

Are MMORPGs an activity the average person should grow out of?

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate and present unbiased information on the topic of MMORPGs, and if they are an activity that the average person should grow out of. It investigates topics such as addiction, social skills, demographics and consequences of playing MMORPGs.

The study looks at how MMORPGs are portrayed by society, and how it gained the stigma that it has. The study will also look at the merits of MMORPGs, and the positives they bring to a person who plays online games, as well as the detriments and downsides of playing MMORPGs.

This study concludes that although there are many social and personal issues that may arise by playing MMORPGs, they are rarely due to a player's age, and that whether or not a person should play MMORPGs is almost always a case-by-case basis.

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1 Introduction

Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) are a type of online video game that supports a very large amount of players, typically hundreds to thousands to millions. They are often set in a fantasy setting, and players can play as a variety of roles, such as a warrior, mage or archer.

They are often set in a large “world” with many cities that can be equated to a real country. They often have their own economy systems, as well as several quests, dungeons and monsters.

MMORPGs are often very time intensive and require a large amount of time to “level up” skills or abilities, which can include combat or resource gathering, such as fishing or mining. It is not uncommon for players to spend over 10 hours a day on MMORPGs.

Examples of MMORPGs are World of Warcraft, RunesScape and Eve Online.

For the purpose of this discussion, the age for “growing out of” will be considered after adolescence.

2 MMORPG Culture

2.1 Perception of 'Nerd/Geek' and Internet Culture

For a long time, there has been a strong social negative stigma about spending a lot of time online, meeting people online and playing MMORPGs.

Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) can be thought of as a precursor to MMORPGs. It is a roleplaying fantasy board game in which players roleplay as adventurers in a group, who must overcome challenges set by the Game-Master (GM) who creates the scenario.

For many people, especially adolescents, having an interest in fantasy, roleplaying or online video games is often met with scorn. People who play games such as World of Warcraft or RuneScape are often embarrassed or ashamed about it.

However, recently, spending a large amount of time online is not uncommon, and playing online games is much more accepted than it was 10 years ago. But, the stigma surrounding MMORPGs and video games has had a lasting effect, and many people (especially those who didn't grow up with video games) view them as immature, childish and a waste of time.

3 Entitlement to Interests

"I should be allowed to do what I like, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone"

This quote is a common saying used by people who want to rationalise their behaviour, often with subjects such as drugs or adultery. This is often a fallacy, as people who have this mind-set tend to not consider how their actions affect others.

However, many people feel that everyone should be entitled to their own interests, as long as it is not destructive. For example, not everybody enjoys watching football or drawing – does that mean that no-one should enjoy these activities? Playing MMORPGs is no different.

There are several activities that people partake in that do affect society in a negative way. Such as vandalism, scamming or violent behaviour. These types of activities are things that should be actively discouraged and not tolerated.

3.1 Are MMORPGs Destructive?

In general, playing MMORPGs do not have a negative impact on people who the player interacts with. However, due to how time intensive MMORPGs are, and how addictive they are, this can lead to neglect from the player.

There are numerous circumstances of MMORPG players who neglect those who are dependent on them. For example, there is a case where a Korean infant starved to death because of neglect from their parents, who left the baby unattended to play an online game. (Tran, 2010)

Of course, players who neglect others because of an addiction to MMORPGs do obviously have an issue with how they prioritise their responsibilities. However, this is not necessarily a question of should the average person grow out of MMORPGs, but rather how much they allow MMORPGs to control their life.

4 Average Age of MMORPG Players

4.1 Target Audience

Héctor Fuster investigated, and gathered information on the average age of MMORPGs in Spanish speaking countries, and discovered that most MMORPG players are aged between 20 and 29.

	Age		Length of time playing		Length of time playing current MMORPG		Hours playing at the weekend	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Aion <i>n</i> = 23	25.26	6.87	5.17	3.09	1.22	.60	8.09	4.62
DC Universe Online <i>n</i> = 17	24.35	6.87	5.59	3.69	.06	.24	9.29	3.31
EVE Online <i>n</i> = 48	27.94	7.34	5.81	3.67	2.44	1.61	7.10	3.77
Lord of the Rings Online <i>n</i> = 94	29.26	7.26	5.04	3.56	1.52	1.66	7.33	4.54
Rift <i>n</i> = 72	29.32	6.32	7.83	2.70	.12	.11	11.08	6.78
World of Warcraft <i>n</i> = 136	24.22	5.63	5.89	2.08	4.74	1.58	8.36	5.17

Figure 1. Age, length of time, and hour spent at the weekend playing MMORPGs

(Fuster, et al., 2014)

In 2009, Jagex (Creators of MMORPG RuneScape) had an open question and answers news post, where they answered questions sent in by RuneScape players. In response to a player asking what age group they felt RuneScape was intended for, Mark Gerhard (CEO of Jagex) responded:

“I believe that everyone can find RuneScape enjoyable. I would suggest that it’s aimed at college students and older, but there is something for everyone, whether you’re 18 or 80!” (Anon., n.d.)

Although many people feel that MMORPGs are for children and adolescents, only around 20.6% of player are under the age of 18. (Cole & Griffiths, 2007)

4.1.1 Children’s MMORPGs

Not all MMORPGs are intended for an adult audience – there are several MMORPGs that are intended for a young audience. One of the most notable examples is Disney’s Club Penguin.

“Club Penguin is designed for 6-14-year-olds but is open to children of all ages. Although the site is funded by subscriptions, you don’t have to be a paying member to visit or play games.”

(www.clubpenguin.com, 2014)

4.2 Age of Beginning to Play MMORPGs

Many player begin playing MMORPGs while they are a teenager, typically between the ages of 12 and 15. (Anon., 2016) However, it should be noted that the sample size here is very small, and although does not accurately represent the community as a whole, it gives an idea of the age players begin to play MMORPGS.

5 Impact to Social Skills

Playing MMORPGs for an extensive period of time can have a detrimental impact on a person’s social life. Time that is spent on an online game often means that the player is not socialising. According to a survey by Nick Yee, players typically spend 22 hours per week playing MMORPGs such as World of Warcraft. (Yee, 2005)

However, it is not uncommon for a player to spend over 10 hours a day playing MMORPGs

5.1 Face-to-Face Communication

MMORPGs do not use face-to-face communication between players. This limits a person’s social interaction, compared to other hobbies such as sports or activities such as hiking. Players who spent

a particularly large amount of time playing MMORPGs have a tendency to only socialise when they have to, and may have asocial tendencies.

5.2 Online social skills

MMORPGs do have social elements, and players can, and often are required to communicate with other players in order to achieve an objective.

World of Warcraft has a guild feature. (Anon., n.d.) Players can create and join guilds, which are sub-communities within the game, they can vary widely in size, from small to hosting many players. Players may coordinate with guild-mates to accomplish objectives, such as raiding dungeons or participating in events.

RuneScape has a related clan feature. (RuneScape, n.d.) Which is similar to guilds in that a clan is a sub-community inside of the game. Clans and guilds often have third-party forums in which members can join and post on.

Many clans or guilds use voice-over-IP (VoIP) programs such as Skype, TeamSpeak or Discord. These programs are used for communicating with other people by voice.

Due to the time intensiveness of MMORPGs, players often spent a large amount of the time on the game, and therefore are likely to become friends with other players who also spend a large amount of time online. This often leads to people having strong bonds with a person who they have never met, but speak to for several hours a day.

5.3 Real-Life Events

Many large MMORPGs host conventions and events in real-life that players can attend and meet clan-mates or friends who also play the game. A notable example of this is RuneScape's *RuneFest*. (RuneScape, 2016)

RuneFest is a RuneScape convention that is hosted every year by Jagex in Cambridge, United Kingdom. Many players attend RuneFest and take part in the many activities, talks and events that occur at RuneFest. They also have the opportunity to meet people that they otherwise might have never met.

5.4 Skills Gained From MMORPGs

Due to the nature of MMORPGs, players have a tendency to develop useful real life skills. Most MMORPGs have their own economy, where players can look at the trends of the value of items, and use this information to better inform their decisions when buying or selling items.

Many bosses or high-level monsters in games such as World of Warcraft requires co-ordination between a large group of people. This is known as 'raiding' and contains a group of up to 30 people. (Anon., n.d.)

Many MMORPGs have in-game quests that may be completed RuneScape, for example, currently has 212 quests (Wiki, n.d.) that can be completed. Each quest has its own story, requirements and challenges, and most quests take from one to five hours to complete.

There are many challenging elements in MMORPGs that players are constantly exposed to. As a result, MMORPG players tend to have better than problem solving, decision making and patience than those who do not play. (McGonigal, 2011)



Figure 2. The graph of an item's value in RuneScape

6 Health Issues

6.1 Addiction and Health

MMORPGs are very addictive – they are very time intensive, progress-oriented and rewarding at a slow, constant pace. This causes many players to spend large amounts of time playing MMORPGs.

Addiction is unhealthy, and can cause players to neglect their personal health and hygiene. Many players may choose to not exercise, eat healthy or look after themselves, because they are too absorbed into the game.

6.1.1 “No XP Waste” Phenomena

In RuneScape, there is a term known as ‘xp wasting.’ This refers to players not gaining experience (by completing tasks and therefore progressing in the game) by being idle. The term ‘xp wasting’ is tongue-in-cheek, and intended as a joke, but many players do take it seriously.

Because of how time intensive MMORPGs are, efficiency is very important to many players, who aim to get the most experience in as short a time as possible, to the point of obsession. This leads to the mindset of a player feeling they must be playing the game, and failure to do so is ‘wasting xp’ and therefore suboptimal.

(Walker, 2015)

The mind-set of always having to be online, and always progressing is very unhealthy. This leads to addiction, negligence of real-world duties and poor social skills.

6.2 Neglecting Sleep

Many players who are addicted to MMORPGs often neglect sleep, and spend up to 16 or 17 hours per day playing online games. This is very unhealthy and is one of the consequences of being addicted to an online video game.



Figure 3. RuneScape player with over 2000 days played (over 48,000 hours)

7 Missing Out on Real World Experiences

By spending significant amounts of time playing MMORPGs, people often do not have as many real world experiences – they may not travel, go out with friends or meet new people. However, this is that person's choice, and they are not obliged to take part in real world activities.

Many people do meet up with players that they meet online, and many begin long-distance relationships (LDRs) with people they have become close to online.

8 Future of the Internet and MMORPGs

The internet, and MMORPGs are still in their infancy, and appear to have very strong growth in the future. Many middle-aged, and older, people do not play video games because they are a new concept that clashes with their personal childhood and adolescence - ignorance is a key factor in an MMORPG's player-base's average age.

MMORPGs may become popular amongst older people as people who have played MMORPGs reach middle age.

9 Conclusion

Playing MMORPGs is an activity that is mainly popular with people aged 20-29, with many players beginning to play MMORPGs in their teenage years. People who do play MMORPGs do have a tendency to become addicted to them, and therefore spend a large portion of time online playing the game.

There are both positives and negatives to playing MMORPGs - players tend to have strong bonds with friends that they have met online, as well as having strong resource management, trading and teamwork skills.

However, online games have a tendency to be very addictive, and it is easy for a person to become reliant on those MMORPGs, this can lead to people neglecting hygiene and health. Depending on the level of the addiction, it could have very serious impact on a person's life

If a player neglects their, or a dependent's, life because of a need to play an MMORPG, then there is an issue that must be resolved, but these tend to be social or personality issues, rather than a person being 'too old' to play the MMORPG.

The reasoning for a person to grow out of MMORPGs is almost always purely social, rather than because they are causing harm to themselves or others.

MMORPGs are often viewed to be immature and a waste of time, which adults should refrain from. However, the internet and MMORPGs are still relatively new concepts, and we do not know what the future of these will be.

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