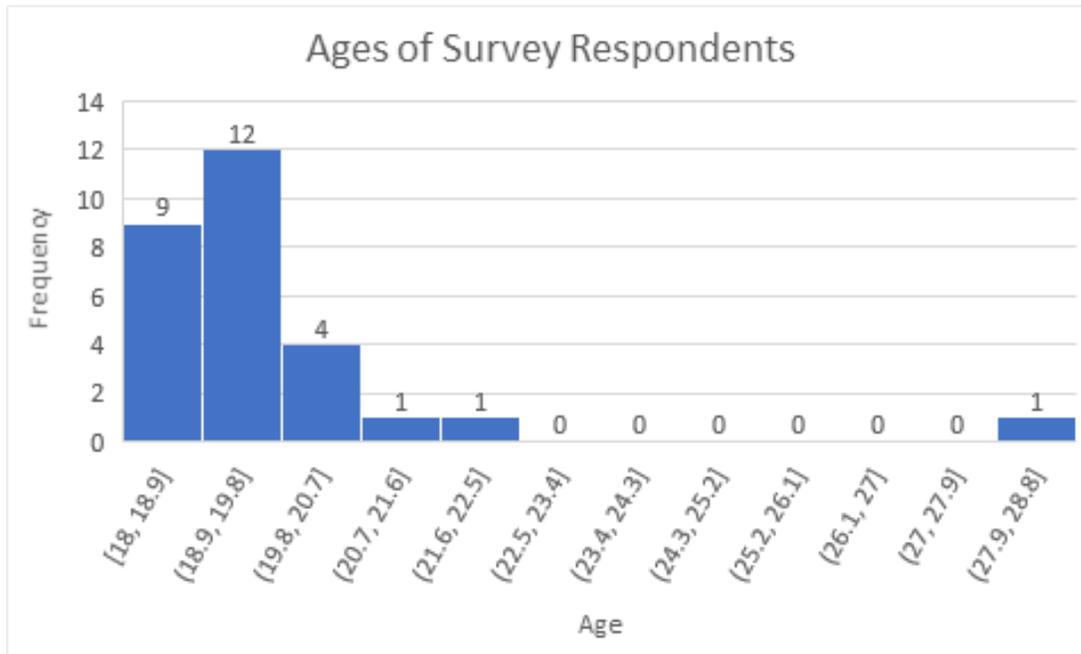


Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents' Ages

A majority of responses came from male participants, with 32.1% coming from females.

As shown in table 1, male participants, with an average of 7.3 hours of sleep per night, slept for nearly an hour longer per night than female participants, who had an average of 6.5 hours per night.

| Gender | Participants | Average Hours of Sleep |
|--------|--------------|------------------------|
| Male | 19 | 7.3 |
| Female | 9 | 6.5 |

Table 1. Average Sleep by Gender

Thirty-two percent of respondents ($N = 28$) ranked themselves a 4 or a 5 on the Likert organization scale and the average amount of sleep per night for those respondents was 7.5 hours ($n = 9$). 25% of respondents ($N = 28$) ranked themselves a 1 or a 2 on the Likert organization scale and the average amount of sleep per night for those respondents was 6.7 hours ($n = 7$). The

data showed a correlation between sleep per night and organization ($r = .38$), meaning that subjects who slept more on average were better organized. There was also a small correlation between sleep hours and GPA ($r = .20$), meaning that within the sample, people who slept more maintained a higher grade point average.

As shown in figure 3, a majority of respondents (74.9%) identified either school, time management, or workload as being the leading source of stress in their lives.



Figure 2. Leading Sources of Stress

Other survey responses included 32.1% of respondents recording that they did not play video games. Of the video game-playing majority ($n = 19$), 2 of 19 are female, leaving 89.5% of that portion of the sample male. Respondents gave range of times spent gaming and a variety of reasons for enjoying or not enjoying playing video games. The responses to these questions were not coded or used. Every participant identified with a favorite leisure activity that they do to receive a positive benefit or feeling.

3.2 Interview Results

The average age of interviewees was 21.7 years old ($SD = 5.3, N = 17$) and their ages had more variance than the ages of the survey participants ($SD = 1.96, N = 28$). Just 2 of 17

subjects that were interviewed were females so, like the survey sample, most of the responses came from males. The average daily World of Warcraft playtime of the interview subjects was 2.17 hours.

As shown in table 2, a majority of World of Warcraft players that were interviewed (52.9%) indicated gaming as their favorite leisure activity and those players played World of Warcraft for an average of 2.19 hours per day.

| Favorite Leisure Activity | Gaming | Working Out | Sports | Watching TV | Time With Family |
|---------------------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------------|------------------|
| # of Respondents | 9 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| % of Respondents | 52.9% | 17.6% | 17.6% | 5.9% | 5.9% |

Table 2. Favorite Leisure Activities of Interviewees

Respondants gave a variety of different reasons for playing WoW, many revolving around how expansive the game content and community is. A player by the name of Marginalized commented that (personal communication, 2017), “There is in a entire world that no one person can possibly experience every part of... The world is so immersive that you can forget about what is going on outside of it.” Many respondants commented on the endless adventure and progression within the game, and how they continue to improve their characters and explore new content.

While some players love the adventure and progression through the game, others get something completely different out of playing. For example, according to one player, Froth (personal communication, 2017), “I’ve been kept hooked on WoW because it is an escape from reality. I can relax and not have to think about anything in the real word. I have also struggled with depression my whole life and WoW has helped me manage it and keep my mind occupied.”

For players like Froth, playing WoW helps lessen other negative aspects in their lives. Whatever it may be, players that love World of Warcraft continue to play the game for those reasons.

The data also showed a trend of a few players becoming too immersed in the game. In-game interviews showed people who played too much felt they were losing track of priorities, missing work or school assignments, experiencing a decrease in social life, and other negative side effects impacting the real world. Players who found themselves becoming too immersed in their favorite game started to find other parts of their lives being taken away from.

4. Discussion

The research methods conducted revealed that there are many different positive and negative aspects students experience in college life and how they manage their lives ultimately shapes the impact that college has on the quality of life of students. There are so many new experiences for college students, especially freshmen, that it is important to understand what allows some students to live a better life than others. A majority of students reported that school, time management, or workload is the leading source of stress in their lives. The survey results show what students did in their leisure time to balance out the stressors of their lives. The research showed that students who slept more on average, were generally better organized and maintained a higher GPA. By getting one extra hour of sleep a night, these students are setting themselves up for a more satisfying life because it reduces stressors. Students that did not put as much time into studying and schoolwork were still found to be generally disorganized and lacking sleep. This shows that if a person indulges in life's pleasures too much, it will ultimately bring down that person's overall quality of life. People that are more content with their lives have a good balance between the different aspects of their life because this allows them to accomplish goals, but also reminds them to take some of the load off sometimes.

Similar to the findings on college life, the research found that playing World of Warcraft can provide players a variety of benefits and drawbacks and that the balancing of playing and living habits determines the game's impact on players' quality of life. As Yee's (2006) research has shown, there is a myriad of enjoyments people love and become immersed in. However, it is important to notice that playing the game can become a negative influence on players' lives. When a player becomes so enamored by the positives of playing the game, it can unbalance the other aspects that help promote an overall quality life. The line between enjoyment and devotion to the game determines how it will influence a player's life.

This study shows that people should find a balance between the various elements of their lives to experience the best overall quality of life. Whether a college student studying or a gamer playing World of Warcraft, putting a majority focus on one aspect of their life brings down the quality of the rest of their life. It is important that people allow themselves to indulge in life's enjoyments, but it is equally important that the same people strive for more. On the reverse side, being an ambitious and driven person is crucial, but forgetting to take time for leisure and release does not allow for true satisfaction. Applicable in both college life and in playing World of Warcraft, the impact an experience has on one's quality of life is determined by their ability to balance and manage their nature.

Further research could be conducted on how people can find the balance in their life that will lead to the highest quality of living. This would be helpful to teach people how to manage the different parts of their lives and learn how to make themselves as happy as possible. This could be applied to almost any aspect of people's lives, meaning this research could help reduce different kinds of stressors in different people by discovering the balance of behaviors.

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