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Investigating Virtual Worlds

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INVESTIGATING VIRTUAL WORLDS

PRESENTATION FOR

ENGLISH 203 - HUMANITIES COMPUTING

Patricia D. Sobczak, M.L.I.S., Ph.D.
“Gaming is an enchanting witchery, gotten betwixt idleness and avarice; An itching disease, that makes some scratch the head, whilst others, as if they, were bitten by a Tarantula, are laughing themselves to death”

- Charles Cotton, *The Compleat Gamester* (1674)
“The reader of these pages should not look for detailed documentation of every word. In treating of the general problems of culture one is constantly obliged to undertake predatory incursions into provinces not sufficiently explored by the raider himself. To fill all the gaps in my knowledge beforehand was out of the question for me. I had to write now, or not at all. And I wanted to write.”

1. Introduction

2. Background – Setting the stage for investigating virtual worlds

3. Areas of interest and research
   a. Gamification
   b. Virtual Worlds Informing Reality / My Study
   c. Play:
      1. The Role of play
      2. The Blur of work and play

4. Why you should be interested

5. Conclusions
2011-12 is the 50th birthday of the video game: Spacewar! (‘61-’62) was created by Steve Russell

Since 1999, video games have grossed more money than the film industry

The study of video games, as an academic area, is just over 10 years old
Global phenomena
- China: 200M active gamers (13hrs/wk)
- US: 183M
- EU: 100M

Hardcore gamers
- China: 6M playing 22hrs/wk
- EU: 10M playing 20hrs/wk
- US: 5M extreme gamers playing 45hrs/wk (2nd job)

10K hours
- Gladwell & expertise
- K-12 education: 10,080 hrs
Background

Statistics for World of Warcraft®

- 12 million+ global subscribers
- 5.3M years of game time (since 2004)
- WoW subculture: second largest Wiki & fee-based sites - Skill Capped
Areas of Interest and Research

- Gamification

- Virtual Worlds Informing Reality/My study

- Play:
  - Role of play
  - Blur of work and play
Over 50% of all Americans play video games

45% of those players are between the ages of 18-49

30% are women over 18

By the age of 21, 99% of males and 94% of females will have played 10,000 hours of video games
Jesse Schell’s
“The Art of Game Design”

A Book of Lenses -
- Lens #27: Lens of Skill--what does the game ask of players, while ‘scaffolding’ the player’s development of skill
- Lens #83: Lens of The Nameless Quality--does my game have a special feeling of life (natural, organic design)
Gamification

Jane McGonigal’s “Reality is Broken”

- A challenge to game designers to solve real world problems
- If games are the place that so many go to have their peak experiences, “Reality is Broken”
- Games for Change
  - World Without Oil
- Game Designer wins Nobel Peace Prize (2023)
Gamification

John Seely-Brown’s “The Power of Pull”

- Playing of games on the edge
- Compared championship surfing with playing WoW
Virtual Worlds Informing Reality/My Study

- Developed gaming program at work and started playing WoW
- Noticed *ephemeral* leadership activities exhibited by players
- Started investigating prior and current research on the topic (Beck and Wade, Schell, McGonigal, Yee, etc.)
- Discovered an untapped area of research
Virtual Worlds Informing Reality/My Study

Research Question

“What are the links between Ephemeral Leadership experiences, actions, and skills developed, exhibited, and described by highly engaged players of the MMOG World of Warcraft ® in the game and ephemeral leadership experiences, actions, and skills developed, exhibited, and described in the workplace?”
Virtual Worlds Informing Reality/My Study
Qualitative study examined the links between ephemeral leadership skills as described and exhibited by highly engaged players of WoW in the game and ephemeral leadership skills as described and exhibited in the workplace.

The unique experiences from 11 study participants were gathered through interviews.

Seven themes emerged from the data: Pervasive Strategy, Similarities and Differences, Variation/Multiplicity, Interdependence, Ephemeral Leadership, Learning by Design, and Adaptability.

Major findings emerged:
- (A) All of the respondents indicated that they saw links between WoW and the workplace;
- (B) All noted that the game informed their workplace behavior in surprising ways;
- (C) Three participants noted specific behavioral changes that informed their work through their play in WoW.

The study findings suggested that organizations need to be aware of and learn how to best leverage ephemeral leadership skills and to determine what behaviors employees who play WoW at a high level are bringing to the workplace.
For Adults – single most important thing we do for happiness and success (*Total Engagement*, Reeves & Read)

U.N. Resolution in 1959 – purpose and importance of play in development (*Mead, 2010*)

Third Place (*Oldenburg, 1989*) – in game
The Role of Play

Play Theory Informing Game Experience:

- **Huizinga: Homo Ludens & the Magic Circle**
  - *Fundamental basis for civilization*

- **Caillois: Typology of play---agon, alea, ilinx, mimicry**
  - *Looked at games sociologically*

- **Sutton-Smith: Ambiguity of Play**
  - *Children play – adults (re)create?*
Play in virtual worlds informing reality:

Three Ingredients in combination:

- Player created avatars – agency
- Game mechanics – in the form of quests or missions involving combat – use of real-world skills
- Complex social, economic, and cultural network valued and interpreted by the players within the world itself
Yee claims that work in games = real work

Reeves & Read argue:
- Play not the opposite of work; rather it’s an important component of attention, involvement, and productivity and its capable of energizing activity of all sorts.

Brown: Play as a strategy for embracing change

McGonigal: Work is more fun than fun
Sheer proliferation of virtual worlds in all aspects of our lives

As a user, you are a stakeholder

Life decisions are now intertwined with virtual worlds

You might be employed in the industry
Conclusions

- Virtual worlds matter
- They have been found to inform life and specifically the workplace
- They blur work and play
- Gamification is becoming a way of life
“It is games that give us something to do when there is nothing to do. We thus call games “pastimes” and regard them as trifling fillers of the interstices of our lives. But they are much more important than that. They are clues to the future. And their serious cultivation now perhaps is our only salvation.”