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Violence in MMOs: It's not only adolescent Boys that like this stuff
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Abstract

In communication studies, the effect of violent media depictions on children heavily scrutinized and debated. While this concern is a serious issue and remains disagreed upon by researchers, another important, but less common issue lurks in the background. There is only a small amount of research conducted on adult media consumers and the reasons behind their preferences in the industry. This paper investigates the possible connections between MMOs (Massively Multi-Player Online Games) and the violent content currently dominating other media productions. Special attention is placed on television and film, two other sources of media presented visually on some sort of screen. More specifically, the driving question behind this research asks if MMOs influence adult players' preferences in other media forms. This inquiry is addressed through private, anonymous interviews with players from a wide variety of different MMOs. Findings suggest the types of media players were exposed to at a young age may play a role in fashioning their intrigue and enjoyment in these virtual realities. There may also be a connection between violent online games and the types of people drawn to these themes. An additional connection between players' prior dispositions towards certain entertainment genres and MMOs is suspected as well.

Overview

As a first-time online gamer, immersion into Sony's infamous Everquest II provided a shocking experience. Beyond the confusion of my avatar's purpose and the task of understanding the game's design, I encountered the greatest amount of "culture shock" during my first attempts to kill alien-looking goblins in Queen's Colony. Initially, as a mage, my mission was one of the least violent assigned to new players. As is typical, I failed miserably in efforts to successfully slay the strange creatures. This failure ultimately led to a long, excruciating, and untimely death (the first of many) in which my poor avatar, Paxpaxis, cried sounds of torment and pain. As a mature, twenty-year old female, I presumed this kind of event would leave me feeling numb and slightly entertained. However, I was genuinely horrified. As time passed and I spent more time in Norrath with a new fighter character, Audentia, my original feelings of disgust towards the game's violence gradually transformed into apathy.

This rapid transition in my own, personal reactions towards Everquest II's brutality guides my research: In what ways might a steady stream of exposure to violence in MMOs affect players' preferences in other media forms? How do avid MMO players feel about the widespread violence? Do the viewing preferences of avid gamers show a proclivity for violence in other media outlets? Players from many different types of MMOs have been interviewed to elicit accurate results.

These issues are important subjects to consider as violence portrayed in media continues to increase in gore and graphic nature and is allotted more and more “air time” and attention (Szaflik, 2004). American culture is obsessed with media violence’s impact on children, but what about the larger, more encompassing picture? How are adults and society as a whole, impacted due to an increase in available aggressive media products? Are American citizens truly being desensitized to violence in the real world? These queries have all been granted vast amounts of research and have been debated heavily (Goldstein, 1999; Gentile & Anderson, 2003). Knowing how violence in MMOs relates to the desensitization and attraction to violence in the real world is an important phenomenon to understand. This knowledge will enable both game designers and players in understanding their desires and help build an awareness currently lacking in the industry today.

Literature Review

Violence as a successful media theme

Many theories on the obsession with violence in media products have been pondered throughout the years. Just as the slogan “sex sells” has become a coined phrase of our society, so has “if it bleeds, it leads.” The most general explanation for this trend has to do with the idea that violence provides entertainment and generates large audiences (Bartholow et al., 2003; Johnston, 2003; Parents Against Media Violence, 2005; Szaflik, 2004). Parents Against Media Violence (2005), Szaflik (2004) and Bartholow (2003) have devoted extensive research to this very subject. These individuals and groups argue that media producers succumb to these low levels of content merely to “hook” the audience – to get their attention and keep it. Additionally, not only does violence hold viewers’ attention, but it excites their interest and is used as a promotion for their upcoming, unreleased product. While most existing research focuses on children under the age of eighteen, these attention-demanding results caused by media-violence can be attributed to adults’ engagement on many levels as well.

Johnston (2003) takes a more psychological approach, attributing this violence addiction to the mental stimulation induced by observing aggressive behavior. He explains this principle as the “jolt per minute” theory which provides viewers the most shocks in a small amount of time, or “the most bang for their buck.” Bartholow et al. (2003) cite Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi’s (2002) opinion that the average American is “addicted to the electronic screen.” If humans are moving away from the television and toward another medium, it is likely to be the computer. They attribute this addiction to advertisement and camera techniques that keep the eye continually interested. Even if the story is not completely entertaining, the visual representation allows for a vast amount of amusement.

Bartholow (2003) and his colleagues blame the societal acceptance and desensitization that has occurred and continues to increase in recent years for the increase in violent media. These authors note three specific explanations as to why media violence has become so acceptable in American culture. Credit is given to Groebel (2001) for attributing violent media’s success to the fact that “violence attracts the attention of male adolescents, a highly sought after demographic for marketers.” Seventy-three percent of men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four consider

themselves “heavy consumers of violent programming.” This statistic proves the newness of this tendency towards violence. Older men of earlier generations do not seek this form of entertainment nearly as avidly as younger audiences.

Finally, violence is a “global commodity” (Bartholow et al., 2003; Johnston, C., 2003). This hypothesis suggests that aggressive storylines are universal – they are appealing to many cultures and races and go beyond the constraints of cultural boundaries. In MMOs, it is difficult to create games that would appeal to a large variety of players. Values, beliefs, and ideals are unique and specific to different regions of the world, and a game that revolved around something so narrow would eliminate a large portion of the audience. Violence appeals to all humans, regardless of race, age, gender, or geographic location. Psychologists argue that there is an inclination towards anger and acting out in violence innate within everyone.

The attraction of violent media

The vast majority of research covering media violence usually deals with the likelihood that consumers will behave violently in subconscious (or conscious) mimicry (Goldstein, 1999). Less effort is placed on discovering why people are attracted to violence in the first place. Undoubtedly, there are popular television shows, videogames, and novels overflowing with one aggressive scene after another, but why is there such a strong following for this genre at all? There are many differing theories, but there is little dispute concerning if people really are attracted to violence. Clearly, violence is a highly desirable style of entertainment.

Jeffrey Goldstein (1999) has analyzed why individuals are drawn to aggressive forms of media. He attributes violence in all forms of media to typically being a kind of social occasion or event, especially those in which male bonding occurs. He notes that while a person may go into an isolated room and play computer or video games alone, they will most likely discuss their endeavors with others at a later, more convenient time.

Others argue that violence is particularly appealing due to its ability to induce high levels of sensation and stimulation in the emotional states of observers/participants (Krcmar & Greene, 1999; Goldstein, 1999). According to Krcmar and Greene (1999) “individual needs for stimulation and for information vary systematically.” Additionally these authors state, “these needs may affect what media sources and other stimuli are accessed by individuals.” This theory reflects the “uses-and-gratifications tradition” and explains why certain individuals are more drawn to violent media than others. Those with a high need for sensation are more likely to enjoy aggressive media than those with a low need (Krcmar & Greene, 1999; Goldstein, 1999).

Many studies reveal a general trend towards males’ disposition for greater enjoyment levels from violent media as well (Jansz, 2005; Gentile et al., 2004). Authors Jason Jansz (2005) and Jeffrey Goldstein (1999) point out that this tendency may be attributed to the emotional outlet games provide for men. In contrast to women, who are usually better equipped for emotional expression and awareness, men are less capable of articulating, or even pinpointing, their inner feelings. Violent computer games, television programs, and other media sources may provide the type

of outlet they need to channel these emotions. N.L. Carnagey and C.L. Anderson (2004) also embrace this idea of emotional release through media, especially games, but also source violent media as a prime factor in the release of emotional hostility. Taking this into consideration, it is possible that the common response of “I play online games for social reasons” is somewhat inaccurate (or at least only part of the whole story).

German sociologist, Norbert Elias (1982) is attributed with the “civilizing process” theory. Under this definition, the changing society and citizens’ decreasing chances of observing death and punishment has increased people’s curiosity about morbid occurrences and events that now take place behind closed and very private walls (Goldstein, 1999). Here, the argument that some people are born with a natural proclivity to enjoy viewing/engaging in violent behavior comes into play. Studies have shown that watching violent media actually increases the speed of one’s resting heart rate (Krcmar & Greene, 1999; Zillmann, 1971).

Responses to media violence among different generations

Video and computer game studies are often difficult to interpret because of the continually changing nature of media and its levels of violent content (Gentile & Anderson, 2003). Because of this obstacle, it is necessary to investigate how members of different generations view this notable shift in all forms of media content, and not just MMOs.

The world continues to be viewed as a more dangerous and unsafe place to live as years progress. Many of these speculations, however, are incorrect (U.S. Crime Rates, 2001). Perhaps the actual number of violent crimes has increased since the 1960s; granted, so has the total population. For this reason, relative percentages are frequently left unaccounted for. This inaccuracy of information leads to the possibility of causing what is known as the “mean-world syndrome,” which entails the ways in which a person views the world in which they live. An article by Dmitri Williams (2006) expands on this very idea through analysis of responses by avid MMO players regarding “the likelihood of violence in the real world” (np). Buchman and Funk (1996) note “violent video-game play may heighten perceptions of the world as a dangerous place” (Dill & Dill, 1998). Perhaps members of older generations believe the modern world to be impossibly dangerous due to the amount of media they have begun consuming late in their lives.

As early as 1969, Evelyn Duvall published a brief work titled “Teen-Agers and the Generation Gap.” This article elaborates ways in which contemporary youth have begun to separate further and further from adults of previous generations. She attributes this widening gap to the media children were beginning to be exposed to, in opposition to some of the more traditional lessons taught in “school, church, and home” (Duvall, 1969). If this were the case in the early 1970s, one can only imagine how much has changed since then. The generation gap must be even wider.

Teenagers and adolescents consume media for very different reasons than adults and the elderly. Older people usually consume various forms of media in attempts to “connect” (Chayko, 1993) whereas the young consume media to learn “what’s hip” and how to become cool and desirable (Duvall, 1969; Chayko, 1993). These findings imply

similar motivations for spending time in virtual worlds and/or MMOs. Youth occupy these spaces to learn from others how to be socially acceptable and desirable, while adults spend time in similar spaces to escape, connect, or fulfill personal fantasies. Though children may be more easily influenced by different sorts of media, adults seem to take the messages and events more seriously. As noted by Dill (1998), "virtual reality allows people to feel that they have visited new worlds and experienced exciting scenarios without ever having left their chairs." Adults, especially, are prone to this kind of emotion because of the connection feelings they achieve in this behavior (Chayko, 1993).

These studies reveal that media components should not and cannot be examined individually, but rather as an entire, comprising factor. The ways people relate to different forms of media vary slightly between mediums, but greatly between age variants (Chayko, 1993; Duvall, 1969). For this reason, it is just as important to analyze adults' opinions of violence in MMOs and other forms as media as much as it is children's.

Violence on the monitor versus violence on the screen

MMOs and other forms of video games are often thought to have a greater impact on consumers than media merely displayed on basic television or movie screens (Funk et al., 2004; Kronenberger et al., 2005). These conclusions are drawn due to the active nature of MMOs and other stylized, interactive games. Funk (2004) and his colleagues attribute the rewards and punishment system of computer games to justify violence and make it fun. Because of the increasing resolution of computer graphics, images on screen begin to become more realistic and immersive (Van Mierlo, 2003). It is this realistic turn in the industry that has created a closer comparison of television and film violence to MMOs and other such games requiring an active participant. Van Mierlo (2003) notes that around the late 1990s, scholars began to notice a shift not only in graphic resolution, but in game content as well. The majority of games used to be comprised of content requiring the blasting of aliens and other nonsensical, science-fiction creatures, whereas the industry has recently started to lean towards more realistic storylines.

Hoffner (2005), Funk (2003), and Van Mierlo (2003) all note the production of games that tend to produce empathy among players for their characters and those they are killing. Funk (2003) argues that with an increase in video game exposure, empathy levels actually decrease and people are more likely to adopt pro-violence attitudes. Oppositely, beliefs are held that players (especially women players) are likely to identify with their characters and feel more empathetic for themselves and those around them in the game world (Hoffner 2005; Kronenberger et al. 2003). Because of this identification phenomenon highly specific to interactive media such as MMOs, violence becomes a reoccurring theme out of self-protection, not sheer enjoyment for violence and aggressive behavior alone (Van Mierlo, 2003).

Online game violence is also different from television violence in that consumers have more control and input about what games they will purchase and play (Van Mierlo, 2003). Despite this more selective power, Kronenberger (2005) and fellow authors believe there is less censorship and screening among adolescents' computer games than television programming. Games, on the whole, are typically thought to be less

destructive and violent, while the reality of the situation is that aggressive behavior is much more concentrated in these mediums in comparison with television and major motion pictures (Kronenberger et al., 2005).

This recurring exposure to violence supports claims by Funk (2004) regarding desensitization in American society. This is marked by repeated contact with aggressive content, which in turn leads to an increase in a tolerance for violence in the real world and other media outlets (Funk et al., 2004). This occurrence is also well-known as George Gerbner's "cultivation hypothesis" (Van Mierlo, 2003). Surprisingly, when Everquest players were surveyed regarding their favorite aspect of the particular game, only 4.8% of players attributed their first preference to violence (Griffiths, 2004). This finding seems inconsistent with the theory of cultivation, but may also be attributed to Everquest's less-aggressive composition than other competing MMOs.

Most remarkable is the uncommon supposition that television programming and violent film create more aggressive people, while MMOs produce more fearful people (Van Mierlo, 2003). Whatever the long-term, concrete effects, it seems likely that violence in online virtual worlds has a much different impact on players than television and film alone.

Study Design

This paper aims to answer questions regarding MMOs' influences on both novice and avid players' preferences in other forms of media. Specifically, this study investigates how these participants view violent content in other types of media, such as television, film, music, and literature. Is there a direct connection between the types of online games people choose to play and the genres of media they choose to consume in other outlets? Are there any identifying qualities that would make one person more prone to enjoy violence in entertainment than another? If so, does this desensitization begin in childhood, or can people be "conditioned" to violence as an adult?

Participants

To recruit participants for this study, a general message was posted in many gaming-community forums in hopes of generating both publicity and personal responses (See Appendix A). Generally, there was a great deal of initial response from gamers eager to share their personal opinions. Overall, the postings worked well at recruiting interested players, despite a few occasional glitches. A recurring problem was that most of the forums tended to generate a great deal of interest from minors, those below the age of eighteen. There was concern that some were answering falsely to the opening, general question of their year of age. In fact, during one interview session over MSN messenger, an interviewee unexpectedly admitted to being only fourteen after eloquently answering many questions. Subsequently, this collection of information had to be dismissed. The quotes included in the following portion of this paper are all from sources that have, on their honor, reported their ages and are over the age of eighteen.

Additionally, difficulties arose when many individuals who had previously agreed to participate in interviews did not respond to questions sent via e-mail. People from

different forums who often seemed anxious to share their thoughts dropped off the radar after preliminary contact on many occasions.

One last troublesome occurrence worth mentioning involved an abundance of crude and threatening e-mail messages from a large number of Penny-Arcade.com subscribers, a website notorious for outspoken and very opinionated members. These gamers must have found humor in bombarding the forum, the author's inbox, and the author's LiveJournal with angry, sexually explicit, and menacing comments. This incident temporarily set back research endeavors, but moderators at the Penny-Arcade site were helpful in removing the original post from the boards and requesting that all harassment be ended.

Forums that did generate suitable and kind participants included: onRPG.com, SecondLife.com, MMORPG.com, and nV News forums. The greatest amount of participants came from onRPG.com, a site offering free access to MMOs, game reviews, and helpful information on how to go about creating an MMO. SecondLife.com is an extension of its virtual reality counterpart and exists for easy communication and information access for its members. SecondLife is a typically non-violent ludic space where people are able to socialize, create shops, and even earn real world money. MMORPG.com is fundamentally a site for gamers to discuss their experiences and find information and news regarding their favorite games. This site has a large following of many dedicated players. Finally, nVnews.net is a fan site for NVIDIA, a leading graphics processor. Audience members at this website are interested in this kind of contemporary technology.

Procedures

The majority of interviews conducted for the purposes of this research were done via AOL Instant Messenger or MSN Messenger. E-mails were also sent to participants from forum posts voicing willingness to contribute. In these settings, no more than three questions were sent to participants via an anonymous Hotmail account. If the recipient took time to reply, another set of follow-up questions were sent in return. Last of all, interviews were conducted in-game in both Everquest II and SecondLife. Four interviews were held in Everquest II and two in SecondLife. The visual, graphical representation offered by these MMOs created a unique and very personal setting for exchange.

In the early stages of preparation for these interviews, a master list of possible questions was constructed (See Appendix B). These questions did not define the progression of correspondence, but rather assisted in helping communication evolve both naturally and comfortably for the interviewer and interviewee. During interview sessions, questions were adapted and expanded upon in order to create as natural of a conversation as possible.

Results and Discussion

In total, eighteen interviews were conducted with individual players from a very wide variety of MMOs. Some of the particular games participants mentioned having current involvement in included Everquest II, World of Warcraft, Second Life, Guild Wars, RuneScape, Dragon Raja, & the Korean multiplayer PC game, Dungeon & Fighter

(to name a few). Of these respondents, five were women and the remaining thirteen, men. Moreover, the range of experience levels among interview participants was fairly evenly distributed. The player with the most experience reported experimenting with different MMOs for approximately eight years, while the newest player had been playing in WoW for only three short months. This disparity in experience and familiarity brought about very differing perspectives.

I got into WoW b/c alot of my online friends were in it and wanted me to play with them. If they hadn't told me what it was all about I probably would have been a little surprised about the violence. It's really not that bad though. Movies are way worse. –Twinklebeam

A two and a half-year MMO veteran had different, more developed opinions on violence in games. As a level 60 player, he actually reported wanting more violence because, for him, it served as nothing more than “eye candy,” which he described to be a kind of artistic choreography.

I would actually like more violence I guess... I seriously think the PvP in WoW is lacking. I like violence, always have... it's never phased me... and adds to eye candy.” -Octavian

I guess I am growing more accustom to [the violence], it just seems normal, and if you like something in one medium, you should like it in all mediums. -Sanjay

In the case of these two players, one very new to the components of World of Warcraft and the other two familiar, it is clear that the experienced players were much more interested in an increase of violence in future game design. This finding provides the basis for suspecting that as time progresses, desensitization might occur, even for the adult player. Many interviewees were even quick to make note of this personal transition, while others denied any kind of change whatsoever.

Those players who reported consuming a large amount of violent media as a child displayed an extra inclination to objectify the violence in MMOs. Of the eighteen participants, only two reported having a relatively low intake of aggressive media by their own standards as an adolescent or child. Mostly, the players in their late twenties and early thirties associated their memories of their parents' leniencies in their media consumption to their parents' explanations of what was reality and what was fictionalized. In most cases, their parents trusted them to determine what was right and what was wrong in their own real life situations.

I had two older brothers who watched a lot of cop movies around me with their friends so I got a good amount of that kind of stuff. I don't think it necessarily made me like the kinds of movies and TV I do now. I watch a lot of comedy now. I don't mind the violence, but it's not my favorite genre. But I mean really, who doesn't love Chuckie? –Cyclonus

My parent gave me guidance, and expected me to be smart enough to know what to do. -Peredur

Really, I don't think most people can remember what they watch when they're kids. I know I definitely don't. I think once I was old enough to remember the shows I was actually watching I knew better than to go around hitting people for fun. –Karp

Many responses to questions regarding media consumption as a child were phrased very similarly by other respondents. Responses were almost sarcastic and usually involved some sort of humor. One player joked about his position in life as an adult in regards to the media he watched when he was young.

Yeah, I watched a LOT of Robocop. He basically taught me everything I know about life. –Busta

Other players did not share this lackadaisical approach. One of the female respondents felt strongly that violence in our society was creating a world she was slightly frightened to live in... not only for herself, but for her children as well. She elaborated heavily on trying to censor television shows for indecent programming, music for inappropriate lyrics, and computer games for their commonly, highly violent themes. This woman plays SecondLife occasionally but does not let her children actively participate in the game for fear of the often unpredictable sexual content easily stumbled upon in game.

I have a SecondLife account I like to dabble in every once in a while. I like SecondLife enough – other than all the pornography that pops up in unexpected places. It's a nice place to relax and forget your worries for a while... I also am currently trying my luck with the economy to see what kind of money I can make there, not so sure if that will help with stress though... I have a six year old son and a ten year old daughter... I guess you could say I'm a strict mother. It's hard not to be strict though when it seems like everything put in front of your children is somehow harmful to their growth as a person! I wish I didn't have to regulate as many things (nobody likes to be the bad guy), but I really don't have any other options from my standpoint. –Ingrid

When asked if she was exposed to any sorts of violent media as a young girl she replied, "oh heavens no." Additionally, she also described her repulsion to Universal Studio's 2005 blockbuster, King Kong.

Many players responded to most enjoying comedy as a form of feature-length productions in film. This common response does not seem in any way connected to the theme of violence in MMOs, but it certainly reoccurred frequently. A player of Dragon Raja spoke of his many preferences in different forms of media.

I guess it depends on the time of month really. Mainly comedy & horror though. Violence can be a lot more graphic in movies which I personally find a little macabre but I still find great joy in watching it. It's the feeling of knowing that most of the stuff shown in big-budget-movies is completely farfetched... You can usually guess if a movie's going to have excessive amounts of gore by the teaser campaigns they spread all over the web and T.V. so you're usually well acquainted with what will be in it before you watch... [I'm] certainly desensitized

to [violence in games], but I've been around it since I teach martial arts for a living. –Maximus

Most of the participants in these interviews held similar beliefs to Maximus, that violence in media is highly “farfetched” and for the purposes of entertainment only. Their enjoyment from the genre tends to come more from the production of the sequences, not the actual depiction of watching a person or thing undergo extreme brutality. Continually, people defended media violence with phrases like “it’s just fantasy,” but one young, male interviewee seemed to hold a quite different opinion.

Violence in movies... I think it actually adds a level of realism. If it’s out of place then it’s bothersome, but most of the time it is well placed and adds to the work.
–Hector

It is impossible to generalize to the broader population, but in these interviews most people do enjoy violent media in one form or another, especially in television and movies. Their enjoyment levels do not seem to stem from the graphic nature of the portrayals, but from the fantasy the depiction produces. MMOs fall neatly into this categorization, especially as these virtual realities provide places for individuals to enact their very own, personal fantasies.

In a short time and with only a few interviews underway, it became very clear through participants’ responses that personal media preferences do overlap in content style. One respondent answered this inquisition with “of course, but doesn’t everybody?” The typical reaction to considering the changing nature of their media preferences with the introduction of MMOs consisted of an inclination to reject any possibility of modification. For some reason, respondents seemed resistant to the concept of an online game having any sort of effect on their outside lives. This conclusion is fair as the real factor in media selection seems to have to do with previous, not present, partialities.

Well I joined WoW because my friends and I were big fans of the Warcraft franchise. We loved Warcraft, were avid Warcraft 3 players before WoW, and always loved Blizzard games, so it was natural that we enter into WoW and it seemed breath taking to us at first... at first. –Octavian

I am using SecondLife to make \$\$\$, a lot of it. I read about it on-line on a message board and it seemed cool. I don’t want to play other games because SecondLife has something other games don't have... their own currency and exchange system. –Sib

For these players, real life interests are what drive their decisions in choosing an MMO. Research has proven that the individualized selection of online games make them more impacting and salient to adult consumers (Van Mierlo, 2003).

Conclusion

Because violence is so highly appreciated among adult media consumers - whether they are readers, watchers, gamers, or listeners - the producers and distributors of these products are constantly encouraged to continue making media of this genre. Despite all the psychological findings behind the attraction to violence, and the ways that it has changed over time, it is obvious through a handful of interviews that a great deal of satisfaction from MMO violence comes through the efforts of teamwork.

The biggest appeal of MMOs for me is working together to achieve something I wouldn't be able to do on my own. I like the group efforts and raids and getting to be a part of something that feels so much bigger than the solitude of the real world. -Ichabod

Violence may be attractive in MMOs for very different reasons than other forms of media. The theme is universal and unifying. For all the criticisms MMOs have faced in regards to excessive and often unnecessary violent nature, this study suggests that the violence may actually be good for the right players at the right time. Aristotle would appreciate this happy medium between undue gore and a perfect, serene, and absolutely dull online existence. For adult players, the violence bonds players together and promotes and aids in sustaining friendships that go far beyond the limitations of physical geography.

The people who choose to take part in this generous environment may all be less sensitive to violence on the screen, but nonetheless, there seems to be little parallel between these games and the kinds of books, television programming, and movies being produced in the mainstream media. This theme works so well in the given medium of MMOs and will likely remain stable as the major genre for years to come. Violence in television and film is easily expendable, but in MMOs, it seems to play a somewhat irreplaceable role to the success and overall enjoyment taken from participants in these indefinable spaces.

To improve upon the findings of this research, more precise statistical information from general surveys should be produced. These surveys should also be distributed to a number of MMO gamers ideally exceeding several hundred. An even larger sample would be more revealing. Possible questions to include in this survey would include inquiries concerning players most and least favorite genres of media across all forms to find more conclusive and concrete results.

Also, introducing individuals from groups of two distinct compositions to MMOs - those exposed to high levels of violent media as a child and those relatively sheltered - may provide interesting results. Rating their initial reactions to these environments may produce more telling evidence of the proclivity of certain people to respond more positively to the violence in MMOs.

Appendix A. Sample recruitment message

Hello,

My name is Kathryn, and I am an undergraduate enrolled in a course on virtual worlds at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. Our class has been playing Everquest II for the past four months, with characters ranging in level from 10 to 27. Our primary characters are members of the guild The Vindicators on the Antonia Bayle server.

As part of an ongoing research project, I would like to speak with people over the age of 18 about their thoughts on violence in MMOs. Please know that I am not attacking anyone's personal views... as I mentioned earlier, I have been playing online games recently as well (and am very much enjoying myself!).

These interviews could take place via e-mail, in-game, or over an anonymous instant messaging connection. I will preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants.

If you are willing to be interviewed about your thoughts on this topic, please contact me at:

kathryn.c.tu@hotmail.com

I understand that the gaming community is bombarded with survey requests that never lead anywhere. This request is different. Our class is committed to sharing its research findings. At the end of the semester, all student papers and presentations will be linked to the course web site and made available to anyone with an Internet connection.

For more details about our course and the research project, visit:

<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/worlds/faq.html>

Thanks in advance for your time.

Kathryn

Appendix B. Interview questions

Preliminary Questions

- What is your age?
- Male or female?
- Geographic location?
- Approximately how long have you been playing online games?
- What MMO(s)/MMORPG(s) do you play on a regular basis?
- Why do you play? (What's the attraction?)
- What kind of character are you? (fighter, priest, mage, etc...)
- Have you noticed a change in your attitude towards violence in games from when you first started playing? If so, in what ways (less shocked, more shocked)?
- Do you prefer PvP (Player vs. Player) or PvE (Player vs. Environment) more?
- Did you choose the MMO(s) you play because of former preferences in movie, television, or literature genres?

Media Preferences

- What kinds of media were you exposed to as a young person (under the age of 18)? (movies, television programming, news segments, videogames, etc...)
- When you opt for a movie, what is your favorite genre? (action, horror, romantic comedy, drama, etc...)
- How do you typically react to violence on-screen? How does it make you feel?
- What are your opinions on violence in major motion pictures?
- What is your favorite kind of television programming?
- Have you ever been disappointed because you expected to get more gore from a movie than was actually shown or oppositely, have you ever felt offended by a seemingly excessive amount of gore in a film? Which film & why?

Conclusion

- Do your tastes in media products (movies, television, novels, games, etc...) seem to vary or generally overlap in content style?
- Have your preferences in media notably changed since playing MMOs?
- Did you choose the MMO(s) you play because of former preferences in movie, television, or literature genres?
- Do you see a relation between your preference in MMOs and other, outside media products?

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