

# **Linnæus University**

School of Computer Science, Physics and Mathematics

# **Master Thesis in Informatics**

# Character Creation Processes in MMORPGs

- A qualitative study of determining important factors.



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Level: Master

Course code: 5IK00E



### **Abstract**

Virtual worlds give us the opportunity to explore another self, a virtual character of the real life you. Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) have become extremely popular over the last decade. It has also grown into a lucrative business. To keep the players, the game needs to be more than just a game. This study aimed at finding out what factors that determine which features of the character creation interface that are most important to players. The following research question was formed; "Which underlying factors affect how important different features of the character creation interface are to experienced MMORPG players? To be able to answer the question an extensive literature review was conducted. A qualitative approach was taken. Long interviews were made with five participants, two female and three male players. The interviews took place while they created a number of avatars in different MMORPGs. The interviews were then followed up. During the follow-ups, the impact the character creation process had for the players, were discussed. The findings indicate that the character creation interface is important for the players to get a good gaming experience. However different types of players require different things. Important features for the users to change were mainly; the head; the name; and adding parts of yourself on your character. The factors that determined the importance of these features were found to be; Player types; Identity types; Immersion levels; and whether or not the game or the gaming experience were new to the player. Another finding showed that the longer you have played a game the less bizarre the different races, classes and gender will seem. The study also indicated that the female participants had a hard time identifying with their male characters.

Keywords: Virtual world, MMORPG, MMO, Online games, character creation, Immersion, identity, motivations, gender, player types, qualitative, avatar, character.

# **Executive Summary**

The aim of this research was to gain a better understanding of which factors that determine which features of the character creation interface that is most important to Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games players. The results indicate that:

What player type you belong to, and what you consider to be fun in games is essential for how much you need to change the appearance of your character.

Immersion in games is vital for how you want to alter the character. The players who enjoyed role-playing wanted to be able to add parts of themselves in their character.

The female players had a hard time identifying with their male characters, although this seems to be a result of the time played in MMORPGs rather than what gender the player is. The more experienced players showed that the choice of gender for the character had become normalized, and was now no more than just another choice.

Reasons for choice of character seemed to be a combination of games and characters. The results also indicates that a familiar game might attract the player more, even if the character creation process might be perceived better in other games.

#### **Important parts of the character creation process:**

- Name
- Head
- Parts of yourself
- Gender
- For experienced players, also structure and zoom

#### Crucial factors that determines essential features

- If the player had played the game before or not
- If the players was experienced in MMORPGs or not
- What Player type the player belongs to
- What identity type the player is categorized as
- How much the player wants to become immersed within the game

To summarize the findings; game designers need to learn more about their players. They need to take all important factors into consideration; Player type; Immersion level; Identity type; and whether or not the game or the gaming experience are new to the player. These factors need to be explored before deciding how the character creation interface should be designed.



# Acknowledgements

I would like to start off by thanking *Ph.D. Alexandra Petrakou* for believing in me and making me realize that this was possible.

A big thank you also goes to *Professor Christina Mörtberg* for her endless knowledge on usable sources for this study.

I would also like to thank my tutor *Ph.D. Jan Aidemark* for all his insight and help to make this thesis what it is today.

Of course I would also like to thank all my interviewees, *Eva, Christina, Erik, Anthon and Lars*, which all sat a side a lot of their personal time for my study. Without you there would not be a study at all.

A special thanks also goes to *Ph.D. Johan Isaksson*, for helping me with the academic writing.

An enormous thank you goes to my rock, *Erik Näsström*, who has made this dream of mine possible.

Finally I would like to thank *My family* for putting up with me through all of this; you are the guiding stars of my life...

So to all of you, thank you for helping me follow my dreams...

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#### 1. Introduction

Would you like the opportunity to start a new life in a new world? How would you look? Who, or what would you be if anything was possible? Virtual worlds give us that opportunity to explore another self, a virtual character of the real life you. In the early 2000's Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) became very popular, and over the years, these games have also become a lucrative business (Li, Shi & Wang, 2011). One of the most important things for the game industry is that players enjoy their game and want to return to it. Yee (2006) could show that from his study about motivations among players, one of the most important things was that the player felt immersed in the game. Previous research (Martin, 2005; Yee, 2006; Turkay & Adinolf, 2010) shows that for a player to get immersed in a game, it is important to be able to create a unique character. In this study I will explore which factors that determine which features of the character creation process that matters the most to players, what choices are necessary for the player to go on playing and enjoy their time with their character? How do the players make choices for their character, why do they make these choices, and do these choices affect the future gameplay of the users? A glossary for some of the more unusual words on this topic is to be found in Appendix 1.

#### 1.1 The Research Problem

The Information System (IS) discipline has during recent years used virtual worlds as an alternative version of the real world, a topic that needs to be examined and researched further. Especially Avatars, the representation of the user have been of interest to IS researchers (Suh, Kim & Suh, 2011). Virtual worlds are growing fast and people are more and more interacting in these social virtual worlds. An increasing number of interactions in these virtual worlds are made in the form of an avatar (Dong, 2009; Suh, Kim & Suh, 2011; Ducheneaut et al., 2009). Avatars are computer made graphic representations; they often look a lot like humans and can also show expressions and form unique identities (Dong, 2009; Suh, Kim & Suh, 2011). Virtual worlds give the user a possibility to interact with an environment that is only computer-based; however this environment can sometimes still give the user a sense of actually being a part of that world (Suh, Kim & Suh, 2011). Lately the research of virtual worlds has focused a lot on Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs). Jiang et al (2010) states that; "An MMORPG forms an online virtual world, where people can work and interact with one another in a somewhat realistic manner. "(Jiang et al, 2010, p. 1) The research that has been conducted has focused mostly on social aspects, such as communications within MMORPGs, (Ducheneaut et al., 2009; Yee, 2006; Voulgari & Komis, 2010) or learning possibilities (Linderoth, 2007; Roussos et al, 1999). Williams (2006) says that online games are played regularly by a majority of Americans and that in spite of what a lot of people still believe; games are not just for children and teenagers. Games are now used by all ages (Williams, 2006). Entertainment Software Association's (ESA) demographic study on games and gamers show that the average age of the computer game player is 37. The same study also shows that 58 % of the players are male and thereby, 42 % females. (Entertainment Software Association, 2011) In today's society there is an enormous amount of different games, in 2008 Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith and Tosca (2008) stated that there were 170 MMORPGs that existed or were in development. All these different MMORPGs have in turn also

varying orientations and possibilities for creating one's character in the game. There are also big differences in the number of choices you have when you create your avatar. It can be everything from just choosing from a number of pre-made avatars to be able to go deeper and create, for instance, exactly the right color of the skin or eye color of your avatar.

One of the most important issues for game developers and other stakeholders is the fact that players return to their game over and over again. This since a lot of the MMORPGs make their profit both by selling the product and even more so from a monthly fee that the player must pay to keep playing. Keeping the players is essential to the game industry. In order to accomplish this, the game must be more than just a game; it must immerse the player so a feeling of actually being in the game occurs. If the player gets immersed in the game, it will be easier to create an identity for the character. In the same process, by creating the identity; the immersion will grow deeper as well. To make sure that this immersion and identification with the character emerges from the beginning of the game, the character creation process is a vital part of the player's journey into the world and into its character. So by being able to create a luring character creation interface the game developers can better assure that their players will stay in their game. This is why it is so important to be aware of every aspect of the game, and make the player feel like he or she is indeed a part of the game right from the beginning. After all ESA (2011) showed that 72 % of all American households play computer or video games (Entertainment Software Association, 2011). Character or avatar creation is often one of the first things a player gets in contact with in a game. It is therefore important for the game designers to realize that the choices they make in this process will have a great impact on the players' perception of the game (Feng, Brandt& Saha, 2007; Yee, 2006).

#### 1.2 Previous Studies

Calka (2006) declares that MMORPGs can offer a unique opportunity to observe social behavior in a somewhat anonymous but yet individualistic goal-driven space. Calka means that MMORPGs are different from other games in that there is no way to win the game; instead you complete goals within the game. Some of the previous research that has been conducted in MMORPGs has been focused on what kind of effect the designer's choices may have. Particular when it comes to race (see Appendix 1) and gender. Both Taylor (2003, 2006) and Pace (2008) concluded that a lot of the choices designers make may be unintentional, but can still lead to unwanted effects. Such effects could for example be stereotypes of how a Caucasian male looks or how an African-American character acts in a certain way, or a female character may be portrayed in an unnatural way (Taylor, 2006).

The researches most in line with this research his studies around the avatar's customization and identity. One of the biggest research reports made in MMORPGs is a study that went on for three years and had survey data from 30,000 users. This research aimed at finding the motivations for players' use of games. The study concluded that there were five user motivations that could affect the player (Yee, 2006). Another important study wanted to evaluate the avatar creation and customization in how usable it was. This quantitative study found that players wanted more choices in their customization, and that one of the most important features to be able to change was the hair of the avatar. (Ducheneaut et al, 2009). Vasalou et al.

(2008) wanted to find out how users chose to present themselves in a virtual world, to do this they conducted lab tests where the users were to "think aloud" and explain to the researchers what they were doing. They found three different motivation factors and concluded that their users also wanted more choices in their creation process. Turkay and Adinolf (2010) examined the character creation process in World of Warcraft and focused on what this part really means for the player. They concluded that customization really does matter and is one of the most important processes for the players' enjoyment. Martin (2005) and Neustaedter and Federovskaya (2009) also drew the same conclusions from their research; customization is really important, and players are depending on a good customization part of the game to be able to create a unique character. If they cannot create a unique character it will be hard to create an identity for the character.

Even though there has been research conducted towards the importance of character creation, less has been said about what the players feel is most important to be able to customize and which factors that determines these choices. Even though it is pretty clear among game researchers that if a game does not offer enough possibilities, the players will surely leave the game (Martin, 2005; Neustaedter & Federovskaya, 2009; Ducheneaut et al, 2009; Turkay and Adinolf, 2010). A lot of the studies have been conducted using quantitative methods. This is an excellent way of coming up with generalizations. However it is hard to really answer questions about why the player thinks that way or why the player made that choice. The qualitative research that has been conducted have been mainly interviews or in game participation. What is lacking is more participation from the users, and allowing the users, to some extent, lead the research forward, and then follow-up on the participants' progress. It is therefore important that this study is made, so that the research can show what the actual users, the players, think, feel and say about their actions and choices.

# 1.3 Significance and Purpose of the Study

Since the number of players using MMORPGs is increasing rapidly (Dong, 2009; Suh, Kim & Suh, 2011; Ducheneaut et al., 2009) more research in all areas around this phenomenon is needed. This study will mostly be significant for game designers and game developers. Even so they are not the only stakeholders with interest. Pace (2008) writes that Global businesses like IBM and Sun Microsystems have invested hundreds of millions of dollars into the research of virtual worlds. ESA (2011) showed that the gaming industry is increasing for every year. In 2000 the United States sold computer and video games for 5.5 billion of US Dollars. In 2010, this increased to 15.9 billion US dollars.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of which underlying factors determines which features are of most significance to MMORPG players. This is something that has not been focused on enough in previous research. To really be able to understand what the players want, this type of research is extremely important. If game developers and other stakeholders put in a lot of money on a feature, they need to know that the particular feature will be used and enjoyed by the players. To fully understand human beings you have to go deeper than a quantitative survey.

Since the stakeholders are dependent on the players remaining in their game, they need to understand why players make the choices they make and how this will affect the player. It is therefore crucial to make a deeper study that can answer the following question:

Which underlying factors affect how important different features of the character creation interface are to experienced MMORPG players?

By doing this research new and valuable information about players thought process can benefit different parties. First of all game developers will get a first glimpse into why and how players make their choices. This will help the game developers to come up with better choices and interactions for the players. Through this, the research will also benefit the players. If they see that the game company listens to what they want and need, the players will gain a better relationship with that company. By saying that, all stakeholders in the game industry will benefit from the fact that users like their games more, and a bigger profit can be made. This work presents a first step in the direction of achieving a deeper understanding of the underlying factors affecting character creation, character identification and in the extension increased profit for the game developers. In the academic world researchers can also benefit from this research. This is a new approach to understanding the player's needs, even though some studies have been conducted with a qualitative method before, as far as I can tell there has not been any research done where the players were followed up so additional interviews about their experiences in the character creation process could be made. Therefore it will be important to show the academic world that this type of research is vital and valuable for future research.

## 1.4 Scope of the Study

This study was limited to a six month period and has been scaled accordingly to include five deep interviews. The five participants were manually selected based on the subjects' ability to communicate nuanced and give high quality answers to the topics of this work. The use of handpicked subjects in qualitative studies is common practice. According to Creswell (2009) it is more common in qualitative studies to hand pick the users instead of using a random selection. Some of the participants of this study were already familiar with the researcher, and this might affect their responses. However, since a part of this research was getting to know the users and making them feel at ease, this fact only made that job easier. No other part of the game except for the character creation process will be studied. Interesting topics can be found in analyzing players' interactions. However, the scope of this study will not have the possibility to include those parts.

# 1.5 Disposition

After the introduction in the previous chapter, chapter 2 will contain the literature review of the research. This chapter aims to explain the background to the research as well as the importance of the character creation process as well as the immersion and identification that is a part of it.

Chapter 3 will then explain what type of methodological approach that was chosen for this research. Who the participants were and how the data collection was carried out and analyzed will be shown. This chapter will also contain validity, reliability and ethical considerations of this study.

Chapter 4 will convey the results from the interviews. These results will be categorized in the most important factors that determine which features the players find significant; Motivations; Immersion; Identity; and Gender. Important features that were discovered during the interviews will then be displayed

In chapter 5 the findings from the follow-ups will be shown. The findings will be divided in topics which were discussed during the follow-ups; Chosen characters; Identity formation; the importance of appearance; and finally a discussion on gender. The final part will then sum up all the empirical findings.

In chapter 6 conclusions and interpretations of the empirical material will be drawn with the help of previous research as well as the researchers own experiences.

Finally in chapter 7 conclusions will be drawn from previous discussions. After that a part about this research contribution is shown and a reflection over the research will be presented. Finally, suggestions to future research topics will be discussed.

# 2. Virtual Worlds, MMORGs, Players and Characters

This part of the study will first give a background about virtual worlds and what Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) really are. After this there will be a subsection about who plays MMORPGs and why these users enjoy playing these games. This is followed by an explanation what the immersive factor of MMORPGs is and how players can be categorized according to different levels of immersion (Immersion, see Appendix 1). The next subsection will focus on the avatar (Avatar, see Appendix 1), the players' character and sometimes representation in the games. A subsection about identity creation will explain how different identities can be created within the game and how this affects the player. The final subsection will be about the gender issues in games. A short summary will then explain how the conceptual framework will be used in this research.

#### 2.1 Virtual Worlds

Turkay (2011) explains that virtual worlds can be divided in two different groups; metaverses, these include social worlds such as Second Life (SL; see Appendix 1); and Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOs), such as World of Warcraft (Turkay, 2011). The first virtual worlds were text-based, that mean that in those environments everything had to be described by using words instead of graphics. Virtual worlds have sometimes been called MUDs (Multi User Dungeons) because the first virtual environments were game based (Bartle, 2004). A steadily increasing number of people connect to virtual worlds daily. These environments can offer anything from business meetings to online games (Ducheneaut et al, 2009; Wasko et al, 2011). A number of scientists, such as Neustaedter and Fedorovskaya (2009) and Ducheneaut et al. (2009) define virtual worlds as immersive 3d environments which make it possible for people to interact with a large number of users at the same time. Wasko et al. (2011) states that "At the most fundamental level, virtual worlds are reflections of their creators." (Wasko et al, 2011, p.646). Wasko et al (2011) also reports that one of the biggest differences between virtual worlds and the real world is that currently virtual worlds can only offer perceptions for two of our five senses; sight and sound. Bartle (2004) lists a number of things that define virtual worlds and distinguish those places from the real world.

- The world has underlying, automated rules that enable player to affect changes to it (although not to the rules that grant them this ability). This is the Worlds *physics*.
- Players represent individuals "in" the world. They may wield partial or total influence over an army, crew or party, but there is only one game entity that represents them in the world and with which they strongly identify. This is their *character*. All interaction with the world and other players is channeled through characters.
- Interaction with the world takes place in *real time*. When you do something in the world, you can expect feedback almost immediately.
- The world is shared.
- The world is (at least to some degree) persistent.

Over 15 years ago Sherry Turkle (1995) wrote a book about life on the screen. Even though the internet had just started to find its way into people's personal homes, Turkle stated that virtual worlds give us a great deal of opportunities to create communities with people from all over the world:

"At one level, the computer is a tool. It helps us write, keep track of our accounts, and communicate with others. Beyond this, the computer offers us both new models of mind and a new medium on which to project our ideas and fantasies. Most recently, the computer has become even more than tool and mirror: We are able to step through the looking glass. We are learning to live in virtual worlds. We may find ourselves alone as we navigate virtual oceans, unravel virtual mysteries, and engineer virtual skyscrapers. But increasingly, when we step through the looking glass, other people are there as well." (Turkle, 1995, p. 9)

Virtual worlds also increase the demands on multinational corporations to implement 3d environments to improve the work process. This due to the benefits of virtual worlds, such as the fact that work can be done at anytime and anywhere. Wasko et al (2011) reports that even though the age of users are widely spread, it is still mostly young adolescents who use virtual worlds. However, the researchers predict that over the next five to ten years this will change and virtual worlds will grow into a more accepted feature for all ages. Wasko et al (2011) also predict that how and where people work will also change significantly during the next decades. They state that the borders between work, play and learning will dissolve or at least be reshaped. Koivisto and Wenninger (2005) mean that a game can take place in two different worlds, in a parallel reality. The researchers explain that real-life events can have an effect on the events in the virtual world and vice versa. Pace, Houssian and McArthur (2009) confirm this in their study where they state that virtual worlds affect users even after they leave those worlds and return to the real world. Especially social encounters have a huge impact on users, and the experience will stay with the user in the real world. A lot of virtual worlds today have created their own economy, and this economy is starting to affect the real world. Most often it means that users spend a couple of dollars on things they can use in the virtual world, or accessories for their characters. However Wasko et al. (2011) report that the record for the most expensive virtual good continues to be broken; in March 2010, a virtual asteroid was sold for USD 635,000 in the virtual world Entropia. This concluded in a profit for the virtual entrepreneur with USD 500,000. This is an example of how virtual worlds are becoming a part of our real world. Another example when it comes to economy is that the Swedish government granted the first real life banking license to Mind Ark, so that the financial deposits of the users would be safe. (Wasko et al, 2011).

#### 2.2 Video Games

The first video game ever created was called Spacewar! It was created at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) by some of the students as part of a demonstration program in 1962. Spacewar! allowed users to maneuver a virtual starship through a control box, and shoot at opponents against a background of black empty space, with only a few stars. (Vorderer & Bryant, 2006; Wolf & Perron, 2003) In 1978 Bartle and Trubshaw created the first persistent virtual world, the first so called MUD (Multi User Dungeon).

#### 2.2.1 MMOs and MMORPGs

Bartle (2012) recently stated in one of his lectures on the University of Lincoln that MMORPGs, that is an abbreviation for Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games, have been so long that the acronym gained its own abbreviation, MMOs (Bartle, 2012). Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOs) are persistent worlds where several thousands of players can interact and communicate. Unlike stand-alone games and network games where the world only exist when the player logs in. The persistent worlds in MMOs are running constantly (Vorderer & Bryant, 2006; Wolf & Perron, 2003; Yee, 2006). There are different names and acronyms for online games, such as MMO, MMOGs and MMORPGs. The biggest difference between these acronyms is in fact the researchers' choice of different terms. All of these names aim at the same persistent virtual worlds. MMORPGs do however involve a role playing possibility (Vorderer & Bryant, 2006). The first MMORPG game was Ultima online, released on September 25, 1997. Ultima combined the social features of MUDs with its advanced 2D computer graphics and this allowed players to create visual characters for the first time (Pace, Houssian & McArthur, 2009; Jiang et al, 2010). Yee (2006) explains that on a very simplistic level MMORPGs could be thought of as a scenic chat room, where users can engage in a number of different interactive tasks. Yee also says that users will be able to experience different environments and maybe even falling rain or snow, all this while communicating with other users in chats or through "emotes" (see Appendix 1) expressed by the avatars . Vorderer and Bryant (2006) say that even though there are a lot of different genres in MMOs they all share the following characteristics:

- Persistence; this means that the world is available to the users 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The element of persistent is what allows the world's community, economy, reputation and social structure to emerge.
- Physicality; the virtual worlds are usually reproduced from the real world, an
  avatar have to open a door to pass through it, or the avatar usually gets injured
  when he falls from high heights. This has been known among researchers to
  increase the user's immersion in the game.

- Social interaction; This feature is one of the most important to MMORPGs, since these games (More than just MMOs) want to let the player create relationships with other players. However most MMOs are considered very focused on social interactions. Usually a game has a number of different channels to communicate with other users, so that a message can be sent to a specific group, person, or server.
- Avatar-mediated play; an avatar is the representation of the user within the game. A lot of different player styles and player types have been created by researchers to be able to better understand the relationship between the avatar and the player (Chapter 2.3 will explain these different definitions more closely).
- Vertical game play and Perpetuity; this is something that will show how much time the player has engaged in the game, or how much he have explored or killed. In many games this is shown in levels. When you have succeeded in enough challenges you earn a new level. (Vorderer & Bryant, 2006)

Curry (2010) says that MMORPGs host thousands of players at the same time, in the virtual worlds of the games the players work together to complete complex quests and solve problems. In 2006 Curry (2010) stated that over 30 million people all over the world played MMORPGs. Pace, Houssian and McArthur (2009) stated in their article that according to White (2007) there were over 47 million players in the world (White, 2007 as referred to in Pace, Houssian & McArthur, 2009, p.196). Yee explains that MMORPGs provides a natural setting to millions of players where they can immerse themselves into another reality (Yee, 2006). These games have also become a profitable business. Gaming companies charge a monthly fee to their players, and that give them a constant flow of money (Feng, Brandt & Saha, 2007). MMORPGs are according to Yee (2006) only the beginning of computer games that use the enormous availability aspect that comes with web-based games. The potential to keep thousands of players on just one server, interacting in a single space make MMORPGs viable to be counted as a cultural phenomenon (Calka, 2006). Li, Shi and Wang (2011) state that MMORPGs have become extremely popular, but also that these games are extremely dependent on their subscribers liking of the game. The researchers therefore conclude that these games need to constantly update their content and also add new possibilities for the users so that they do not get bored with the game (Li, Shi & Wang, 2011). Vorderer and Bryant (2006) also explain that game developers constantly struggle with the problem of casual players. Since these players do not have time, or need, to play actively, the game developers need to find features that will attract even these players to join and then come back to their game.

MMORPGs, like many video games, have developed a reputation as "addictive," supposedly leading to isolation from offline friends and family (Calka, 2006). However some researchers claim that MMORPGs actually are designed to be social and that a lot of the time "quests" that needs to be done in the game for the player to advance need to be collaborated with other players (Filiciak, 2003; Calka, 2006; Curry, 2010).

Yee (2006) found that users can derive meaningful relationships and gain real life social experience from these environments:

"Indeed, the stereotype of videos games as trivial past-times or as creators of violent teenage criminals serve only to hinder more fruitful research into how social identity and social relationships are being transformed in these emerging environments." (Yee, 2006, p. 34)

Even though the fact that games does not necessarily mean that players get addicted. Calka (2006) explain that users that have trouble feeling a connection to other communities often turn to virtual worlds to satisfy that need. It is also a risk that players do not want to "miss" anything that goes on in the virtual world, and since the world is persistent. The player's unwillingness to leave might lead to an addiction. The amount of time and energy the users spend in the virtual communities might be hard for others to understand (Calka, 2006). Filiciak (2003) feel that MMORPGs are the most fascinating phenomena to appear in recent years in the field of interactive entertainment. Filiciak also state that MMORPGs are one of the best arguments against those who say that video games alienate players. He means that these games do the opposite. MMORPGs functions best when there is communication among players. The researcher also recognizes the fact that it might be easier for a user to communicate in a virtual world if they have problems interacting in the real world.

A lot of researchers agree on the fact that MMORPGs are more than just games. They are places and communities that allow people to come together and interact with each other (Calka, 2006; Yee, 2006; Bartle, 2004). Calka (2006) even say that it would be inappropriate to say that things that happen in MMORPGs not are "real". Calka's research show that 45 % of all players across both genders and all ages indicated that their in-game friendships are just as important and good (or even better) than their real-life friends. MMORPGs can thus be seen as alternative worlds in which identities are created and developed, where it does not matter where you come from or how much money you have in the bank. It is instead a place where you can create new communities and interactions that may lead to new social contacts. MMORPGs are worlds where people fall in love, or even get married, users choose mayors and start businesses (Yee, 2006).

# 2.3 Players

Bartle (2004) points out that virtual world players are older than console users. Online games also cover a wider age range than PC gamers. As was stated in the introduction, ESA (2011) could show that 72 % of all American households play computer or video games. The report also showed that the difference between female and male players aren't so big, since 58 % of the players are men and thereby 42 % women (Entertainment Software Association, 2011). Bartle (2004) also mention that virtual worlds often attract more women than console or PC games. ESA's report could also show that 29 % of all users were over 50 years old, and for adults, the average time they had played games were 12 years (Entertainment Software Association, 2011). Even though these statistics are important, Bartle (2004) states that for the designers it is more important to know why people play games.

#### 2.3.1 Why Do Players Play MMORPGs?

A lot of studies have tried to understand why players play games. Richard Bartle is seen as the inventor of Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs) in the late 70's. In the early 90's Bartle created categories to categorize players, so called player types. He explained that player types are dependent on what the players do in the game, and what they do depends on what they consider is fun to do. Player types are therefore based on what different players perceive as fun things to do in games. Bartle's four different player types are; Achievers; Explorers; Socializers; and Killers. These player types have different wants and needs when they play the games. After a few years research, Bartle developed a graph to illustrate players' interest, see Fig. 2.1. This graph clarifies what the different player types expect of a game (Bartle, 2004).

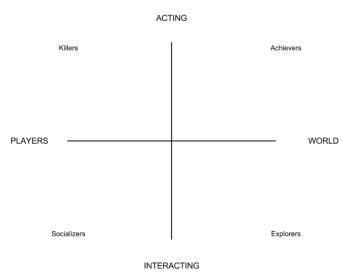


Figure 2.1 - Illustration of Player Interest Graph excerpted from Designing Virtual Worlds by Richard A. Bartle. Copyright © 2004. Used with permission of Pearson Education, Inc. and New Riders.

Bartle clarified his different player types like this:

- Achievers have fun acting on the virtual world
- Explorers have fun interacting with the virtual world
- Socializers have fun interacting with other players
- Killers have fun acting on other players.

Bartle explain that these categories can help game designers to focus on the right crowd for their game, and if they, for example, want to attract more socializers it might be a good idea to allow more interactions among players. (Bartle, 2004).

Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith and Tosca (2008) also discuss differences in why players play the game, they conclude that:

"People also play games because of the emotions they elicit. Multiplayer games in particular can create a whole palette of "social feelings" in the gamer; a player might run the emotional gauntlet during a game, feeling anything from rage to joy to betrayal, all because of the trials and tribulations of his on-screen persona. These emotions – even the negative ones – can offer a powerful incentive to keep playing." (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith & Tosca, 2008, p. 151)

Vorderer and Bryant (2006) state that most games today have been built upon Bartle's four player types, there are also several other studies who use or discuss Bartle's player types (Drennan & Keeffe, 2007; Yee, 2006; Neustaedter & Federovskaya, 2009; Van Looy, Courtois & De Vocht, 2010; Castronova, 2004). However, there is still no correct or simple answer as to why people play games (Vorderer & Bryant, 2006).

#### 2.3.2 Immersion

Immersion in a game is about the game's ability to capture the player and make the player feel as a natural part of the game. Users feel that it is important to be able to feel a connection with his or her character and what the character does (Bartle, 2004). Blinka (2008) demonstrated that emotional feelings and empathy for the character was important for players of all ages. To feel even more connected with their character; a lot of players create a background story for their character, and also an identity (Yee, 2006). There are several factors that can affect a player's immersion in the game and to what extent they will identify with their characters. Some players feel that the ability to create their perfect character, with the exact right characteristics that the player wants the character to have, definitely increase the immersion of the game and also deepens the interaction with other players (Martin, 2005). Bartle (2004) state that immersion in a game does not automatically mean that there is a high risk of abuse. Players may feel that they are in the world without feeling withdrawal when they leave. According to Bartle (2004) players want to be immersed in the game, and game designers want this to happen, as a designer you should therefore not worry about how much immersion to implement, but rather give the players what they want. Bartle also explain that if you want people to stay in the game, it is important that you are investing in social interactions and how to encourage them. When players feel a connection to other players, it becomes harder to leave the game. The more immersive a world is, the more likely it is that players will feel like a part of the world. Immersion, according to Bartle (2004) occurs in different degrees and can therefore be explained in relation to the following terms;

- Players
- Avatar
- Character
- Persona

A user sitting by the computer, interacting with the virtual world, belongs to the first category, players. The player controls an object in the game which is, to some extent, associated with him or her. Many players do not feel any relationship with the objects that represent them in the game. If this is the case the player is not immersed in the game. The next stage of immersion is when a user sees the object as some kind of representation of them. An avatar can be seen as a puppet that the player controls. A third person-view is often used by this type of players. For example; "Frodo will win this battle." However, avatars are mostly used as a way for the user to get something done within the game. The third step is the "character". This level of immersion occurs when the player stops thinking about his or her character as an object but rather as a representative of themselves. "The character" is the category where most MMORPG players categorize themselves. A character is an extension of the player himself, a brand new personality that goes into a new world. Players can have many different characters with different personalities, but all are treated as friends. Characters are often referred to as names, but many still say "I will win this fight," even if they do mean that "Frodo will win this battle." Bartle further explain that avatars are dolls, characters are simulations, but none of them are people. The deepest level of immersion is what makes virtual worlds something completely different than anything we have ever seen before, personas. A persona is when a player feels as if s/he is the one that is in the virtual world. All differences between player and object are gone, and the player is the character. A lot of people often have difficulties understanding the deepest level of immersion, since there is nothing similar in this world. Bartle does however point out that these levels of immersion are rather technical and most people mean the same thing when they are talking about the avatar and character. Immersion is according to Bartle a very important part of the gaming industry. If the player does not feel immersed within the game they will have a hard time creating an identity for their character, and without immersion there will be a gap between reality and games. If the game is immersive however, that gap will be filled and players can concentrate on what they want to do and who they want to become. (Bartle 2004).

#### 2.4 Avatars

The graphical avatars, or characters, that exist in today's virtual worlds are representations of the user that is playing the character. These avatars originate from text-based MUDs (Multi User Dungeons) where players wrote down the description of the avatar so that others could "see" what they looked like. These descriptions could range from a few sentences to several paragraphs (Vorderer & Bryant, 2006). In virtual worlds today users more often create a graphic, visual projection of themselves to be able to communicate and interact with others (Castronova, 2004; Jang, Kim &Ryu, 2010; Ducheneaut et al, 2009). Vasalou et al (2008) states that the creation of avatars has increased rapidly, but they are not surprised about this fact, since an avatar can give the user more freedom of expression (Vasalou et al, 2008). Taylor (2006) says that avatars are extremely important for the sense of presence and immersion in virtual worlds:

"People move their avatars through virtual spaces, using them to interact with each other and with the world. Avatars are crucial in producing a sense of presence, of "worldness." Just as corporeal bodies are integral to our personal and social lives, avatars are central to our experience in digital environments." (Taylor, 2006, p. 117)

Turkle (1995) and Taylor (2006) have both done remarkable ethnographic studies of users and their avatars and they mean that avatars can also be used as objects for solving real life issues. This could be that the user tries out a new family role to better understand or learn about others situation. Trying out a different gender might also help a user to understand a real life issue better. (Turkle, 1995; Taylor, 2006)

#### 2.4.1 Identity Creation

Fullerton, Swain and Hoffman (2004) point out that we, as human beings have a desire to express ourselves. Be it through art, poetry, or by creating a character in a game. Giving the players opportunities to express themselves can therefore be crucial for whether a game will be successful or not (Fullerton, Swain & Hoffman, 2004). Linderoth (2007) also recognize the need for humans to express themselves, but also to be able to explore themselves and perhaps create an entirely new identity. Linderoth use a quote from the social virtual world Second Life (SL), when they announced the launch of their world:

"What if there was a world...
where you could be anyone...
do anything...
and experience total freedom?
That world exists." (Linderoth, 2007 s.69)

Suh, Kim and Suh (2011) define avatar identification as "the cognitive connection between an individual and an avatar, with the result being that the individual regards the avatar as a substitute self or has such an illusion." (Suh, Kim & Suh, 2011, p.715). Neustaedter and Federovskaya (2009) say that users present different types of identities in virtual worlds. Some users want their online identity to be similar to their own. Some create completely different identities from that of their "real life" identity. Others might want to create a better self to be their representative in the virtual world. There are different ways of explaining the identification. It is conceivable that the identification that a player makes with his character could be a sort of experimentation of how it would feel to "be" the character. For example, the player might, for a while, want to become a celebrity, a gangster or why not a supermodel. By allowing ourselves to experiment with different identities we can expand our horizons both emotional and socially (Koivisto, 2003; Van Looy, Courtois & De Vocht, 2010). Wolf and Perron (2003) explain the difference between the real identity and the one we create online:

"In any case, it would appear that our virtual "self" is closer to our images of ourselves than the one we present, which is governed by requirements and expectations of "real" life. The fact that one's identity is often the product of society ceases to limit us here, because there are not many transgressive whims which could not come true on the internet. For example, in reality I can't shoot my boss when he or she puts me off, but in games I can." (Wolf &Perron, 2003, p.92-93)

By being able to change your character's appearance you will open a whole new world of opportunity, the player can create a unique avatar with a unique identity (Li, 2006). According to Martin (2005) it is a general consensus among researchers that virtual worlds allow players the possibilities to explore, create and play with multiple identities. Bartle (2004) give his view on identity creation in virtual worlds by saying:

"Virtual worlds enable you to find out who you are by letting you be who you want to be." (Bartle, 2004, p.161). People show their identity through their actions and interactions, both in real life but also in the virtual world (Neustaedter & Fedorovskaya, 2009). Feeling the need to experience romance, fun, and adventure etcetera are strong forces for a person. A lot of people dream of being something they are not. As a designer, one should note that players must be allowed to live out those passions. If so only for a small amount of time, it is this opportunity that can really have the possibility to capture the player (Fullerton, Swain & Hoffman, 2004). Neustaedter and Federovskaya (2009) found four different types of identities when they investigated the different ways people created and evolved their avatar. They found that users want to create a character that can match the desired virtual identity, and these types of identities were;

- Realists;
- Ideals:
- Fantasies:
- Role-players

These identity types all have different preferences for how similar their character is in comprising with the real life user, thus how realistic their avatar looks. Neustaedter and Federovskaya (2009) also state that the appearance of an avatar in virtual worlds often can be altered to the users liking and that "it is possible to masquerade as one's ideal-looking self, or "try out" attributes of others. This permits unique opportunities for identity presentation" (Neustaedter & Fedorovskaya, 2009, p.183). Martin (2005) points out the importance of multiple choices in the character creation process for the players to be able to create an identity for their avatar. Martin claims that when a player has too few choices to customize their character they will feel a disconnection from the avatar and the game itself. Martin says that the players need to feel that they have the opportunity to create their ideal avatar, so they can create a unique identity for it.

Wasko et al (2011) have shown a curiosity about the relationship between avatar and user. They want to know how the user views his or her character, is it as a created object or thing, as an extension of self, or possibly as a child or offspring? (Wasko et al, 2011). Vasalou et al (2008) say that the offline self is merged together with the online self in virtual worlds and this leads to a more honest construction of both the identity and self-representation online (Vasalou et al, 2008). Suh, Kim and Suh (2011) could show that the more alike the avatar is to its creator (the player), the more likely it is that the player will gain positive attitudes, such as affection, connection, and passion, toward the avatar. (Suh, Kim & Suh, 2011) These researchers could also show that there were different factors that determined whether or not an avatar would look like the user, they state:

"For instance, when people wanted to be totally different as a way to escape their daily life, they preferred an avatar with an appearance that projected a certain personality, mood, or role (ideal self-concept). On the other hand, people who like their role playing to be exactly like their real life are likely to use an avatar that resembles them so as to transfer their real-world identity into a virtual world." (Suh, Kim & Suh, 2011, p.725)

Nowak et al. (2008) noticed in their research that it also mattered what kind of game the avatar would enter. In non-competitive games users more often made the avatar much more like themselves than in competitive games. The researchers also concluded that users who were more satisfied with their real life more often made the avatar as a self-image than those with low satisfaction for their real life, who instead tried to make idealized avatars (Nowak et al, 2008).

#### 2.4.2 Character Customization

There is a wide range of possibilities when it comes to character creation in different virtual worlds. In some games the character can only choose from a couple of premade features for the character, whilst in other games the user can change every part of the avatar, right down to exactly the right skin tone (Ducheneaut et al, 2009; Tychsen & Canossa, 2008). Isbister (2006) state that people in the real world will automatically interpret signals from another person as soon as they see them. The same happens in virtual worlds, and especially in MMORPGs. By understanding how and why the social relationship works in a game, designers can get help to make important choices for the elements in a character creation process (Isbister, 2006). Wasko et al (2011) states that in our real world people spend money on customizing themselves and the same is true when it comes to customizing one's avatar (Wasko et al, 2011). The character's appearance is also a big part of their identity. Players enjoy creating characters that can be recognized even in large crowds. It can sometimes be a message of how the player is in his or her real life in how s/he create a character (Koivisto 2003; Ducheneaut et al, 2009; Turkay & Adinolf, 2010). Vasalou et al. (2008) concluded in their study on avatars in social media that it was very important for the players to have a lot of different choices to be able to create the character that they wanted (Vasalou et al. 2008). One of the researchers who came to the same conclusion in her study about characters appearance is Jennifer Martin (2005). Martin conducts her study in the MMORPG World of Warcraft (WoW). Martin means that WoW players are limited in the amount of choices made in the character creation process, since all of the choices have been pre-coded into the game. She compares this to text-based games, where the player has a lot more options to introduce themselves in detailed forms. Martin found that players were very disappointed with Wow's lack of choices in the character creation interface. She says that this will make it harder for the player to create an identity for their character, and therefore the game might not be as enjoyable as it could have been. Martin argues that:

"Players feel that being able to create exactly the avatar they want greatly enhances their sense of identity, immersion, and involvement in the world, and allows them to play with an identity instead of simply having a character." (Martin, 2005, p. 3)

Martin also found that there are two identification issues involved in the character creation process. The first is for the player to be able to create the desired avatar. The other issue focuses on being able to create an individual uniqueness for one's character. When there are not lots of choices in the character creation matrix, a great deal of the characters will look the same. This makes it hard for a player to feel unique and create a special bond to their character (Martin, 2005). Another study that identifies the importance of character customization is Ducheneaut et al (2009). In their study the researchers try to pick out which factors are important to character customization, by using the existing avatar customization in the game the user

played. The researchers then compared the results with age, gender and time spent customizing. They concluded that the most important feature was the hair, and that this could be due to the fact that hair, both in real life as well as in virtual worlds, is visible from a far distance or that hair is a way to express one's opinion (Ducheneaut et al., 2009). The same conclusion, that hair was the most important feature, was also shown by Turkay (2011). Ducheneaut et al (2009) also concluded, in line with Martin (2005), that a lot of players lack options for making their character unique (Ducheneaut et al., 2009). Guitton (2010) also concur with the importance of character customization and identity creation in his study on the importance of the character's name in virtual worlds. Guitton state that: "The process of creating a character with its own personality is clearly one of the key of the success of MMORPGs in particular, and immersion in virtual spaces in general" (Guitton, 2010, p. 1775). Turkay and Adinolf (2010) study on the effects that customization can have on user motivation, engagement and enjoyment showed just how important the character creation process really is to the game developers. The researchers conclude their study with the following statement:

"One of the core principles of design is: "Know your audience." In the case of user control options, this can't be stressed enough. People feel so strongly about various types of customization that failing to provide support for them can greatly decrease their enjoyment of your product. If players' enjoyment drops enough, they'll stop playing. "(Turkay & Adinolf, 2010, p. 1843)

According to Bartle (2004) it is a small cost for the virtual world to let the avatars have different hair styles, hair colors, clothing etcetera. These options can however be extremely important to the users, so that they can show off their personality. Bartle mean that this can say a lot about a person, and how a person views themselves. He also mentions that it could be a good idea for a designer to let the players have two different options; one where the player can randomize (see Appendix 1) their character; and one where the player is able to customize their character in detail (Bartle, 2004). Ducheneaut et al. (2009) is on the same line as Bartle. They say that it might become necessary for a game to provide different opportunities for the players to customize their avatar. These researchers also want the players to have the choice of changing their character in detail, or use pre-made features (see Appendix 1) (Ducheneaut et al, 2009). Turkay and Adinolf (2010) could see that out of the participants in their study 66 % said that customization affected their enjoyment of the game to a moderate or large degree. They could also show that being unique was one of the driving reasons for users to customize their character (Turkay & Adinolf, 2010). 25 % of Turkay and Adinolf (2010) study said that since the avatar is their representation in the game they want to have control over that representation. The users see the time they put in to this as an emotional investment and therefore they want more active control (Turkay & Adinolf, 2010). Neustaedter and Fedorovskaya (2009) also say that it is crucial for designers to understand that the different choices they make in deciding the customization choices, will affect a player in many different ways. Neustaedter and Federovskaya conclude by saying that appearance in virtual worlds is very important for identity creation. However they also acknowledge the fact that not every player has the same need for changing their appearance.

#### 2.5 Gender Performance

The word "gender" and its meaning have been discussed a lot by different researchers. This study will originate from the theories and ideas of Judith Butler. A small background on Butler's theories will first be presented, after this previous research about the performance of gender in MMORPGs will be explained.

#### 2.5.1 Gendering Genders

In Butler's theories about gender the focus is on both gender and sexuality, and that this fact can be hard to separate when gender is explored. However in this thesis Butler's understandings will be explained without focusing on sexuality, since this requires more background research than what is in focus of my thesis. Butler's ideas mainly focus on the fact that nobody is a woman or a man but they are all created through performances. You are not "being" a gender; you are "doing" a gender (Rosenberg, 2005). Butler argues that these performances are not something that happens once; instead it is an iterative process of different actions (Rosenberg, 2005; Butler, 1993). Butler argues:

"If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not "do" one's gender alone. One is always "doing" with or for another, even if that other is only imaginary." (Butler, 2004, p.1)

Butler explains that the gender is more of a norm. With this she argues that gender is not a rule or a law, but rather something that is created by a range of activities in the society. A norm is something that has become normalized by the majority of people. Individuals who do not follow these – sometimes to them unknown – norms, will often be looked upon as peculiar people. Femininity and masculinity have been created into a norm, similar to a lot of people, and anything that strays from these "beliefs" will be considered weird and bizarre. (Butler, 2004). Lina Eklund (2011) conducted a study of female gamers, on how they performed and created identities within the MMORPG World of Warcraft. Eklund also originated from Butler's theories about gender performance. Eklund (2011) could see that:

"The game is in some respects gender neutral, sex in itself does not have an effect on anything. Female warriors are as fierce as male ones, sex is purely visual. The women, as Butler would say, stylize their online bodies in conscious performances of gender identity. Even though gender here is a choice, it appears to be a limited one." (Eklund, 2011, p.330)

From her study, Eklund could also conclude that the female players wanted to play female characters, but that this was to be done on their own terms. They wanted to create powerful female characters. Female players in Yee's (2008) study declared that they were tired of the way female characters were projected within the game. One of the participants of the study said that every time she saw the wrong proportioned breasts of her character she was reminded that the game was made for 13-year old boys or men who still think like them. Yee explain that this factor only increases the objective look on females as spectacles rather than players (Yee, 2008).

Another thing that both Yee (2008) and Eklund (2011) could see in their studies were that the female players often did not want to reveal their true gender because other players would think they were incompetent and also because of the risk of being propositioned by every male player.

#### 2.5.2 Gender Issues

Following Butler's theories, one should focus on how males and female players come into existence. A lot of studies that have been done in virtual worlds have involved gender differences, or gender issues (Ducheneaut et al, 2009; Taylor, 2006; Turkay & Adinolf, 2010; Grosman, 2010; Rosier, 2011). Taylor (2006) has questioned previous research which showed that women mostly are interested in the identity creation and social aspects of the game. Taylor says that even though some women of course enjoy these parts of the game, she thinks that it is clear that women play games for multiple reasons, just as men do (Taylor, 2006). Yee (2008) is on the same track as Taylor. He could conclude that the motivations as to why players play games did not differ much at all between the genders. "Men like to chat, gossip, and talk just as much in these games as women do." (Yee, 2008, p.91). Yee (2008) found that even though there are a lot more men playing MMOs then women, the two genders spend about the same amount of time playing. He also noticed that female players were often older than male players. Yee says that this could have to do with in what age they were introduced to these games. Eklund (2011) also discusses women's entry into the games. She states that it is often the woman's partner who introduces her to the game, and the game therefore gets introduced a lot later in the woman's life than in the man's life. The conclusion of Yee's research was that women and men often play games for the same reasons and the differences lies more in the age than gender (Yee, 2008). When it comes to gender issues in character customization, much less studies have been made.

However Ducheneaut et al (2009) made a big survey about avatar creation, which included demographics. From that survey they could draw some conclusions of different players' preferences in character creation:

"Later on we also saw that age and gender significantly impact the way users create and customize their avatars: males want to stand out, females idealize more, older users create younger-looking avatars, etc. Therefore, it is interesting to ask whether or not each world offers an avatar design system that reflects the needs of its unique population." (Ducheneaut et al., 2009, p.1158).

Turkay and Adinolf (2010) could also see that for female players character customization had a higher impact than it did on the male users. According to these researchers females enjoy customizing the appearance of their avatar more than the men. The researchers could clearly see that character appearance were the favorite customization for female users. Turkay (2011) could see differences in specific body parts. She found that women were more interested in customizing the head and face, while men focused more on the characters height and weight (Turkay, 2011).

#### 2.5.3 Choosing a Gender for Your Character

Virtual worlds offer a playground in regards to gender. When a user enters the character creation screen they have a number of options to choose from. One of these is what gender they want to present through their avatar. Do they want to show their "real" gender or try another one (Rosier, 2011). Ducheneaut et al (2009) found that "gender swapping" (see Appendix 1) is rather common within games. A large amount of their participants played a different gender then their own. They could also see that it was mostly men who gender swapped, even though it did occur among the females as well (Ducheneaut et al., 2009). MacCallum-Stewart even gave the acronym MMORPG a whole new meaning when she used: "MMORPG: Many Men Online Role Playing Girls" in her research (MacCallum-Stewart, 2008, p. 32). In Grosman's (2010) study however, the results showed that there was not a huge different in who gender swapped, male or female. The most significant difference was instead the amount of time that was spent on playing the other gender. Grosman found that men gender swapped for over 80 % of their time online. In Eklund's (2011) study on female gamers she noticed that all her participants chose to play female characters. She stated that the users gave many different reasons for this choice. The most obvious reason was still that it was because they were women and therefore needed female characters to be able to identify with their avatar.

MacCallum-Stewart (2008) made an extensive research on gender swapping among MMORPG players. One of the conclusions that could be drawn from this study was that a lot of the players chose to play female players because they looked more beautiful, and they wanted something pretty to look at while they were playing. It was also a fact that a lot of players wanted to play not only an attractive but also a strong female character. MacCallum-Stewart also saw that the discussion about female characters being more attractive was debated constantly on forums, in guild chats as well as in Role Playing events. MacCallum-Stewart could also see a difference in maturity among players and their avatars. The skinnier and bigger breasts the character had, the bigger the chance was that it was an immature player controlling that character. More mature players chose more curves and an older appearance. One of the most interesting things that could be shown in MacCallum-Stewart's research was that contrary to what many have said before about gender swapping, the players found the choosing of gender to be just another choice for their character, just as race or class (see Appendix 1). According to the researcher this shows that players in some way have normalized the importance of gender:

"Overall, a clear pattern emerges – players are continuously seeking to normalise the playing of avatars of the opposite gender, but at the same time they genuinely see it as a standard practise. Male players who adopt female avatars are not seen as usual or freakish within what can be an extremely male orientated environment. Players are certainly not laughed at or shunned for gender-bending; in fact it is seen as perfectly normal behaviour within the context of the game" (MacCallum-Stewart, 2008, p.37)

As was shown in the previous part by Yee (2008) and Eklund (2011) female players are treated differently from male players. This can also be true for the female character, no matter the gender of the player controlling the avatar. Female characters are according to MacCallum-Stewart (2008) given more help within the game, they are also allowed to make in-game mistakes more frequently than male characters (MacCallum-Stewart, 2008).

## 2.6 The Use of the Conceptual Framework

The virtual worlds and the MMORPGs were explained in this chapter to give a background of the research area. By adding a subsection with who plays MMORPGs and why these users play I will to be able to connect the rest of the conceptual framwork sections together. As was stated in the introduction, game developers need their players to stay in the game. This is where they make the most profit, on the monthly fee. To be able to keep the players, the game needs to be more than a game. It needs to have the ability to attract and immerse players in to the game, so they will want to return over and over again. If the player gets immersed in the game, it will be easier to create an identity for the character. In the same process, by creating the identity; the immersion will grow deeper as well. To make sure that this immersion and identification with the character emerges from the beginning of the game, the character creation process is a vital part of the player's journey into the world and into its character. So by being able to create a luring character creation interface the game developers can better assure that their players will stay in their game. The gender preferences among both male and female players as well as between male and female characters have been stressed in recent research. Therefore it feels important to add this aspect to the study as well. To be able to understand these parts of the experienced players the research will focus on an intimate qualitative research. I will then use the theories on player types, identities and immersion levels to categorize the players to gain a better overview of which factors that can be connected to which features. And thereby understanding the aim of this research; which underlying factors that determine which features are of most significance to MMORPG players.

# 3. Methodology and Methods

This chapter will first introduce what type of research approach that was chosen for this study. An explanation of the participants and the games in question will then be presented. A step by step description of how the empirical material was gathered and analyzed will be offered and finally there will be a part about validity, reliability and ethical considerations of this research.

# 3.1 Methodological Approach

The main aim of this research was to gain a better understanding of which factors that determine which features of the character creation interface that is most important to players. To be able to do this, I used a qualitative approach. Creswell (2009) as well as Myers and Avison (2002) explain that all individuals have different ways of looking at things, and for the researcher to be able to understand this, the research must go deeper and try to really interpret and understand the users (Creswell, 2009; Myers & Avison, 2002). By making the choice to not use a quantitative study, it was hard to make generalizations of the findings. However, as stated above, this was not the main aim of the research. Instead the study sought to understand the individual and draw conclusions from the users' answers and behaviors. Yanow (2006) states that human beings cannot be studied in the same way as objects:

"because of an essential difference between them: Unlike (to the best of our present knowledge) rocks, animals, and atoms, humans make, communicate, interpret, share, and contest meaning. We act; we have intentions about our actions; we interpret others' actions; we (attempt to) make sense of the world: We are meaningmaking creatures." (Yanow, 2006, p.9)

Yanow (2006) explains that interpretive researchers are trying to make sense of a specific situation in a specific context. The interpretive researcher also reflects on their own research by acknowledging the researcher's own position and worldview Therefore an interpretive approach to the research did not only give a broader view on the participants' actions, but also the thoughts and reflections from the researcher. Therefore the approach suited this study well. Yanow (2006) also clarifies that interpretive researchers pursues the situation as it is understood by its participants. Therefore the voices of the users were valued more than those of the researcher's. (Yanow, 2006) In this research the participants were to be the leading force. This meant that the information that was acquired in the data collection affected the analysis as well as the theory. Creswell (2009) also discuss the importance of participants in a qualitative study:

"One of the chief reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory. This usually means that not much has been written about the topic or the population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to participants and build an understanding based on what is heard." (Creswell, 2009, p.26)

# 3.2 Participants and the Selected Games

Five people participated in this study. The five participants were manually selected based on the subjects' ability to communicate nuanced and give high quality answers to the topics of this work. Four of the participants were experienced MMORPG players; one additional user was chosen who had never played a MMORPG before. By making that choice a part of the study would be able to make comparisons between the experienced players and the new player. In conclusion five different users were observed and interviewed individually. The choice of having so few users was due partly to the fact that this study was time limited; but also because I wanted to be able to have time to get to know the users so I could gain their trust and better be able to read them, and thereby better and more correctly interpret what I saw and heard. The users can be seen below:

- User 1; Anthon, Male, experienced player
- User 2; Erik, Male, experienced player
- User 3; Lars, Male, experienced player
- User 4; Christina, Female, experienced player
- User 5; Eva, Female, inexperienced player

Some of the participants of this study were already familiar with the researcher, and this might affect their responses. However, since a part of this research was getting to know the users and making them feel at ease, this fact only made that job easier. To understand the impact of the character creation process four games were chosen. Three of these were completely new to the players. This was important so that the focus would be on the game in question, and more specifically the character creation interface of the particular game, not on the gaming experience. To be able to do a better analysis of their actions, World of Warcraft, which all players had used, was chosen as an opposite to the completely new games. The MMORPGs that were used were:

- World of Warcraft (WoW) This is the biggest MMORPG in the world today with over 12 million players (Blizzard, 2010). However, WoW has been accused of not having as much customizing choices as other MMORPGs.
- City of Heroes (CoH) This game was chosen because it has a different theme; it is based on superheroes. CoH is also known for its numerous choices in the character creation process and was therefore an interesting addition to the research.
- Star Trek Online (STO) was chosen since the player will control both the avatar as well as a spaceship, also the customization possibilities are quite high within this game.
- Dungeons and Dragons Online (DDO) The original Dungeons and dragons were somewhat of an ancestor to today's online roleplaying games, it therefore felt important to add this game.

## 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The main data collection method was long interviews together with observations of the participants while they made their avatars. The interviews were conducted in March 2012. The participants were first given information about the thesis, as can be seen in Appendix 2. After this they were given a consent form, as is shown in Appendix 3. During the observation, the user had to explain what he or she was thinking, and also explain the choices they made. The participant went through the same procedure in all four MMORPGs, which means that the user all together created four avatars in four different games. After the interview the participant were asked to either try out all of the characters, or pick one or two that they wanted to continue to play with. The important thing was that they made a choice that later could be discussed. After the interview I myself evaluated the same games, as an expert user. This means that I created a number of characters and evaluated the choices deeper. A summary of this evaluation can be seen in Appendix 4. A follow-up gathering was then held to discuss the choices of the participants. The data was then compared and analyzed. All of the interviews were also recorded and transcribed.

The data collection process followed McCracken's (1988) four steps of inquiry for the long interview. McCracken explains that the long interview is one of the most powerful methods in qualitative research: "The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves." (McCracken, 1988, p.9). McCracken explain that the long interview method consists of four steps that will help guide the researcher through the data collection and analysis.

#### Step I

In step one the researcher begins with an extensive review of the literature. McCracken mean that some qualitative researchers have argued that this part of the research should be ignored because it makes the researcher have preconceptions about the research. McCracken does however not agree with these researchers and says that this step is crucial for the continued study. It allows the researcher to define problems and assess data. The literature review is also the foundation for the questionnaire that will be created.

#### Step II

In the second step of this approach McCracken explain that the researcher needs to review the cultural categories. This means that the investigator should do a detailed estimation of the own experiences with the topic for the study. The researcher needs to examine her own associations, incidents and assumptions around the topic in question. McCracken explain that there are three purposes for this cultural review; it is a preparation for the questionnaire, since this can involve thoughts and assumptions that previous literature have not considered, these conclusions will then be put in categories and relationships to find out how the questions can be answered in the best possible way; the second reason for a cultural review is that the researcher in a way listens to herself to better be able to listen and understand the participants; The third purpose is so that the investigator will be able to distance herself from her own assumptions, and become more objective.

#### Step III

The questionnaire was now created. McCracken explain that the construction of the questionnaire starts with establishing a set of biographical questions, which will "open" the interview. Qualitative questions are not easy to form, however McCracken gives a number of examples for approaches. The researcher has to make it possible for the participants to "tell their story in their own terms", therefore the questions need to be unobtrusive and put in a way that is not directive in any way (McCracken, 1998). The questionnaire that was created for this study can be found in Appendix 5.

After the questionnaire was created, participants were picked out and the interviews begun. McCracken (1988) point out the importance of making the participants feel at ease during the interview. To accomplish this, all interviews were conducted in the user's own home, by their personal computer. The participants were, as McCracken (1988) also explained, allowed to "go" wherever they wanted, even though the questionnaire helped to lead the respondent in to the current topic eventually. One problem occurred here with the youngest participant, Anthon. He explained that he had recently stopped playing World of Warcraft all together because he felt that the effects of the game had started to affect his real life. I therefore decided that we should only speak about WoW, and thereby not force the interviewee to anything.

#### Step IV

The final stage involved the analytic part of the inquiry. McCracken explain a scheme that suggest some particular strategies for the analysis, he does however press that how exactly the analysis will be done is impossible to say from case to case. The first thing that was done was the transcriptions of all the interviews. According to McCracken this should not be performed by the researcher, however in this case there was no other choice but to transcribe the material myself. After this the texts were analyzed for common themes and unanswered questions.

After this I went back to stage three to be able to establish how the character creation process will affect users' gameplay. A new questionnaire (Appendix 6) was made and all participants got invited to the researcher's home for a follow-up and shared discussion of the interviews and new questions. Three of the five participants were able to make it at the same time, and the two remaining users were later interviewed separately. The follow-ups were conducted in March and April 2012. The new information was then also transcribed, and a new analyze started. The first step was to analyze the interviews from the first meetings separately, to see what the different users thought was important and liked or disliked about the character creation of the different games. These summaries were then used to compare the users with each other to be able to draw conclusions about character creations. Here categories, relationships and assumptions were picked out from the material. After this stage the analysis of the follow-up meetings were compared with each other and the previous interviews to see similarities and differences among the users. The empirical material was then compared with my own analysis and experiences from playing MMORPGs, according to McCracken's second step. Finally this material were analyzed and compared with previous researchers work, and a result and discussion could be written.

# 3.4 Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2009) explain that validity does not have the same significance in qualitative research as it does in quantitative research. Stenbacka (2001) even said that the entire concept of reliability is irrelevant for qualitative research. Golafshani (2003) did a comprising of different researchers approach to validity and reliability in qualitative studies and found that the meaning of the words validity and reliability must be reevaluated to better suit qualitative research. The researcher also explains that because of the confusion around these two concepts a lot of researchers have come up with their own terms and concepts for measuring the validity and reliability in qualitative research. For example Creswell (2009) state that validity can be measured somewhat different in qualitative research, instead of measuring reliability and generalizability the validity will be determined by how accurate the findings are from the standpoint of the researcher, participant or reader:

"Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while Qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects." (Creswell, 2009, p.190)

Creswell (2009) continue to explain that this issue has been debated a lot through the years and words such as "trustworthiness," "authenticity," and "credibility" has been used instead of validity. Schwartz-Shea (2006) state that it is the researcher's responsibility to give a sufficient "thick description" of the investigation, this is done so that others can assess if it is possible to redo the study in another setting. With this as a background, I will still use the terms Validity and Reliability. However, they will not be measured in a quantitative sense, but rather how trustworthy, dependable, credible and transferable the research findings are. There will also be more focus on validity, since this, according to Creswell (2009) and Stenbacka (2001) is the most important in qualitative research.

#### 3.4.1 Validity

Some researchers choose to divide Validity into internal and external Validity (Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Creswell, 2009), therefore I will follow this trend and do so here as well.

#### Internal Validity

Internal validity is about how much conformity that can be seen between the researcher's observation and the previous theory that was displayed. To accomplish this, I have tried to give as "thick descriptions" as possible to the findings of the interviews and observations. This was made to help increase the readers understanding of the setting. The interviews were also followed up and analyzed again, which also shows that the results have a high internal validity. Another concern was that the users would display continuity in the patterns and themes for the research. This issue raised the validity of this research a great deal, since there were a lot of things that were similar among the participants answers, and that made it easier to connect the findings of this study to the previous theory section. So in conclusion, I feel that this study showed a high count on internal validity.

#### External Validity

External validity should explain to the reader about the quality of the empirical findings. The participants were made to feel at ease in their own home, by their own computer. I also spent time getting to know the users, so that they would be more comfortable opening up to me. The interviews, not including the initial socializing, all lasted between 2 and 3,5 hours. The participants were very open, and had a lot of previous stories to tell about their character creation process. During the follow-up gathering, which lasted for about 1,5 hours (not including introductions and socializing). I felt that the participants were not afraid to speak their mind, and a lot of discussions were had between the users. I therefore conclude that the empirical findings possess a high amount of external validity as well. Of course it is hard to say if the findings of only five participants can be generalized to the rest of the gaming community. However in my selection of participants I tried to get a wide range in ages, gender and also player types. All and all I find the external validity of this research to be very high. It is also important to point out that since this is a qualitative study, the interpretations that were made were affected by the researchers own worldview and experiences. This is also according to Creswell (2009) impossible to get away from in a qualitative study. McCracken (1988) also states that in the long interview this is almost a necessity, since step two will include a cultural analysis of the researcher.

#### 3.4.2 Reliability

The main thing that is to be answered about reliability is whether or not the research in question can be trusted. It would be hard to repeat the study again, as it is with all qualitative studies. Every person is unique, and people also change over time. So even if the same participants were to be asked again, the same answers might not be given. However a few things can be measured; the recording of the interviews were made with a smartphone, in which a program called "tape a talk", an application that is available for smartphones, was used. The recording was successful, and everything was easy to hear. These recordings have also been saved and protected. The researchers own ability to perform interviews can also be questioned. Since I have done qualitative research before, which involved interviews, I find myself able to perform good interviews with the help of theory. The one thing that might be questionable is how much I affected the inexperienced player in her choices. This respondent's English was not as evolved as the other users and therefore a lot of translation was made by me. The explanation of the different classes and abilities of the games were also my own interpretations and might therefore have been colored in rendering. However, since this part did not feel important to the respondent I still feel that this was a minor reliability on my part. Since the interviews were conducted in Swedish, all quotes have been translated by the researcher. However, to avoid misinterpretations of the Swedish quotes, the original citations will be added in Appendix 7.

#### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

There are some important ethical considerations that must be reflected on in this study. Creswell (2009) discuss the importance of protecting one's participants. They need to feel that they can trust the researcher. One way of earning the users trust can, according to Creswell (2009), be to fully specify the purpose and aim of the study. This is done so that the participants always feel that the research is legit and safe. As was written about in the data collection and analysis part, an introduction to the study was given orally along with a consent form, to show the authenticity of this research. There were not any minors involved in this research, so therefore there was no need for any consent form from other people than the participants themselves.

It was important to me that the participants felt at ease, so they would open up and be honest in their answers. I also ensured them that they could not do anything wrong. I feel that this is important to inform the users about, so that no one feels that they have to pick the right character for example to make me happy, or to be perceived as a good participant. Since the research took place in the participant's natural setting, I was clear on the fact that I had been invited to their home and would therefore respect their rules. Even though I was observing the players throughout the interview, the users were always aware of my presence and my interest in observing them. Another important part of this study was my self-reflection, seeing how much of the results that was based on my interpretations of the participants and the situations, I had to keep reflecting on my own position in the research. To help with this I gathered a large literature background to support my reflections and thoughts. One big ethical question in researching games generally is the immersion and addiction issue. Bartle (2004) discuss addiction and says that:

"Virtual world designers are creating something that they know is addictive. Addiction is a bad thing, because of its personal and social costs. At a moral level, are designers of virtual worlds little better than drug pushers?" (Bartle, 2004, p. 682)

However, Bartle later conclude that addiction is not that easy to make sense of. He means that it becomes an ethical question when designers deliberately ads features to the game that they know are addictive. So the question of this research was if I might be doing something wrong by introducing users to new MMORPGs, which they could later be addicted to if they keep playing them. Since I was using experienced players I felt that this eased the ethical question somewhat. An experienced player has probably felt much immersed in a game at some time previously, and knows how to handle it. However I did not take in account that one of the participants had already experienced a part of addiction. I do however feel that I did the right thing by letting him stay in the study and just skipping that game. I also chose to use one inexperienced player, which might find the games quite thrilling. We did however have a conversation before the interview about the risk of addiction.

# 4. Empirical findings - the Interviews

This chapter will present and analyze the results from the interviews. The results will be categorized in the most important factors that determine which features the players find significant; motivation; immersion; identification; and gender. I will use these factors to categorize the players to gain a better overview of which factors that can be connected to which features. And thereby understanding the aim of this research; which underlying factors that determine which features are of most significance to MMORPG players.

#### 4.1 The Motivation Factor

To be able to understand the different motivations of the participants, Bartle's (2004) player types were used as a base to be able to analyze the players' wants and needs. Bartle state that there are four main groups of players; Killers, Achievers, Explorers and Socializers. To be able to understand which kind of category the different players belonged to. The question; "What do you do when you play, what do you consider to be fun within the game?" was asked. This question originated from Bartle's statement that the player types depend on what the players do and consider to be fun when they play. Lars found most aspects of MMORPGs to be appealing. However he was not interested in PvP (Player versus Player) where he had to kill other players. The longer the interview went on it became more clear that the main thing Lars enjoyed was however RP (Role playing) and exploring the world. The proper category for this user would then be "Socializer" and "Explorer". However, since he also enjoyed to do quests and had a number of high leveled characters, he also fit in the "Achievers" category. Erik was similar to Lars in his answers. He also enjoyed socializing with others and exploring the world, and as Lars he enjoyed leveling as well. Erik therefore end up in the same categories; "Socializers"; "Achievers"; and "Explorers". Anthon was currently completely set on playing PvP. This comes down to the fact that he enjoys killing other players. He also said that he played to become a better player, and while he was playing World of Warcraft he often power leveled (see Appendix 1), which meant that he only wanted to gain higher levels as fast as possible. Anthon therefore falls mainly under the category "Killers" but also a part within "Achievers". Christina answered the question with "I'd say kill as much as possible!" She only became annoyed when other players came in her way. She only wanted to focus on gaining levels on her character. The right category for Christina then seems to be "Achievers". Since it later came up that she enjoyed looking around or just picking flowers, I want to place a piece of her enjoyment in the "Explorers" category as well. Since this was the first time Eva ever created a character in a MMORPG, she was instead asked; "what do you think you would enjoy doing in the game?" The different suggestions from Bartle's player types were then explained to her. She definitely did not want to kill other players. She did not believe she was enough competitive to focus on gaining levels. However socializing with other players and exploring the world sounded interesting to her. She was therefore categorized as "Explorer" and "Socializer". To better show this summary visually; a figure was made to demonstrate where in Bartle's graph the participants fit in. The image is shown in Figure 4.1

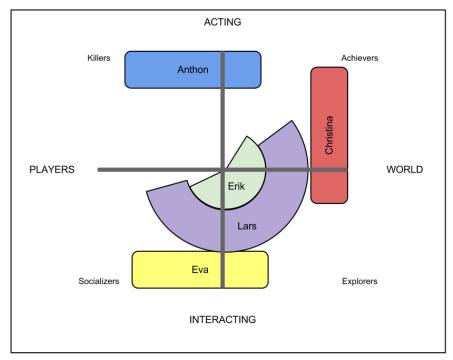


Figure 4.1 - The motivations of the participants according to Bartle's player types

To sum it up; Lars and Erik have fun while they are exploring, doing quests and interacting with other players. Anthon enjoys killing other players and also doing quests. Christina likes it best when she is not disturbed by other players and can focus all her attention on the quests and the virtual world. Eva would not enjoy the killing part of the game; instead she wanted to interact both with other players and the virtual world.

### 4.2 The Immersion Factor

The amount of immersion the participants showed differed quite a bit among the users. Since the immersion usually increases along with the gameplay (Bartle, 2004 & Calka, 2006) it was hard to establish an exact level of immersion for the participants. However, after each character had been created, the user got the question if they would be annoyed if I deleted their character now. Also how they "felt" toward the character, to see which character brought on the biggest connection to the player. This was also elaborated in the follow-up.

When asked if they would be angry with me if I deleted their characters, all participants, except Christina, said that they would react negatively towards that action on almost all of their characters. Christina would only be upset if I deleted her character after she gained a level, because she would lose that level. On the question whether or not they felt something towards their characters most participants answered that they did feel some kind of bond with their character, even though it sometimes just was the case that they had spent a long time creating it. Erik, Lars and Eva needed the game, and character, to feel realistic for them to be able to experience a connection with their character. For example, Eva could only do human beings, no other race, since then she wouldn't be able to identify and connect with the character. Christina however did not want the game to be realistic at all. She wanted it to remain

a fairytale, where nothing was real. She refused to do a human, unless she had no other choice. Erik and Lars had both written background stories to several previous characters, and felt that this action gave their characters more depth and meaning to them. Lars and Erik both put themselves in the characters "shoes" very often. They always tried to think how the character would react in a given situation. Both said that they wanted the character to be "more me than you". Bartle (2004) says that immersion in a game is about capturing the player. Lars, Erik and Eva all felt captured in the game when they started to address and talk to their character. Especially Eva did this quite often, for example: "Stop glancing at only one direction, you will get shortened eye muscles on the other side!"

To explore how the participants spoke about their character, a search in the transcriptions of the interviews was made on the words "Her/She/He/His", "the person", "the human", "the guy/the figure", and "it". The result from this word search is shown in table 4.1. The numbers stand for how many times during the interviews the participants used the different words, and the percentage is calculated from the sum of all of the previous stated words when they spoke about their character.

Table 4.1 - A summary of the words the participants use when they speak about their character

	Erik	Christina	Eva	Anthon	Lars
				7	
"Her/She/He/His"	89 ~ 82 %	52 ~ 51 %	107 ~ 85,5 %	155 ~ 70 %	155 ~ 84 %
"The person"	2~2%	2~2%	0	9~4%	11 ~ 6 %
"The human"	3~3%	0	0	0	0
"The guy/The figure"	0	7~7%	1~1%	8 ~ 3,5 %	1~1%
"It"	14 ~ 13 %	41 ~ 40 %	17 ~ 13,5 %	51 ~ 22,5 %	17~9%
Sum:	108	102	125	223	184

The next step in the analysis was to use Bartle's (2004) immersion levels to find out the participants' different immersion levels, as is shown in Figure 4.2. Christina was the person who experienced the least immersion. She did not see the character as a representation of herself, but only as a game piece. Christina was also the player by far that used "it" the most when talking about her characters, as is shown in Table 4.1 she used this word 40%. According to Bartle's immersion categories this would put her in the "players" category. Just as Christina, Anthon's immersion factor differed compared to the rest of the group. He did however sometimes see his character as a representation for himself. Even though Anthon used "Her/She/He/His" al lot when talking about his characters, it was not nearly as much as Erik, Lars and Eva. I therefore group him in the "Avatar" category. Since Eva never had played before, the immersion factor was hard to determine. Eva seemed to consider her character as a representation of herself. The text analysis also showed how she preferred to talk about her characters in the words "Her/She/He/His". Therefore I sort her into the category

"character". The deepest level of immersion is according to Bartle (2004) "Persona", this is when the player loses her/his way in the game and feels like s/he is the character within the game. Erik and Lars was not quite that immersed. However they did spend a lot of time with their characters and to call the character "it" occurred very seldom with these two players. They were therefore put between the "character" and "persona" category.

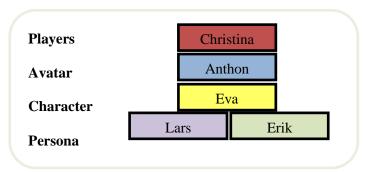


Figure 4.2 - Immersion levels of the participants

## 4.3 The Identification Factor

As stated in the theory section Neustaedter and Federovskaya (2009) explained four different identity types among players; realists; ideals; fantasies; and role-players. By originating from Neustaedter and Federovskaya's (2009) research, it is somewhat possible to determine where the participants of this study would fit. "Realistics" try to make their character look as much as their real life self as possible. They want their virtual world identity to be just as same as their real life identity. This description did not fit in on any of the experienced players. However Eva, the inexperienced player, felt that it was very important to look and act in the same way with her character as she did in her real life. Eva thought it was extremely important to be able to identify with her characters. To be able to do this, she made the first character look a lot like herself. Then this character became the prototype for the following female characters she created. She was however afraid that she was doing something wrong when she wanted to recreate the first character. One of our conversations about this explains what she felt:

Researcher: So you're going with this style?
Eva: Yes, if it is okay that I go for the same

Researcher: Please do, this is only more...

Eva: I feel, what a boring person who cannot change herself

Researcher: It can also be just that you haven't played so you don't know how the game works.

You have never tried this before so that means that it might be difficult to make a lot

of different...

Eva: Yes, but I think, yes that's right, I think I might need to have the character within a

safe sphere somehow, that won't differ to much from what I think

The "ideals" also want their own identity to be a part of their characters identity. They make their characters look like their real selves, but with small modifications. This could be another hairstyle, bigger breasts etcetera (Neustaedter & Federovskaya, 2009). Erik fits well in this group, as he often uses expressions like "more like me" or "it didn't feel like me". When he was asked whether or not the looks of the character was important he stated: "Yes, although the looks are only the exterior, then there is always the behavior and that is still, well it's like I said before, the same, the

same me". Christina fits well in the identity group "fantasies". This type of players want their real life identity to completely separate from their virtual identity. They want to become something they are not in their real life. Christina wanted the virtual world to remain a fairytale. She did not want any connection to her character except for the usage of it. Fantasies also require unrealistic looks on their avatar. This also fits Christina's answers, since she refused to do a human character if she did not have to. The last category is role-players. This type wants the virtual world to be as realistic as possible. They also separate their own identity completely from their character. They want to experience new identities and new ways to reform the identities constantly. Lars and Anthon were hard to place in these categories. Lars did want the world to be realistic, and his characters all had different identities, so that would fit him with the role-players. However Lars often put bits of himself in his character to better be able to connect with them. This would suggest that he fits better in the "ideals" category. Anthon might seem to fit best with the "role-players" as well since he said that he could identify with anyone, because he is not that person. However he did not express any need for exploring identities. Instead he seemed to be the same person in game as he is in real life. This would put him in the first category, realistics, even though he did not make the character look like him at all.

Vasalou et al (2008) said that the offline self is merged together with the online self. This study indicates that this might not be accurate for all players. For example Christina, needed the offline and online identity to be separate. According to Suh, Kim and Suh (2011) the more the character looked like the player the more likely it was that the player would gain emotional attitudes toward their character. As was shown in the last chapter about the players' immersion, all users, except Christina, would show emotions if I deleted their character after they had created it. Eva, Erik and Lars all put in a lot of "themselves" into their characters so this goes well together with Suh, Kim and Suh (2011) research. However Anthon did also respond negative to my question, even though he did not involve any of his own features in the character. This could be connected to the fact that he was "hard to place" in Neustaedter and Federovskaya's (2009) identity categories. In fact all but Christina said that they saw their characters as representations of themselves and wanted to identify with them. Christina did however later in the interview admit that she identified more with her characters in World of Warcraft, since she knew that game. This is probably also related to the fact that she would be annoyed if I had deleted a character of hers which had gained a level. For her the identification process might be linked to the achievement and advancement within the game.

#### 4.3.1 Being You

Wolf and Perron (2003) suggested that it might be easier for users to portray their real self in virtual worlds, since the society doesn't limit us there. To see if this was true for the participants of this study, the following question was asked: "Can you be more like yourself when you play games?" Erik and Lars both thought that there could be some truth to this. However they saw it more in the line with picking a character that suited your mood for that day. Erik said:

"I guess it depends on what you consider to be yourself... like I mentioned before, sometimes you might play that harmonic Vulcan-human [see Appendix 1], who only cares about logic. And at other times you might play that brutal little dwarf [see Appendix 1] who is one and a half meter tall and slashes everything that gets in his way, so it all depends on the mood"

Lars also added that if you had a bad day at work you might not want to go around pretending to be happy all the time. Wolf and Perron (2003) stated that you could not go out and shoot your boss if he angers you, this is however possible in games. Erik did not quite agree to this. Since he knew so many other players, he could not act like a total jerk one day and then think that everything would be fine the next. Instead he meant that if he wanted to kill things and don't be social he rather played a singleplayer game where he could kill 300 in two hours. This is more in the line with Nowak et al (2008) who said that it mattered a lot what kind of game the avatar were to enter. Anthon's answers did not at all agree to what Wolf and Perron (2003) said about it being easier to be yourself in a game. He concluded that it was just the opposite. He stated that it might be harder to be yourself in games because you were constantly, unconsciously, Role playing your character. It could therefore be hard to tell whether it was the character or the real you who acted in a certain way. Anthon also added that it might be easier to start talking to someone in a virtual world about difficult things. However it is easier to have more intimate conversations face to face. Christina was very consistent in claiming that she did not feel any connection to her characters. They were not a representation of her. However over and over again she said that if she was a superhero, or if she lived in that world, this is how she would have wanted to look: "Since this is, a sort of role play... you are able to be someone that you actually aren't... or maybe such as you really would like to be..." This might be an indication that it is important for all players to be able to experiment with different identities. Just as Koivisto (2003) and Van Looy, Courtois and De Vocht (2010) concluded.

## 4.3.2 Uniqueness

According to Martin (2005) it was important for users to have a lot of different choices to be able to make a unique character. However a lot of the players felt detached from the game City of Heroes, even though this was the game where they had the most choices. For example, Erik was extremely disconnected from the game toward the end of the character creation process. In this discussion he has just given his character in City of Heroes a name:

Researcher: It is quite interesting because you have all along said, it is me, or it's for me and such,

but here...

Erik: Yeah but not here

Researcher: Here you say to the chick

Erik: Yes

Researcher: Well, it feels as though you have a certain...

Erik: A certain distance...

Researcher: Yeah

Erik: Yeah, I got to say that there is... I can however not explain it, why I feel more

distanced to this... it is probably, a superhero is... it's something you read about, a grumpy dwarf or werewolf [see Appendix 1], that is something you are! [...] Yeah I got to say, that no matter how sick it sounds, in my world it is more realistic to be on a

spaceship or in a virtual medieval world

Wasko et al (2011) said that it is important to know how the players view the character. It might be as an object or thing, an extension of them self or perhaps a child of offspring. Eva had a really hard time identifying with her male character, but she still wanted to give the character some type of redemption for the fact that she had created him too hard and edgy. To do this, she almost started to treat him as her child, or as another friend's child: "His mother has pattern knitted that sweatshirt, she spent a lot of hours I tell you!" She explained this disconnection with her male character like this:

"Well, with the female characters I could identify, but when I created a male character that wasn't possible, I thought it would be easier, but it didn't work. He looks a lot harder than I had imagined, and then the thought was to give him a name like "Olle", so he could seem more soft and rustic."

One of her female characters was also made too hard and tough. She tried to get her more down to earth with the colors of her clothes. She was also almost offended by the characters breasts. Eva said:

Eva: She has no normal breasts either; she has put silicon in them!

Researcher: I think you can change that too if you'd like

Eva: No! If she has done it she has to live with it, that's just how it is.

Researcher: Okay

Eva: She decided it all by herself! Her mother had nothing to say in the matter...

A lot of researchers have discussed the importance for a player to be able to create a unique character, and through that, a unique identity (Li, 2006; Martin, 2005; Turkay & Adinolf, 2010). The questions "Can you create a unique character in this game" and "is this an important part" were asked to the participants. All participants thought that it indeed was important to create a unique identity for their characters. Anthon did however state that it was more important that you liked your character, then that you had the possibility to make it unique. In a conversation with Anthon the following was reveiled:

Researcher: But do you feel that it is important for you to create a unique character?

Anthon: If you can create a unique character in a game, then it's important or maybe that I

feel that it is important to make a character, that is not unique, but a character that I like... But if you can't do it, like in World of Warcraft, then you just don't care that

much anyway.

Researcher: No, it isn't crucial somehow...

Anthon: No, it's like; you play the game because you feel that it's a good game, not because

you can create a unique character...

Researcher: Okay

Anthon: Or, I mean, even if you, I mean in Sims [see Appendix 1] you can make a damn unique

character, but it's not so damn funny anyway perhaps...

Martin (2005) argues that if the user does not have enough choices in the character creation process they might feel disconnected from the game and the avatar itself. For Anthon and Christina however, the game was what was important. Not the character creation part. Christina also said that the character got more unique the longer you played with it, since then you can alter the clothes and weapons more. Eva was the only one who did not find it possible to create a unique character in the game City of Heroes. All other participants felt that this was the game where you had the most

choices in the character creation process and therefore could create a very unique character. For Eva however it was more important to be able to convey characteristics through your character, not only a unique look. This made her disconnect from the game, just as Martin (2005) suggested that it might.

### 4.4 Gender Issues

As was showed in the theory section, Taylor (2006) and Yee (2008) could not conclude that women played games only for the identity creation and social aspects of the game. In the currents study, Christina had no interest in the social aspects at all of the game. She did not want to identify with her characters. For her it was more a matter of killing as much as possible as fast as possible. Even though Eva said that she would like these aspects the most, it is hard to know since she has never played a MMORPG before. Just as Yee (2008) stated. Men like to gossip, chat and talk just as much as women do, the male players of this study had all at some point role played with their character. Erik and Lars found this part of the game to be the most enjoyable. Therefore this study agrees with Taylor (2006) and Yee (2008) that the gender does not determine what you enjoy doing in games.

Turkay and Adinolf (2010) claimed that the character customization had a bigger impact on female players then male players. In the current study, this was not confirmed. All participants felt that it was important for them to be able to change their characters appearance. Turkay (2011) said that she could detect differences between witch body parts were most important for male and female players to customize. Turkay concluded that female players were more interested in customizing the head and face of their character, while male players thought the body was more significant. At first this seemed to be the case also in this study. However it became clearer that even though the body was more important to change for the male users. It was not the most important thing. Instead it became clear that it was more important for the male players to see their character from different perspectives. This might have to do with the fact that the male players had played more and a bigger amount of games then the female players. For the male players it was very important to be able to zoom by scrolling the mouse wheel, and to be able to click and drag the character to see them from the side or from behind. They pointed out that you often saw your character mostly from behind. Therefore it was important already in the character creation interface to be able to see how this would look in the game. One feature the male players all lacked in every game was the ability to zoom in on specific parts of the body. Lars stated "It was too bad that you couldn't zoom in closer on the hands while you were making them, because it would have been fun to be able to detect if it looked really weird with long fingers... might be too long, but you can't really see..."

#### 4.4.1 Female Characters

Yee (2008) declared that a lot of female players were tired of the way that female characters were projected within the game. In the current study this was not in any way confined to the women. Anthon was the one who voiced this the most when it came to the female characters breasts: "Yes and then I'll make, just because I'm so against women having huge breasts I'll do it like this... It's so, and to think that this girl will be out fighting it's so inflexible with big breasts" Eva, Lars and Anthon all commented on the skirts in Star trek Online. Which they thought was way too short.

One thing that came up in the study was that female characters were treated differently from male characters. This is in line with Yee (2008) and Eklund (2011) who both stated that female players often were perceived differently from male characters. Erik said that "it's a MMO so people might be nicer to... ladies..." For the players of this study it was also a general consensus that just as Yee (2008) pointed out there were a lot more male players. Christina said "I think it's a little fun, since in World of Warcraft it is so much, it's almost all the time that you meet guys, so that's why I think it is ... it is why it's fun, and that is also the reason to why I have played mostly with the girl there" So this was also one of the reasons as to why the participants of this study chose to create a female character. It was their way of standing out and not being like everyone else. MacCullum-Stewart (2008) also saw a difference in maturity among players and their characters. More immature players would choose large breasts and skinnier characters. In the current study none of the participants were aiming for this type of character. This could be due to the fact that there were no adolescents participating in the study, and all participants behaved in a very mature way.

### 4.4.2 Gender Swapping and Identification Difficulties

Among the participants of this study it became very apparent that most players enjoyed playing female characters. No matter what gender they were in real life. This is in line with Ducheneaut et al (2009) conclusion that a lot of players gender swapped within games. Those researchers also said that this phenomenon occurs mostly among men. However women do gender swap also. All participants, except Lars, in the current study made three female characters. Lars made two male and two female. Anthon talked a lot about gender swapping, among other statements he said:

"But here it does not matter ... to play a woman or a man that's, yes it is very many ... mostly macho guys, I think ... yes, those who are as macho as it is possible to be when actually playing MMORPGs, but who refuses to play female characters .... They refuse to play female characters because ... well, I do not really know why, because there, they must think that it is only homosexual men and women who play female characters. But for me it is the same thing, I can relate equally well to a woman, a female character, as I can relate to an orc[see Appendix 1] you know, it's not harder you know ... it's even more difficult to relate to an orc, than a female human being, for example, if you see it that way, and I don't care if I play a character who doesn't have a penis you know..."

Grosman (2010) said that just as many women as men gender swapped, but the male players did it much more frequently than female players. This could be a conclusion of this study as well. The female participants did do one male character each, while the male users created two or three female characters. Eva tried to create a male character in City of Heroes but she had a hard time customizing him for her needs, as she explained by saying:

Eva: It wasn't fun to make a male character actually

Researcher: Then go back...

Eva: No, I'll make a man just because of that!

[...]

Eva: No, I'm not really happy with him Researcher: You're not satisfied? Why?

Eva: *He looks too rough* 

Researcher: Would you like to go back and change?

Eva: No I'll settle for this, he might have a heart of gold

Eva continued to explain why she had such difficulties relating to the male character she created: "It wasn't easy to make a character based only on the appearance. When one did the female characters one could give them such an appearance that ... that actually ... or you could with just the appearance get them to... express what I wanted, but in his case, I had to add a text". All participants of the study did at one point or another say that they simply chose a female character because they looked prettier or more beautiful than the male characters. This was also the conclusion of MacCullum-Stewart's (2008) research. She said that the players wanted something nice to look at while they were playing. Anthon expressed this by saying:

"With the appearance it is much more fun to make a girl than to make a guy, the guys still looks, generally speaking, just the same... Just because they have much, or here, we have as much choice but he looks beefy, then it's there, he's very ... or, he has a very impersonal appearance. He looks like everyone else, he looks like one of all the others, but it is also that for girls, there are much more different types, have been many more different kinds of ideals and what looks attractive ... guys, it has virtually always been the same deal..."

In line with Eklund's (2011) research the female players mainly wanted to play female characters because they were women themselves and would easier be able to identify with their character. When Eva got the question why she chose a woman she clearly stated that it was because she wanted to identify with her. MacCallum-Stewart's (2008) said that players of MMORPGs do not add the same importance to gender as researchers might think. Instead this is trying to be as normalized as possible. All male users did not see the problem, or that it would be something weird with picking a female gender for their character. Lars stated that "The only difference [among men and women] is some parts on the body; otherwise it's pretty much the same between us". However Erik did have an epiphany about the fact that a female character could be a representative for him as a male player, he said:

Researcher: But do you see it more as a game piece or as a representation of yourself, or?

Erik: No, but... I mean it's not ... I cannot see it as a representation of me because I am a

guy and she's a girl.

Researcher: And that is important, I mean...

Erik: No, no but... no, but I mean, that's not me, but of course she represents me in the

game, so I would never ... behave completely different from the way I behave in real

life anyway

Researcher: But yet you do not think that a girl could really represent you?

Erik: [Sighs] Yes... Well okay then... Yes, but I actually have to agree that it can, that she

can, I can, it can, my God now I'm really starting to get schizophrenic [...]

Researcher: You have played a lot with female characters, don't you feel that they represent you Erik: Well of course they do, for the ones that I play with they are me, so then it is obvious

that they represent who I am ... Ehm ... Of course!

All and all it seems as the female players put more significance in the gender of the characters than the male players.

## 4.5 Important Features for the Character Creation Process

To figure out which features of the character creation process that was the most important to the participants. The question "Which are the most important parts of the character creation process?" was asked. This question was asked before and after the interviews, as well as later on the follow-up meeting. Table 4.2 shows a summary of the users' answers.

Table 4.2 - Summary of what the participants felt was the most important feature to be able to change on their character

	Before the interviews	After the interviews	Follow-up
Erik	Everything on the character should go well together. Race, class, looks	To be able to put parts from himself into the character	Not feeling limited by the choices but also not overwhelmed
Eva	The face - the mirror of the soul	Being able to make the character soft and sympathetic	The face and the eyes
Anthon	Face and size. The face was more important when you didn't do anything	Depends on what you can change	The Face/Head
Lars	Everything. He is what everyone else sees	Adding features from yourself. "More me then you".	Everything. To create a nice overall picture
Christina	The appearance. Male / Female	The face and eyes. Mirror to the soul	Male / Female

As is shown in Table 4.2 all participants went on something that had to do with the characters appearance. Previous research (Ducheneaut et al., 2009 and Turkay, 2011) stated that from what they could see the hair was the most important feature, since this could make the character stand out, and show off their identity and personality. In the current study the participants were almost just the opposite. Lars, Erik and Eva all said that they chose things that would not stand out. They wanted it to be normal, not to large, not to small. Another important thing for Lars and Erik was that it should feel right. They could not explain what it was, but it was an important feeling. The hair was never mentioned as the most important feature throughout the interviews. It came up from time to time that it was important but not the most important.

Anthon did however want to be able to choose alternate hairstyles, which could be considered as Goth or industrial. Though, according to Anthon, the hairstyles where often too complex and that made them unappealing. Koivisto (2003) Ducheneaut et al (2009) and Turkay and Adinolf (2010) all said that it can sometimes be a message of how the player is in his real life in how he creates a character. Except for Anthon's Goth/Industrial style, this can also fit in on Erik, Lars and Eva, and them not wanting to stand out too much. Erik and I discussed this:

Researcher: When you were on the hair, it was also this, blending in a bit more... Is that how you

feel, I mean you have made her a bit more like you, if you were a girl that is, is that something that you're aiming for [in your real life] fitting in... if it's not to personal,

you are welcome to say that you don't want to answer.

Erik: No... but I guess, that is a pretty good perception... I mean, to try and make it look as

normal as possible, it's the same in WoW [World of Warcraft] this character is going

to represent me...

## **4.5.1** The Importance of Numerous Choices

Another question about the character creation process was "Is it important for you to have a lot of different choices in the character creation process?" The background for this question was that some researchers (Martin, 2005; Neustaedter & Federovskaya, 2009; Ducheneaut et al., 2009) felt that it was crucial for players to have a lot of choices to be able to make a unique character. Vasalou et al (2008) also concluded that a lot of choices were important for the user to be able to create the character they want. For Erik and Lars it was very important with a lot of different choices, although there could also be too many choices. For Anthon and Christina a lot of choices were fun, but not a necessity. In Star trek online and City of heroes it became very clear that the participants thought it was really fun at the start, but then got bored when there were too many options to choose from. Erik once stated during the interview in Star trek online: "Oh my god... Yeah, there were a decent amount of color choices actually, and I get decision anxiety over where I should park my car, this was quite difficult actually". All of the participants reflected over the fact that this was the first time they entered the game, and that you might want to see and understand a game better before you put a lot of time and effort on the character creation. Anthon thought that it was very important. Especially when it was the first time making a character, to have presets to choose from. Bartle (2004) concluded that it would be a good idea to have different options for players, one where the player can randomize the character; and then one where the user can be able to customize the character in detail. Ducheneaut et al (2009) agreed on this, but said that it might be wise to make the players choose between changing their character in detail and using pre-made features. To see how important this was to the participants of this study there was a question as follows: "Is it important to have the choice to randomize a character?" As stated previously Anthon did think it was important to have pre-made features. However, no one in the study felt that it was necessary to have a "randomize button". The only thing they had used this button for was to gain inspiration. Both Lars and Erik used randomize on the name to better understand what the characters on a starship was called. Nevertheless they still changed the name to something that was more in line with what they liked. Lars clearly stated that he could never use anything that would appear from randomizing: "That could be very weird, it would be like someone else were choosing instead of you" All the participants, except for Erik said at least once that they had seen a feature on a pre-made character, and wanted to make it look like that again. Not so the character looked exactly that way, but there should be a resemblance to the pre-made character they first laid their eye on.

#### 4.5.2 What's In a Name

One feature that was discussed a lot was the character's name. Guitton (2010) did a study on names in MMORPGs and if the visual appearance of the character had any effect on the name. However this was mainly between humanoids and non-humanoids. Nevertheless, the characters names seemed to be very important to the users of this study. The way the different participants chose name for the characters was widely spread. Christina used the same name on all her characters, no matter what class, race or gender it had. Erik and Anthon both chose favorite names from previous games. Eva had a hard time choosing a name for her characters, since the name she chose was constantly occupied. This was mainly because she wanted as common names as possible, so it would be easier for her to connect with the character. She finally started to go through names she had given puppies and also names on childhood friends. For Lars, every character was unique because of the fact that he created backgrounds for them. This also meant that he could not use the same name twice on two characters. Lars explained:

Researcher: Yes, so the name is hard?

Lars: Yeah...

Researcher: Is there any particular reason for this? Lars: It's in the name much of it lies...

Researcher: Okay, much of... Lars: Him as a person!

Researcher: Okav

Lars: Well I mean you have to understand that if this is a warrior [see Appendix 1] who has

been doing this for 20 to 30 years and been all around, he cannot be called Timmy!

It was important for all male participants (Erik, Lars and Anthon) that the name of the character should "fit" it. Erik said "If I now have created her in the way I imagined that this person would look, then she must have a name that this person actually could be called." Erik here calls his character "person" two times, which indicates that this character is important to him. This made it even harder to find the right name for her.

## 4.5.3 Differences in Different Games

To be able to see if there were any other differences between the different games. The questions "Was there anything you would have liked to change that you couldn't" and "What is your overall impression of this character creation?" were asked. Martin (2005) could clearly show that World of Warcraft (WoW) players were extremely unsatisfied with the choices within the game for the character customization. Since all experienced players in this study had played WoW before. I decided to let two of them start with that game, and two end with it. They all said that it was very limited. The two users who was asked to make a character in WoW after having experienced the hundreds of different choices within City of Heroes and Star Trek Online were amazed by how little there really was to change. They had never really reflected over this fact before. The male participants would have wanted to change the body more, since this is not possible at all in WoW. In Dungeons and Dragons Online (DDO) there were very different opinions of the character creation process. The male participants reacted over the fact that you did not get to choose your race first, but instead a few steps down. Anthon thought it was very poorly configured. Erik did not like it at all, since you could only have one shape on the characters head, and he

thought it looked like a celebrity every time he looked at it. Christina and Eva were more positive toward this interface, although they would have liked to be able to change the eyes of the character more.

The character creation process that was given the most praise was Star Trek Online (STO). Everyone felt like there were a lot of fun choices to pick among. However one of the color schemes covered almost the entire character and this was an irritable factor four of the five participants. Another good thing about this character creation process was the ability to zoom by scrolling and move the character around by clicking and dragging. This was very important to the male users, and the commented on this in every game. A request from all the male participants was that they wanted to be able to zoom in on whatever part they were currently changing. So even if there were a lot of positive things about the STO creation interface there were still things that needed improvement. City of Heroes is known for its unlimited character creation interface (Turkay and Adinolf, 2011). Even so, this was the game where most of the users felt disconnected after a while. This interface was much more rough and hard and it was not possible to zoom and drag the character as easy as in STO and DDO. A lot of the participants also felt that the classifications of the interface were too hard to understand. There was also a lot of settings for attacks and the appearance of the attacks. However no one found this particular important to be able to change. Anthon did like the possibility to be able to create a more Goth-like character. Yet he could not see himself playing a superhero game. Erik said "But... what do you do, I mean city of heroes, a town full of superheroes what do you do? What's the point, what should I do?" Christina did feel that the character she made in City of Heroes was her favorite. She liked the fact that she could connect the fire, from the attacks, to her looks. All and all, most participants still thought there were too many choices and too much focus on the clothes.

#### 4.5.4 Realistic Representations

Turkay and Adinolf (2010) found that 25 % of the participants in their study wanted to have control over their character because it was their representation within the game. For Eva it was very important that her characters could portrait the characteristic she wanted them stand for. She did not like the character if it got too tough for her. She even wrote a background story on her male character to give him redemption and show that he had "a heart of gold". She also shows the importance of the character creation customization in her following statement: "She could have looked awful, and then I could have taken that away, she could have looked evil, and then I could have made her look kind instead". Erik also felt that it was important to be able to have control over his character's creation, since this affected how he presented himself in the game. He stated that:

"I mean, first you pick the race, and then the class, and those two steps then determines how the appearance will be and... how one acts I think [...] If I for example play a male dwarf, I might not pick rouge [see Appendix 1] or a thief, it's not that sneaky to run around like that, feels like being one and a half meter tall and just as wide. Then perhaps it's a more physical class one chooses in that case."

Anthon was on the same line as Erik, although he did not want a dwarf to be a spell caster (see Appendix 1), because he saw them more as a physical class as well. For all the male participants there was sort of a red thread between the different stages in

the character creation process. They all wanted to start with race, class and then appearance. They also mentioned that since they did not know what the game had to offer. The appearance became even more important, but that to get the perfect character you might have to give it a couple of tries first. Overall abilities, attacks and talents were not such an important part of the character creation process. The only one who made any bigger changes to these was Anthon, who customized all of his abilities in Dungeons and Dragons Online. However he did say that it was because he knew what he needed since he had played the pen and paper version many times before. It seems that the most important part of the character creation process, therefore is the characters appearance, or anything who is involved in the appearance, such as race, class and gender. It did affect the players a great deal when they were not able to accomplish the character they intended to create. Erik had a lot of problems in DDO because he could not change the shape of the face: "And somehow it doesn't feel like I will ever get satisfied with it... Just because... It's the same all the time, I mean if we all had the same face but different beards, it wouldn't make much of a difference anyway..." So maybe it is crucial for players to be able to make the character precisely the way they want them. If not they might feel as Erik did. Not immersed at all in the game, just because of the characters look.

# 5. Empirical findings - the Follow-ups

This chapter will summarize the findings from the follow-ups that were held with the participants. The findings in this section are a summary of all the three follow-ups that were held. One follow-up consisted of the researcher, Anthon, Eva and Erik. The other two were held separately with Lars and Christina. The chapter will be divided in topics which were discussed during the follow-ups; Chosen characters; Identity formation; the importance of appearance; and finally a discussion on gender. The final part will then sum up all the empirical findings.

## 5.1 Chosen Characters

The first question for all participants on these follow-ups were what character they had chosen and why. In Table 5.1 there is a summary of the participants chosen characters and how they felt about all the characters when they created them.

Table 5.1 - A summary of how the participants felt about their characters after creating them, and which one they ended up playing

	Erik	Christina	Eva	Anthon	Lars
World of Warcraft	Felt a connection, have tried to put himself in her shoes	Was satisfied but wanted to change more	Most satisfied with this character	X	Not as much connection, he could create it again
Dungeons & Dragons Online	Not satisfied	Wants to keep playing it	A bit rougher than the one in WoW	Felt connection but could create her again	Felt a connection, cool character
Star Trek Online	Want to continue playing, more connection than WoW	Liked him, brought forward his personality	Too rough for her.	Felt personal and kind	Most satisfied with this character
City of heroes	Felt no connection	Most satisfied with this character	Could not relate to the male character	Felt connection to the character but not the game	Some connection - cool
Chosen Character(s)	Canea in <b>WoW</b>	Tinalin in <b>DDO</b>	Nyponros in <b>WoW</b>	Aleria in <b>DDO</b>	Mainly Allva in <b>WoW</b> but also Xylia in <b>STO</b>

As is shown in the previous table most participants chose to continue with the game they already knew, World of Warcraft. The question that followed was then if this choice was made because of the game or the character. For Anthon and Erik it was because of the game.

Erik did not find any of the other games interesting and Anthon could not see himself playing neither City of Heroes nor Star Trek Online. Christina said that she thought it was a combination of the game and the character, she explained:

"A combination I think... Yeah a combination, you can call it fantasy in a way that is fantasy for me... That's how I'll put it, and then it was both the character as well as the game that worked, it was, there were two parts. In the other [games] I did do the character the way that I wanted it but... Those games just don't appeal as much..."

Christina also said that she did try City of Heroes, but found it to be very confusing. Lars and Eva however said that for them, the character was the essential factor to their decision. They felt that they had a stronger connection to the characters they chose.

5.2 Identity Formation for Experienced and Inexperienced Players On the follow-up gathering we also discussed if it was easier to connect to a character if they looked realistic. The only one who agreed with this statement was Eva. When she was asked why she thought it was only her who found this important, she answered: "Because I'm so new in this game, with gaming... So I want to be able to identify myself with the character and then it should be in a way so that I can handle it... On such a level, and then it gets realistic for me." The rest of the participants agreed with the fact that it might be because they had played longer than her. Erik meant that when you had played for a while appearance start to matter less. The personality that one played was more important. He said that he does not play a werewolf hunter. He plays the personality of the character. Anthon took this one step further and said:

"Yeah, we just don't care as much, we don't really care as much, I said so also before when we, when you create the character then you care, but once you've started playing you pretty much don't give a crap about how it looks most of the time, you don't think about how your character looks while you're playing."

On the follow-up with Lars, he also agreed that you might need a more realistic character in the beginning. However now he has grown so accustomed to all the different races that he could identify with all of them. He stated that after playing World of Warcraft for six or seven years you start to think that they all look pretty normal. Christina also agreed on her follow-up. She said that the first character she ever made looked a lot like her in real life.

#### **5.2.1 Unique Versus Likable**

During the interview with Anthon he said that it was more important that you liked your character than that you made your character unique. According to Bartle (2004) it is extremely important for the player to feel a connection to their character. However according to some other researchers, (Martin, 2005; Li, 2006) the best way for a user to become immersed with their character is to make it unique. Since Anthon's claim was a new direction on how important it is for the characters to be unique, this question was asked to everyone else too. As Anthon said, everyone agreed that it was much more important that you liked your character. Christina said: "Yeah I think it is, that you connect with it somehow... and then what it is that does that, well it's hard to put your finger on what exactly it is, but..." Lars also agreed

that there had to be a connection to the character otherwise he couldn't play it. This might be one of the reasons that so many chose World of Warcraft even though it contained the least choices of all the games in the study. Erik said: "Well, there has to be a reason as to why I still play WoW, or that they have 14 million players even though you can't change the body at all." When Lars was asked why he had chosen the character from WoW he stated:

"Yeah but I think... They have succeeded with the colors and I mean... They haven't tried to make it to realistic; instead it has seemed a bit more cartoonish kind of... That's good and also I do know some people who plays there as well, and then it becomes easier to remain there cause then I could just jump in and Role play a bit with them and so on..."

It was also important to see if the characters of the participants' choice had become more unique to them after playing for a while with them. There were different opinions on this. First of all Eva and Christina had hardly had any time to play, so they did not feel they could answer that question. Anthon did not feel that his character had become more unique to him. He said that he did not care about the character. Instead he had just focused on the game, and the mechanics of the game. Nothing else had interested him at this point. He also restated that he chose the character because he wanted to try out the game, not because of the character. Erik on the other hand said that he thought his werewolf hunter (see Appendix 1) had grown on him, but admitted that this might be due to the fact that he already knew the game. Lars on the other hand really thought that his characters had grown. He said that they were no longer a figure on the screen. Now he had a connection to them:

"Now, I've had time to start creating a background for them and figure out how their personality should be and so... so now they're much more alive I think [...] Now they have grown and seen some things... and then you change, so of course they will grow all the time... and it's not over here, they will keep on growing and experience new things."

No one wanted me to delete their chosen character at this time, Erik even said "No! I have a knife!" Anthon did however not feel as strong as the rest about his character. He meant that his character did not yet exists. It has not yet become a character because of the fact that he had not yet met any other players, whom he had engaged in conversation.

# 5.3 Appearance Matters If You Look

On the follow-up Anthon kept claiming that you only cared about the appearance of your character while you were making it. The statement was therefore turned into a discussion whether or not this was true for everyone. Anthon started by saying that there were times when he did care after all, but this was only when he had nothing to do in the game or if he just talked to others. He claimed however that if you were inside a cave killing monsters you did not look at your character. Erik meant that he spent just as much time on creating his characters as he always had. When Anthon reminded him that it was about playtime, Erik did agree that once you were indulged in killing you did not spend much time looking at your character. During the follow-up with Lars it became clear that he did not agree on this:

"No, I don't think so, I mean... it's as I said if I'm walking around and I mean, If you're going to do a role play event with some people and are, well then you have to think about how they should look, so that the clothes fit in and as I said before, I have different clothes for whatever I'm up to, if I'm going fishing, or picking flowers or... yes... oh my god, when you're traveling around mining a lot of minerals and such you have special clothes for that as well... No, so I do think that appearance matters all the time."

Clearly it matters what you are doing mostly in the game whether you look at your character or not. Anthon who does a lot of killing monsters and other players do not care about how his character looks. Lars who spends a lot of time role playing found the characters appearance very important even while playing.

#### **5.3.1 Features That Matters**

The answer to the most important features was pretty widely spread among the participants. As was shown in table 4.2, this question was also asked at the follow-up. Anthon concluded that the face was the absolutely most important feature, and Eva agreed with him. Erik did however feel that it was more important to not feel limited or overwhelmed by the choices. He wanted just the right amount of choices:

"A moderate amount of choices... no but for example in WoW, you can get very annoyed because there are only for example 5 faces or 6... While in STO you can get a bit confused because there you can determine the length between the eyes, how big the eyes should be, how the angle of the eyes should be, how big the nose should be, how big the right nostril should be, and left nostril should be... So there it becomes a bit much..."

Lars stated that he thought it was important to change everything. It was always the full picture of the character that was important. Christina went back to her first statement about the most important feature was that of the gender for the character. She had through this experience realized just how important it was for her to play a female character.

Since a lot of research (Ducheneaut et al, 2009 & Turkay, 2011) had concluded that the hair was the most important feature. There was a discussion of the importance of hair during the follow-ups. Anthon declared that he had very special opinions about what he liked. He also said that he would like to have more special hair styles, but that these never looked good in games. If they had, he would have been more interested in the hair of the character. Now he found it more important with the hair color. For Erik it was more important that the hair fit the personality: "If you play evil, you cannot have pink hair if you don't have a good reason for why she has pink hair for example" Eva explained that her own hair was very important to her. Even though everyone around her cut of their hair, she had kept it long throughout her life. She thought that due to this she also projected the importance of her own hair on to the character. She also did not want anything to stand out from the crowd, it should be timid and calm. Lars thinks that the hair can give off a sense of that person's personality and that the hair should fit the personality of the character. It here seemed as if the hair might not be as important for these participants as it was for the previous research groups. However when the discussion led into barbershops in World of Warcraft, the voices seemed to change a bit. As Martin (2005) pointed out; a lot of people complained about the lack of choices in Wow's character creation interface. To make their customers happy the game developers, Blizzard, added Barbershops to the virtual world. Here players could change hairstyle, hair color, piercings etcetera.

All male participants had played since before this feature was added to the game, and they all said it was great. However Erik did admit that he hardly used it, but it was good to know that you had the choice. He also added that he knew a player who changed the hair of her character after how her real life hair changed. If she got a haircut so did her character. Anthon said that he used the barbershops a great deal when he played World of Warcraft. After this Anthon and Erik started to discuss if the hair maybe mattered more to them then they first thought. Their conclusion was as follows:

Anthon: Or rather I should change that, it's not the face that is the most important, it's the

head... Yeah that would be more correct, just because the hair does so much for the

face as well, if the hair doesn't fit the face then it will look horrible!

Erik: Yeah, I agree, it has to fit together

Anthon: Yes, so the head simply is the most important.

When the question about randomizing came up, not much was added from the previous interviews. No one felt that it was vital for it to be an option. Christina did however add "Yes, well it's not necessary for me, I mean I think it's much more fun to make it yourself, but it could be fun to still have it, because you can always try it out, if you have a complete blackout you can press it, and it could be perfect".

Even though the players concluded that "randomize" might be used for inspiration, it seemed more important for the users to have presets. By using presets they could quickly enter the game to first get to know the game itself.

### 5.3.2 The Importance of a Name

After the interviews it was clear that the name of the character was of great significance for three out of five participants. Therefore this was brought up to discussion. When asked why the name was so important to them the first conversation went like this:

Anthon: It is what people see

Erik: Exactly

Researcher: What people see?

Anthon: It is what they will identify you with Erik: That is what is visible in the chat

Anthon: Yes, precisely, your name is who you are... Until they meet your character, but even

then, the name has more importance than the appearance of the character has.

This introduction to the name-discussion made it even clearer that the name was of great importance to the participants. When Lars was asked the same question during his follow-up he confirmed what the others had already said. The name says a lot about you and it has to fit their personality. The fact that the name of the character shows who the character really is, were also discussed by Anthon and Erik. They explained that a lot of players gave their characters unserious names like "darkdeathdemondragon" or "deathknightdk". This was annoying to them. They meant that if they saw that a character had a silly name they would instantly assume that it also was an unserious, silly person playing. Anthon and Erik continued:

Anthon: It's either that it is a very unserious person, or it is a 13-year old

Erik: Yeah
Anthon: Kind of...

Erik: If you put a little effort into the name, you will see that, well this seems to be a serious

name, someone, this person has thought a little about the name... If only just in a chat where they scream out that they need help with something... then you'd rather help

someone like that then someone with a silly name...

Since the name was so important for most of the players it was interesting to see why it was not important to Christina. Seeing how she used the same name on all her characters. However that conclusion seemed to be completely misinterpreted. Christina explained that the name, which contained parts of her first name and surname helped her feel a stronger connection to her character: "Then it's a part of me there, then it's my character, and then it's no one else's character, but my own character [...] It is my mark, my watermark on it..." By understanding Christina's point of view it became clear that it indeed was important for all participants with the character's name.

### 5.4 Gender Discussions

On the follow-ups there was also a question about whether or not there were any preferences between what women felt was more important to change than what males found most important. This according to Turkay's (2011) findings that male players wanted to change the body of the character more, while female players wanted to change the face of the character. Eva started by saying that she thought that was a correct assumption:

Eva: Yes, I kind of think so... that the women look more to the characteristics ... to the soul

or what you want to call it... to the mental, to how the person is...

Researcher: And that is then reflected in the appearance?

Eva: Yes, it reflects in the eyes, and the facial expression and a little bit hair style and such Erik: You state that when both myself and Anthon are sitting here saying that we play the

personality more than the character...

Eva had to admit that she might be wrong in her statement. Anthon claimed that the face was the most important for him to change. The discussion concluded that the body was still not the most important thing for the male players to change. It was merely one of the important things. Since the male players had played for much longer than the female players. The question "Could it have more to do with how long you have played instead, how much you want to change" was asked. Everyone agreed on this conclusion. Erik said that it was hard to make a character unique if you could only change a couple of decimeters of the entire body. It would therefore seem as if the participants of this study did not agree with Turkay's (2011) conclusion.

#### **5.4.1 Gender Exploitation in Games**

During the follow-up with Anthon, Eva and Erik, there was one topic that constantly reappeared, gender. Eva expressed her horror for how women were exploited in this type of games: "But I actually think they are exploiting the woman in the wrong way in those games, it has to be big breasts and it has to be short skirts and... well you shouldn't do that, it's wrong!" Erik reminded Eva that it is not only the females who are exploited. Male characters are always portrayed as having a six-pack and huge biceps. Eva agreed that this was of course also wrong. She wanted the characters to look as normal human beings. As Anthon said in the initial interview, he agreed with Eva on the fact that it was annoying that the female characters always had to have huge breasts. He thought that it would be very unpractical for a warrior to run around with enormous breasts while fighting monsters. However he did point out that it might not be because the games where created by men, which Eva had previously stated. Even if women had created the games, they would have made big breasts on the characters because they know it is profitable. The discussion continued:

Eva: Okay, so it's a way to sell more products, but that shows that people...

Anthon: I mean, everyone wants to exploit women because they know it generates money...

Eva: Yes... It is... It's the money that matters, not moral and ethics

Eva did not feel that the exploitation issue had been solved yet. Anthon and Erik tried to convince her that this was how it was everywhere. It turned into a heated discussion between Erik and Eva:

Anthon: That's because they are exploited in all Medias, they do it no matter what it concerns Frik: Yes but of course it all comes down to supply and demand. I mean if it is 80 % guys

Yes, but of course, it all comes down to supply and demand, I mean if it is 80 % guys who plays, and guys generally wants to see bigger breasts on women, then they have to provide what the majority of the market wants. If there are 2 % that thinks that, no, now let's burn our bras and refuse to shave our armpits, and women should not have breasts at all, then they won't make it so that they provide what these 2 % wants and

ignore what the other 98 % think of the game. It is marketing...

Eva: Then you can think about these games, why should there be such aspects in these

games, because they are about other things...

Erik: *It's you who put them in the game* 

Eva: No it's not

Erik: Yes it is, because so far you've said that women are exploited three times in five

minutes, so you are very stuck on that...

Eva: Yes but I think it's wrong
Erik: I have never reflected over it

Anthon did agree somewhat with Eva. He is reflecting over the fact that women are exploited, but just because they are exploited in the entire society. During the follow-ups with Lars and Christina it became clear that they did not share Eva's point of view about exploiting women. Lars pointed out, just as Erik had before, that men were also exploited if you wanted to see it that way "but it's the same if you're out on the town and you check the billboards for H&M or Dressman or any other business... they don't have a chubby little 40-year old, half bold who stands there with a shirt on him... its some guy with a six-pack on the belly" Christina also agreed with Erik about the fact that if you think that you are exploited that is what you will be. She also pointed out that in some of the games you could change the size of the body, so there were possibilities to make it different if you wanted to. For Christina it was still just characters and she could not see it as exploitation of women.

#### **5.4.2 Female Characters Differences**

This statement led the discussion into whether or not women were treated differently from male characters. Erik was the first to confirm this: "I mean, if you for example start playing a new game or so, then you will be treated in a better way if you play a female character..." Lars also confirmed this during his follow-up. A female character is much more likely to gain help from other players, then male characters. Christina had also encountered this difference while playing together with her husband: "I've been in the same group, and they are kind of, they have higher demands on Magnus, while they are kinder to me, for some reason [...] but I notice that they have a much harder vocabulary towards him, then they have had towards me when I was there" This was according to MacCullum-Stewart (2008) a reoccurring thing among players. The females were treated more nicely and were also allowed to do make more mistakes. I then asked if the players acted differently while playing female characters. They all claimed that they didn't. Anthon had once discovered however that other players often thought he was a woman in real life because he used a different, more mature language while chatting. He explained:

"You don't write LoL [Laugh out loud] all the time, you don't use as many abbreviations, I use... I prefer to use a very... also very, ehm, what is it called, authentic, ehm, correct English when I speak, and that is also something that most guys don't do... I think... or most guys think that there is someone who doesn't write a lot of abbreviations and stuff all the time so... it became more authentic somehow, they knew I had a female character and I spoke in a more correct manner..."

Anthon also added that you get more prepositions as a female character. People ask you where you are from and what you are called etcetera. Anthon's answers are very much in line with Yee (2008) and Eklund (2011) research, who both said that females were propositioned more than men.

### 5.4.3 Thoughts on Gender Swapping and Identification Difficulties

As, among other researchers, Yee (2008), MacCullum (2008) and Grosman (2010) pointed out that a lot of players gender swapped during their time online. In the follow-ups it became quite apparent that the male participants were more comfortable with this procedure than the female players. Eva had a really hard time with her male character. She could not feel a connection or identify with him. In the initial interview Christina stated that she had no problem playing a male character. It did not matter to her. However during the follow-up this viewpoint seemed to have changed a bit. She admitted that she had not given her male character a second thought. He was not even an option when it came to picking a character to continue playing with. During this follow-up, she explained, on the contrary to what she had said in the initial interview. She did not play male characters at all. She had only had one, and since she never played it, her husband took over the character.

When asking Anthon and Erik about why they played female characters and did not have any problem with it. Anthon drew the following conclusion:

"No but I think it can have to do with the fact that male players are more often power gamers [see Appendix 1] than female players... So we just don't care that much about the character in the end. We can make a character that we have an idea about, but we only care for a small amount of time, but in the end, we are just there... to play, to PvP, to kill other people, or kind of... get as good gear as possible, so we care less about the character then we do about the gear the character obtains, and what we are able to achieve or... what we are able to achieve with are character... So that's why we don't care as much about the character later either... but instead that we might just occasionally care about the character as a character"

Erik did not quite agree with this statement. He meant that since he played the character's personality. He did not care whether it was a male or a female. Erik did not see that much difference in personalities between men and women. Anthon agreed on the fact that it did not matter to him if it was a woman or a man. He pointed out that men and woman are just the same. Anthon also said that he knew from reading the forum discussions that a lot of male players also played women because there were already so many male characters in the game. He also said that in these conversations there are men who refuse to play women, and even people who think that it is something wrong with switching gender in a game.

Another discussion about male and female characters that came up during the followups was if it was more fun to create a female character, and if you had more choices with a female than with a male character. Lars claimed that in the character creation process there was just as many choices for men as for women. However in the game, it was easier to dress up a female for a role playing event, because they had more options on dresses and other nice clothes. Anthon said that it was easier to make a female character more unique. The male players all looked the same, no matter how much you adjusted different features. Both Eva and Erik agree with him on this. Eva stated that it was impossible for her to make the male character she wanted because there were not enough options. A follow-up question if it was more important to make an attractive character if you made a female was then asked. Anthon stated that he cared more about how the female characters looked because he was a man, and was not interested in other men. He still claimed that you could not make a male character look different, and that female characters had more options. Erik also added that women had the same opinion as men do about what looks good on women. He said that today's women are socialized in the same way of thinking. Big breasts are beautiful: "or else there wouldn't be a market for plastic surgery either..." He also said that by making the female characters more attractive it might be easier for the player to get help from other players.

## 5.5 Summary of the Empirical Findings

The result of this study goes in line with Bartle's research. Bartle (2004) argues that it comes down to what players perceive as fun in MMORPGs. It was clear that for Lars, Eva and Erik it was much more important with the appearance and especially with the connection to the character. Anthon and Christina wanted to achieve as much as possible, or in Anthon's case also dominate other players. The identity forming process is not uniform, that is, it was not possible to categorize the participants in accordance to Neusaedter and Federovkaya's (2009) categorizes. However it was shown that Christina was the one who stood out and did not want anything to be too real. She wanted to have a fantasy world. Martin (2005) argues that players expect a lot of choices in the character creation process to make their character unique. However the participants of this study found it more important to have a character that they liked then that it was unique. It was also a fact that the game where the players felt the least immersed in was City of Heroes who had the most choices in their character creation interface. The most important feature to be able to change was not an easy task to decide for the participants. This changed for everybody depending on when they were asked. Most of them did however conclude that the head was the most important. To be able to add parts of yourself also showed to be important to some of the players. The name of the character was also of great importance to these users. They said that the name is what the other players will identify you with, and therefore it is extremely important that the name is well thought about. The most discussed topic among the users was that of gender. While Eva was determined to show the others that women were being exploited in these games, the others could agree to a certain point, but also said that men were exploited just as much in that case. Another conclusion that was drawn about men and women was that it might not be the gender that is essential. Instead it might be of more significance for how long you have played, or what you like to do when you enter a virtual world. Gender swapping seemed to be easier for the male participants. The women had a hard time identifying with their male characters whereas the men did not see much of a difference between male and female characters.

## 6. Discussion

The aim of this research was to gain a better understanding of which factors that determine which features of the character creation interface that is most important to players. This chapter will draw conclusions and interpret the empirical material with the help of previous research as well as the researchers own experiences. The first part of the chapter will try to answer which underlying factors affect how important different features of the character creation interface are to experienced MMORPG players. This is followed by a discussion around the characters that were chosen by the players.

## **6.1 Factors Determining Features**

To understand what underlying factors affect how important different features of the character creation process are, we must first look at the specific features and their importance to the players. The outcomes show that the participants can be divided in two different groups – enough choices and the face, or head. For Erik and Lars it was the fact that they had enough choices to be able to add features from their own look onto the character. The other three all, at one point or another concluded that the face or head was the most important. To understand the reasons for this division among the users, it is a good idea to look at the levels of immersion the different players felt in the game. The first group, containing Lars and Erik, both had the highest amount of immersion in the group. It was clear that these two players wanted to experience the world to the fullest and immerse themselves as much as possible. For this to become reality, they felt a need to connect themselves to their character. Thereby having enough choices for this to become possible made a huge difference for them. Since Eva had not played any MMORPG before it is hard to draw conclusions as to her immersion in the game. Therefore I will focus more on the experienced players. Anthon and Christina were the two players who experienced the least amount of immersion in the games. This could be a reason as to why the attractiveness of the face and hair was the most luring feature for them. By not feeling a need to add parts of themselves into their characters, they focused more on making their characters look beautiful. Even though this might seem as a fair estimation to the participants' choices, it is still an interesting fact that both Erik and Lars chose the game where you could add the least amount of features from your own body. This might indicate that even though it is important for them to have these choices, the game is still the determining factor for the choice of character. This will be discussed further in the second part of the discussion chapter.

In the results it became clear that it was not the gender of the player that determined what features of the character creation process that was important. This had more to do with what the players considered fun in the games. Bartle's (2004) player types seemed to be a good way to determine the differences among the participants in this study. Those players who were more oriented towards interacting with other players liked to put in parts of themselves in their characters, while players who interacted more with the world cared less about how the character looked. For them the game was what was the most important. The only thing that differed between the male and female players was the importance the characters gender. The female players had a very difficult time trying to identify with their male characters. Both thought it would be much easier than it was. In opposite to this the male players did not find it more

difficult to identify with a female character than with a male character. This is very much in line with previous research (Eklund, 2011; Yee, 2008). Nonetheless the question as to why it is much harder for women to relate to male players is a lot harder to answer. It could be connected to the time players have played. Eklund (2011) found that women were often introduced to the game in a much later stage than men; women are often older than men when they start playing games. Perhaps male players have had a longer amount of time adjusting to playing both genders. This is of course difficult to say in such a small study. Nevertheless it is a plausible and interesting explanation. This seems to indicate that at least the very experienced players have normalized the gender in games, just as MacCallum-Stewart (2008) could conclude.

## 6.1.1 Creating a Character

A more thorough look at each part of the character creation process can tell us more about what features might be the most important for designers to spend time and money on. Some MMORPGs have a choice of different servers (see Appendix 1) for their users to choose from. However in the games used in this study only World of Warcraft had any classifications on the realms; Role playing (RP), Normal (see Appendix 1), Player versus Player (PvP) and different combinations of these terms. Christina and Eva had no knowledge as to what the difference were between the different realms (see Appendix 1). They therefore chose the realm with the most interesting name. Lars and Erik always picked RP realms, because they thought that the players there were more mature. Also they enjoyed role playing occasionally. Anthon almost always chose a PvP realm, since that was what he enjoyed doing in the game. When a player has chosen a realm, the first choice to make is often that of what race the character should become. For all the male participants, it was a very important choice. This was where the character started, and the choice of race determined the continued creation of the character. It was therefore frustrating for these players in Dungeons and Dragons Online, where you picked your class and path before the race. The possibilities of what race one could be was not as important as where this choice were placed. This circumstance might have to do with the fact that these three players have all played World of Warcraft (WoW) since the beginning in 2004. In WoW every choice is however gathered on one interface screen. From what was shown from all these interviews the participants went from the upper left corner, where the choice of race, and faction, is placed. So if the users have grown accustomed to always choosing the race of the character first. It might feel as if this is where the character starts, since it has always been this way before. In choosing the race it became apparent that Neustaedter and Federovskaya's (2009) research about different identity categories could be connected to this choice. Since Eva, according to these categories, was a realist. She needed her character to be human to be able to identify at all with it. The role-players and ideals, Erik, Anthon and Lars found that they could identify just as well with any of the races, since they had become more accustom to these during the years of playing MMORPGs. Christina, who belonged to the category Fantasies, was the opposite of the realist. Making a human was an impossible choice for her. She did not want to add any of her real life into the character. However at Christina's follow-up it became clear that she might not be as distanced from the game as she wanted to give the impression of. The reason for her not playing as much anymore was not due to the game, but to the fact that she was afraid of gaining a higher level of immersion and thereby allowing herself to get

caught in the game. The choice of class, path, and attacks etcetera were of some importance to the participants. However none of these stood out as more than another step in the character creation process.

### 6.1.2 Choosing a Gender

The choice of gender was in all games but City of Heroes available from the start. One of the most interesting facts that occurred here was that Christina, before the tests began said that gender was the most important choice, along with the appearance of the character. However while creating her characters she pointed out that this did not have any importance to her at all. It simply did not matter. Later on in the follow-up it showed that again, this choice was the most important. It could be that Christina was aiming at appearing as gender-neutral as possible during the interviews. She did not want me to think that she put any great importance to what gender a person, or character was. Then during the follow-up she had realized that this really did matter to her, and could better explain that it was not because it mattered in real life, but simply because she herself was a woman. Lars stated in the beginning that he almost always played male characters. Though as the interview progressed, it became clear that he probably had as many female as male characters. He could however not explain why he did not say so from the start. Since Lars was the one who took the longest to warm up and open up during the interview, this is not so surprising. He might have thought that I would judge him the way that clearly a lot of people do on the forums. That only homosexual male players play female characters. Since I knew Anthon and Erik from before it was easier for them to know that I would not judge them. They could be open from the beginning with the fact that they enjoyed playing female characters just as much as male characters, if not more since the male characters, according to Anthon and Erik often looked horrible. Gender swapping was just not a big issue for the male players at all. Gender was just another choice, as MacCullum-Stewart (2008) stated, these players had already normalized the fact that gender of the character did not matter.

### **6.1.3 Building the Appearance**

After these initial choices the players get to change the characters appearance. This was the part that mattered the most to the participants. The head had a lot of influence on all players. This is probably due to the fact that the face is often the first thing you see on another person in real life as well. Christina and Eva both said at one point that the face or the eyes were the mirror of the soul. If this is how you see the face, then it is not so peculiar that it matters a lot too many players. In DDO and WoW the face was the focus of the entire character customization. In STO there were also more possibilities to change the face, even if that game also focused on the body and the clothes of the character. In CoH however, the main focus was on the clothes and a lot less changes were available for altering the face. Eva was the one who had the most issues with this. The graphic also were a bit more edgy in this game. She felt it impossible to create a softer look for her male character. Some of the participants were also challenged by the fact that you could not change the shape of the head in DDO. This made it impossible for Erik to become satisfied with his character. The possibility to change the face was one of the most important features for all of the users. When it came to the hair style and hair color of the character, it first did not seem very important, in contrast to Ducheneaut et al (2009) and Turkay (2011) studies that the hair was the most important feature for users to change. This view

was however somewhat changed in the follow-ups, where it became evident that the hair was in fact a very important part of the character customization. A lot of this had to do with the fact that this feature was important in real life as well. Just as Anthon concluded, it was now the head that was the most important thing to change not just the face.

In STO and CoH it was possible for the players to change the shape of the body. Especially the experienced players found this satisfying. They meant that it was easier to create a unique character if you had more possibilities than just altering the head. It was not a particular feature on the body that was important for the players to change; instead it was the prospect to be able to change it at all that was important. During the follow-up we could conclude that this was because the experienced players most of the time grew tired of seeing the exact same bodies on all characters. They also wanted the body to fit the race and class. Anthon pointed out that a spell caster, whom had studied all his life should not be a mountain of muscles. Instead it would fit that character better to either be a bit skinny, or on the heavy side. The players who role played found this very important. They wanted to have as much control as possible to be able to better create a background story for their character. For inexperienced players it might therefore be enough to just be able to change the head of the character. However when you have grown custom to the same faces and bodies for a period of time. You might need more possibilities to at least change the overall body structure. One part of the body that is possible to change in all these four MMORPGs is the skin color. For Anthon and Lars the skin color was important to change before the other features of the face since they after that could match the rest of the colors in the face with the skin tone. As with the body, the clothes could be changed in STO and CoH. In STO the users mostly wanted to change things that looked odd. Whereas in CoH the focus was so much on the clothes that it was almost impossible for the players not to focus on each part. The experienced players pointed out that it was hard to know how important the clothes were to change. In for example WoW the players will change their gear constantly. Therefore the starting clothes become less important to change. For Eva who did not know this. The clothes were the part she would have liked to change in the character interface of WoW. It therefore becomes clear that the importance of this feature is connected to the player's experience of the game. None of the experienced players even commented on the fact that you could not change the clothes in World of Warcraft.

## 6.1.4 Picking a Name

The name of the character proved to be one of the most important parts of the players' character. This feature had not been written a lot about by previous researchers. Guitton (2010) did a study on names. However that study was more focused on spotting differences between humanoid and non-humanoid names. The fact that this topic has been written less about is probably due to the fact that the name is not something that can be modified as much as for example the head or hair. Even so, it showed to be very important to the participants of this study. They felt that the name was what other players would identify you with. While you, identify with your character through the previous choices in the character creation process. The name is what matters the most to other players. Actually this is not so unexpected, since, as was concluded on the follow-up, this is often how you are introduced to another player. A lot of the time you cannot even see the face, body or

clothes. This means that the name must convey all of these parts together, to be able to show an accurate version of your character. By adding your nationality or using a name from an object. You portray a more immature and unserious projection of your character. Christina's choice to use the same name on all her characters first seemed very unserious and yet another way for her to distance herself from the game. When it was explained that this was her way of putting parts of herself into the character it seemed like the name was just as important to Christina as to the other participants. For Christina however, it was not about what others thought of her name, as it was for the rest of the players. For her it was a choice that showed that this character belonged to her. Other features that proved to be important to the more experienced players where that you could zoom in on your character and also move around, so you could see the character from the sides and from behind. These players also would have liked even more possibilities in this area. Anthon pointed out that he would have liked to look at the character's different parts just as he could do later in the game. This should not be impossible, seeing how you can do this within the game. The feature could very well be integrated in the character creation interface as well.

### **6.1.5** The Important Parts of Creating a Character

So from these different features it would suggest that almost all parts of the character creation process are of some importance to the player. However there are indications as to which features are the most important. First of all, it was quite clear that the more choices a character creation interface contained did not necessarily mean a more enjoyable process. City of Heroes was the game with the most choices in the character creation process. However those choices were not focused on the features the players needed the most. CoH contained a lot of different choices for attacks and clothes. However this was not what the participants of this study saw as the most interesting. So despite the large amount of choices, the importance of choosing the right features seems crucial for the character creation interface. For the experienced players it was important to have the possibility to build up your character in the right order. This proved that they were all very affected of how World of Warcraft's interface was built, and in which order the features in this game often were chosen. Therefore it might be wise for game designers to not try and be too creative in the way they order the character creation process. At least for these participants it was extremely important. The biggest difference between the inexperienced player and the experienced players was that since she had no idea what the games were about or how she would present herself, the appearance of the character became everything to her. With the characters appearance she had to be able to portrait all the characteristics of the character. The experienced players were more confident that they could display this in other ways to the other players. So if a game is trying to attract a new group of people or a different type of people. It might be wise to consider how much the characters appearance can convey to other players. To sum it up; for the experienced players it was more important to have enough options to create a unique character that could involve parts of themselves, with most focus on features on the head. However once the players have played the game for some time, they need more. They need to be able to change for example ageing, scaring or the body of the character. Once you have created a number of characters in World of Warcraft they all start to look the same. The game developers tried to solve this by adding Barbershops to the game, this was something that most players enjoyed very much, but it still is not enough to attract the long-term players to stay. To answer

"which underlying factors affect how important different features of the character creation interface are to experienced MMORPG players?" I would say that designers should focus on having a similar order as other resembling games. Designers and developers need to focus on what player types they want to attract and how immersed these players want to become in the game. Developers need to know their players. They have to understand if these players are new to just this game or to MMORPGs in general. The player should have the choice to have different types of head shapes. Be able to change the eyes, skin color, hair and hair color. In addition to this there should be choices for the player to make the character his own. This could range from body type, ageing to the shape of the lips.

## 6.2 The Choice of Character

The first conclusion that could be drawn from the players' choice of characters were that they chose fantasy-related games, namely, World of Warcraft and Dungeons and Dragons Online. Lars had played a bit with his character in Star Trek Online. However it was the WoW-character that mattered the most to him. This was interesting to learn seeing how both Lars and Erik was very clear on the fact that it was very important to be able to add features of yourself in the character. Even so none of the characters they chose in World of Warcraft fit this description. This could indicate that it is very important if the players know the game from previously. Erik and Lars both enjoyed role playing with others and therefore they chose a game where they could interact with other players from the start. Anthon and Christina both made their choice because of the game, not the character. The only one who truly chose the character that she was the most happy with was Eva, the inexperienced player. This is probably due to the fact that she had no idea what the different games had to offer. Therefore she had no other influences except for her character. I think it has to do with the fact that all players were interested in fantasy games. No one, except Lars, was interested in trying out CoH or STO. Therefore it became more of a choice between WoW and DDO, the fantasy-genre games. Since Anthon and Christina's choices originated in what game it was, they knew they wanted to try DDO, and they therefore chose that game. Whereas Lars and Erik went for the character they liked the most out of these two games, but partly because they knew the game itself as well. This would mean that even though the game still affects experienced players on their choice of character. The character itself might also be a determining factor. This still indicates that the character creation process is a big part of MMORPGs seeing how you spend the least part of your game time creating your character and yet the choices do have a significant importance to a lot of MMORPG players. The fact that world of Warcraft, a game known to all experienced players, were chosen makes it harder to interpret how much the fact that they were familiar with the game determined their choice of character. If only new games had been chosen for this study, the outcome might have been completely different. The character itself might have had a bigger impact on the players.

#### 6.2.1 The Characters Growth

It was hard to establish whether or not the characters had become more unique to the participants sense they created them. This because of the small amount of time they had played. Anthon claimed that he did not have a stronger connection toward his

character. Whilst Erik and Lars said that they both felt a stronger bond with their character now. Again, I think this has to do partly with what you like to do in the game, but also how immersed you are in the game. Anthon admitted that he had only aimed at reaching higher levels (see Appendix 1) to learn more about the game. However he did mention an interesting thing. He had not yet talked to anyone. According to Neustaedter and Fedorovskaya (2009) the identity of a person as well as of a person's character is created through actions and interactions. This could therefore be one of the biggest factors as to why Lars and Erik felt more for their characters. These two players had role played, started to create backgrounds and hung out with friends. Therefore their identity would have had time to develop and evolve. This could also be the determining factor to why Christina did not feel immersed in games. She only felt that it was annoying when other people where around, disturbing her advancement in the game. That means that to be able to create an identity, it might be extremely important to have a character that you feel can and will represent you in the game. The participants did conclude that it was more important to have a likable character than a unique one. By saying that, the importance of a character's uniqueness might not lie in the appearance but rather the identity of the character. Depending on what level of immersion, and what player type the player is. All male participants pointed out that they did not care as much about the gender or appearance because they would still play the personality of the character.

#### 6.2.2 Gender Issues

An interesting phenomena was that the inexperienced player felt that female characters were exploited in these type of games, however none of the experienced players had considered that a big problem. This is probably due to the fact that you get use to how races and genders are portrayed. Just as the fact that the inexperienced player could not identify with any other race than a human. The experienced players saw all races as normal. If this is a good or a bad thing that females are falsely portrayed and no one cares because they have gotten used to it is another question. Maybe as more women start playing games this will change. It is still a fact that, just as the experienced players pointed out, women are exploited everywhere. Females choose to go to plastic surgery's and bill boards still portray young, skinny, beautiful and retouched women. The conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion is that, especially the male players had normalized this so called exploitation of women, as well as the gender of the character. It seems as the longer one plays, the more one grows accustom to the world and the characters in and around it. Another interesting experience that was revealed during the follow-ups where that all experienced players had noticed that female characters are treated differently than male characters. This could also be due to the fact that male players often were introduced to the game earlier than female players (Eklund, 2011). Therefore it has been a known "fact" that female players are not as skilled as male players, with the assumption then that all female characters are female players. There are however always different opinions among different players. Some believe that all female characters are played by female players and some that they are controlled by men. Even so, when players know, or think, that there is a woman playing a character they will, according to this study, as well as according to Yee (2008) and Eklund (2011) treat them differently. Some players will be patronizing or propositioning, others more helpful and might also allow the women to make more mistakes. As in real life there are of course different

type of players. All and all the gender preferences in games seem to depend more on what gender your character has, than the gender of yourself. It has also been said a lot of times in the results and the discussion that more often it has to do with how and why you play the game. Age and gender might make a difference, but it is not the essential factor, the way you want to perceive the game and play your character are.

## 6.3 Interpretations of the Empirical Findings

To summarize these findings I will originate from Bartle's (2004) player types, and see how well certain features and factors that can be categorized. These are my own interpretations, and the findings have been much generalized. However it is possible, even in this small study to see connection between different parts, types, levels and motivations. These conclusions are shown in Figure 6.1.

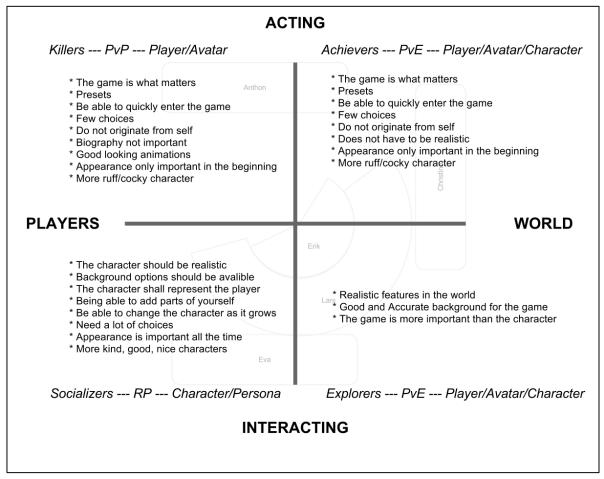


Figure 6.1 - A summary of the findings, originating from Bartle's player types

Starting with Bartle's player type "Killers", this category seems to hold the users who enjoy the Player versus Player approach. The level of immersion for these players seems to be on a level of player or avatar. For this type of players the game is more important than anything else, they want to be able to enter the game quickly and presets are therefore a wise choice. These users does not require a lot of different features, and do not originate from themselves. For them the appearance is only

important in the process of creating the character. For the type "Achievers" the level of immersion can be slightly higher than for Killers. These players seem to enjoy acting towards the world, and therefore enjoy Player versus Environment. This type of users is quite similar to the Killers – from a character creation point of view – The game is more important and they also want the possibility to enter the game quickly. The type "Explorers" is a bit harder to understand, from a character creation perspective, since these players enjoy interacting, but not with other players but with the world. They want to understand everything about the world, how it works, what you can do and how you can get the most out of it. A lot of the participants of this study enjoyed the exploring part of the games. However this was not the main reason for their playing and it is therefore hard to draw any further conclusions about this type of players. The type that attracted most of the users in this study was "Socializers". This player type find role playing interesting and the levels of immersion can reach to the highest point, persona. It is in this category the character creation process means the most. This type of players wants to have enough choices to make a character that is realistic to them. They want to have the possibility to add features of themselves into their character, and also change the character as it "grows".

#### **6.3.1 Familiar Games vs. New Games**

Another type of differences could be detected between the game that was familiar to the players and the games that were entirely new to the players. In the familiar games it became more important to think about the abilities and talents (see Appendix 1). Whereas in a new game this was still an unknown area for the users and therefore the appearance had more significance in the new games. In the familiar game the players did not have to think about the structure, seeing how this was the "right" was to build a character for them. In this game they also knew which features that could be altered later and therefore needed less attention right now. The players who ended their interviews with the familiar game suddenly realized how limited the character creation process was, something they had not thought as much about previously. In the new games a lot of players felt that they might want to do "a standard" character just to get into the game and see how it works. Therefore in new games there might not have to be numerous choices, since the players will go with what they feel is familiar to them. However as soon as the game becomes more familiar to the players this point of view will also change and the users will require more possibilities to make a unique character. A summary of these differences is shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.1 - A summary of the differences between familiar and new games

Familiar Games	New Games
<ul> <li>Abilities, talents etcetera becomes more important</li> <li>This is the "right" way to build your character</li> <li>Know what features you can change later</li> <li>Harder to see the limitations of the game</li> <li>All races and classes are normalized</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Appearance matters more since the game itself is still unknown</li> <li>Might create a "test-character" to faster get to experience the game.</li> <li>Want the possibility to be able to change features they can change in their familiar games</li> <li>The face might be enough to change here.</li> <li>Chooses familiar races and classes</li> </ul>

Originating from these conclusions even experienced players become "newbies" (see Appendix 1) to a certain degree when they enter a new game. They have learned about the different possibilities, such as zoom, drag, structure and these become important. Yet familiarity is what matters the most to all players, inexperienced as well as experienced players. There are of course still those players who like the world to be a fantasy-world. If however all other identity-categories, realistics, ideals and role-players behave like this when they enter different games, there might indeed need to be different levels of character customization. Perhaps the "unlocking" of features that can be seen in many single-player games might become useful even in MMORPGs. In that way the choices for the newcomer will not be overwhelming and the experienced players will not grow tired of the game because of the lack of customization possibilities. In conclusion, it seems that it is important for game developers to gather more information about the players they want to attract to their game. What games have they played before? Are they inexperienced or experienced players? What do they consider fun in games? Do they like to socialize, explore, achieve or kill other players? All of these questions will affect how the player perceives your game and your character creation process. As Turkay and Adinolf (2010) said, you need to know your audience.

## 7. Conclusions

This chapter will conclude the findings of this research and state what the contribution of this study is. A reflection of the research will be given and finally a section about further research will be presented.

## 7.1 Conclusions of the Findings

It became clear that having a lot of choices while creating your character did not necessarily mean a more enjoyable character creation process. For inexperienced players it might be enough to just be able to change the head of the character. For more experienced players more possibilities are needed. For experienced players it was important to recognize the structure of the character creation system. They want to build up their character in the same way they have always done. The name of the character also proved to be an important part of the player's character. Other features, such as zooming in on your character, or moving it around also proved significant to the players. The level of immersion the different participants experienced affected how they saw their character and how they perceived the game. It also became clear that different player types could affect the importance of the character creation process in future game play. This since role-players often looked at their character more than those players who focused sole on the game. The first conclusion that could be drawn from the players' choices of characters was that they had all chosen fantasy-related games. Even the players most interested in having a lot of choices in the process both ended up choosing World of Warcraft. The biggest reason for this choice was probably the game and not the character. Even so the character itself might also be a determining factor, at least for some player types. It was found that the identity of a person's character was created through actions and interactions, and that this probably was one of the biggest factors as to why the participants who role played felt a stronger connection to their characters. That means that to be able to create an identity, it might be extremely important to have a character that you feel can and will represent you in the game. It might therefore be the case that the importance of characters' uniqueness does not lie in the appearance but rather in the identity of the character. And so if the character creation process can provide you with the possibility to create a character you like. It might be easier to socialize within the game. This could help you build an identity for your character and gain a stronger connection toward it.

One of the most interesting findings of this study was that the longer you have played a game the less bizarre the different races and classes will seem. This was also true for the phenomena of gender swapping. They are not choices that determine the entire identity of your character, merely a pawn in the game of character creation. It became very clear that it was not the gender of the player that determined what choices of the character creation process that was important. This instead had more to do with what kind of player types the different users belonged to. The players who interacted more with other players liked to put in parts of themselves in their characters. Players who interacted more with the world cared less about how the character looked. For them the game was what was the most important. The only thing that differed significantly between the male and female players was the importance of the characters gender. For the male players this was not important, while the female players had a difficult time relating to their male characters.

## 7.1.1 Overview of the Findings

- What player type you belong to, and what you consider to be fun in games is essential for how much you need to change the appearance of your character. Especially if you are acting or interacting with other players is of importance to whether or not the appearance is significant to the player.
- The results indicate that the name of the character is very important to the players.
- Immersion in games is essential for how you want to alter the character. Especially the players who enjoyed role-playing wanted to be able to add parts of themselves in their character.
- When it comes to the choice of race. This study indicates that this is determined by how long you have played and how you create an identity for your character.
- It is more important to create a character you like than one that is unique.
- The more experience players, all men, use both female and male characters.
   This seemed to be a consequence that a normalization process had taken place, and choosing a gender for the character is now no more than just another choice.
- The participants emphasized that female characters are treated differently from male characters.
- Reasons for choice of character seemed to be a combination of games and characters. The results also indicates that a familiar game might attract the player more, even if the character creation process might be perceived better in other games.

In Table 7.1 the most important factors and features for the character creation process are displayed.

Table 7.1 - Important features and factors of the character creation process

Important parts of the character	Crucial factors that determines essential
creation process:	features
• Name	• If the player had played the game before or not
Head	• If the players was experienced in MMORPGs
<ul> <li>Parts of yourself</li> </ul>	or not
Gender	What Player type the player belongs to
<ul> <li>For experienced players, also</li> </ul>	What identity type the player belongs to
structure and zoom	How much the player wants to immerse
	himself in the game

To summarize the findings, game designers need to learn more about their players. They need to take all these important factors into consideration, before deciding how the character creation interface should be developed.

#### 7.2 Contribution of Research

Thanks to this study it will be eminent for other researchers that qualitative studies can bring forth just as important answers to the MMORPG research as quantitative studies. It has shown that it is important to have follow-ups of the research. To sit down and discuss how the participants felt, and how they see it today. This study also focused on very long and deep interviews which made it possible for the participants to open up and better explain their thoughts and needs. As was stated in the beginning of this study, the result will mostly benefit game designers and game developers. However, by detecting the fact that it might not be important to have a range of different choices for the players, the stakeholders might be able to focus on making the more important features even better. Thereby gaining, and keeping players in their game. This will in the end also benefit the players, whom will get more choices on the features that matters, and thereby a better character creation interface.

#### 7.3 Research Reflection

It was very interesting to do a qualitative research, because numerous other studies had been accomplished with a quantitative approach. Choosing this type of methodology approach gave me a chance to get to know, and understand the players better. Deciding to do a follow-up showed to be very successful, since interesting topics could be reevaluated and further discussed among the players. This also helped to make the interpretations and understanding of the players needs more visual. It also presented a new and different view on some topics, such as the importance of uniqueness and the amount of choices a character creation process need to provide.

The MMORPGs that were chosen for this research aimed at giving the player a range of different genres of MMORPGs. However since all of the chosen participants previously only focused on fantasy related games, instead of providing a wide range of selections, my decision limited their choices. For these users the fantasy-genre was more important. Therefore the choice came down to only two characters instead of four. If I were to redo the study I would probably have chosen similar games, to better see the affect that the character creation process might have on their choice of character. Another alteration that would be considered in a new study would be not to include a game that the participants were already familiar with. This especially affected the players who wanted to interact with others, because they rather choose a game where they already knew other players. So to gain an even better understanding of the impact of character creation, all games should be in the same genre and totally new to the participant. It would of course also had helped if the players had more time playing their characters, to better gain an understanding on how much the character creation process affects the future gameplay. The decision to include an inexperienced player showed to be very interesting. This gave me an opportunity to realize how much that gets normalized in the games for experienced players.

The researchers own part in the study also needs some reflection. By including some players that were already known to me, I might not have distanced myself enough from the participants. However, it did become apparent that those users who knew me had an easier time to open up to me. Especially when discussing gender issues. Therefore using familiar participants may have pros and cons. Even so it might still have affected my own interpretations of the users. As I wrote in the reliability section, I might also have colored the inexperienced players choices. It might therefore be vital to translate these parts beforehand. That would have given the user a more objective description. Overall the choices made in this research, both regarding methodology approach as well as MMORPGs and participants appear to have given the research a new, interesting viewpoint of identity and gender in the character creation process and what impact this has on further gameplay.

#### 7.4 Further Research

- The topic that was of most interest to all participants was that of gender. So a suggestion to further research is to look at what interest people and researchers today namely the preferences of the different genders. Even though this study did not see a huge amount of differences between male and female players, there was one important topic that deserves more research.
  - Why do female players have such a hard time identifying with their male characters, when this does not seem to be a problem for the male players?
- It would also be interesting to research the differences between male and female characters; here are some suggestions to topics;
  - Do players speak differently to male and female characters?
  - Can more differences in how players treat male and female characters be detected?
  - Are there a different number of choices for male and female characters during the character creation process?
- It would also be a good idea to pursue the idea of follow-ups. A similar study but with more focus on the impact of the character creation process would be very interesting.
- Another topic that is worth pursuing is the interactions between different player types. To see if there are differences in these communications which could affect other virtual worlds as well.

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# Appendix 1 – Glossary

**Appendices** 

**Abilities/Talents** A set of skills that can be chosen for the players

character.

**Avatar/Character** The game piece that the player controls in the game,

is often a representation of the player.

**Class** Each character belongs to a class; this class

determines the character's skills, abilities, and

limitations.

**Dwarf** One of the races in some MMORPGs

**Emote** Through these emotes, a character can express

feelings or actions, for example /dance to make the

character dance.

**Gender swapping** When a player chooses to play with a character of

opposite gender

**Human** One of the races in most MMORPGs

**Hunter** One of the classes in some MMORPGs

**Immersion/Immersive** Immersion in a game is about the game's ability to

capture the player and make the player feel as a

natural part of the game

**Level** This is often used in MMORPGs to show the

character's advancement in the game

MMOG Massively multiplayer online game

MMORPG Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game.

MUD Multi User Dungeons

**Newbie** A player that is new to the game.

**Normal server** A server where players cannot be attacked by other

players.

**Orc** One of the races in some MMORPGs

**Power Gamer/ Power level** A player who wants to gain levels as fast as possible

trough repetitive killing of mobs.

**Pre-made** Already finished features or complete skins for the

character.

PvE Player versus environment.

**PvP** Player versus player.

Race Each character belongs to a race; this race determines

which features that will be available for the player to choose from when they are creating their character. The race can also determine certain skills or talents

for the character.

**Randomize** A random feature or full body can be generated with

the help of the "randomize-button"

**RP** Role Playing

**Rouge** One of the classes in some MMORPGs

Second Life A virtual world created by Linden Research

**Server/Realm** Individual servers running the game.

Sims A single-player game created by EA games

**Spellcaster** A type of classes that deals with magic and spells

Warrior One of the classes in some MMORPGs

**Werewolf** One of the races in some MMORPGs

**Vulcan** One of the races in Star Trek Online

# Appendix 2 – Introduction to the Interviews

I am currently writing my master thesis in informatics. I have chosen to write about character creation in MMORPGs. My goal is to do interviews to understand why players make their choices, and what choices that are really important.

I will ask you to create a character in four different games. I want you to tell me everything you do, think and feel when you create your character. I will also ask questions before, during and after the actual character creation process. I'm also going to record our conversation to help me remember everything later.

You can do absolutely nothing wrong, if I ask why you chose a certain look, it is just because I need your answers to the essay.

Talk as much as you feel that you want to, I will however ask why you chose this or that unless you say it out loud. Of course you can admit that you do not know!

Comparisons or stories about past character creation and characters are welcome.

Try to go about the character creation as you normally do when creating a character in a game.

Try and have some fun while doing it!

#### Consent form

Information about the researcher and the research:

My name is Susanne Isaksson, I am a student at Linnaeus University, where I am currently writing my masters dissertation. The study I am conducting is about the character creation process within MMORPGs. The purpose of this study is to find out what the players of these games think are important to be able to change with their character. Hopefully the research will be able to benefit both players and game developers in creating a better character creation.

#### Participation:

- Your participation in this research is voluntary.
- You will not be paid for your participation.
- You will be able to withdraw from participation at any time.
- You have every right to decline answering a question.
- The interview is confidential, only age, gender, job situation and first name will be revealed.
- Before the report is turned in you will get an opportunity to review it and also decide if you do not want to participate in the report.

during the interview. I have had all my q voluntarily agree to participate in this stu	uestions answered to my satisfaction, and I ady:
Participant's Signature	Date
Participant's Printed Name	Signature of the Investigator

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I agree to be recorded

If any questions should arise, please contact Susanne Isaksson:

E-mail: si22ax@student.lnu.se

Choices	WoW	STO	СоН	DDO
General	-			
Realm	Х		Х	X
Faction	Х			
Race	X	X		X
Class	X		Х	X
Path		X	X	X
Play style			X	X
Gender	Х	X	X	X
Background		X	X	
Name	Х	X	X	X
Surname	Х	X		X
Randomize all	Х	X	Х	X
Randomize parts		Λ		X
Nandomize parts				^
Attacks/talents				
Powers/attacks			X	
Customize Skills/abilities		X		X
Customize Weapons			Х	
Customize powers			Χ	
Face				
Entire Face	Х	X	X	
Face shapes		X	X	
Parts of face		A lot	Some	Some
Face details	Х	X	X	X
race details	^	^		^
Hair				
Hair style	Х	X	Х	X
Hair color	Х	X	Х	Х
Body				
Skin color	X	X	Х	X
Entire body		X	X	
Height		X	X	
Weight		X	X	
Body parts		A lot	Some	
Clothes				
Entire costume		X	X	
Upper clothes		X	X	
Lower clothes		X	X	
Clothes colors		X	X	
Ciotiles Colois		^		
Other				
Background light	-	-	Х	-
Zoom	-	Scroll + Buttons	1	Scroll + Buttons

Viewpoint	Drag + buttons	Drag + buttons	Buttons	Drag + buttons
Special things		Starship name, stance	Tails, animal faces, battle cry, gender; huge	Recommend, good or bad
Paid version	No differences in the character creation process	Character slots	Almost all parts of the customization have other things in the paid version	Classes, races, character slots

## Appendix 5 – Questionnaire for the Interviews

#### **Before starting the character creation process:**

- How much do you play?
- Why do you play games? Is it different from time to time?
- What do you do in the games? (Leveling / socialize / explore / Kill)
- Is it important for you to change your character's appearance?
- What are the most important features to be able to change in the character creation process?

#### In the first game:

- Is it important to be able to randomize a character (or parts of its appearance)?
- Do you play both female and male characters? Why? How often?
- Is it important for you to have plenty of choices in character creation?
- Do the choices you make in the character creation process affect how you present and conduct yourself in the game

#### **During each game:**

- What is the first thing they change?
- In what order do they choose the different features?
- Why do they do the choices they make?
- What takes up the most time?

#### After each game:

- How do you feel about your character?
- Did you try to somehow make the character look like yourself?
- Was it something you had wanted to change but could not?
- Was there anything that seemed unnecessary to change?
- What is your impression of this game's character creation interface?
- Do you think it is possible to create a unique character? Is this important to you?

#### After all character creations:

- What are the most important features to be able to change in the character creation process?
- Is it important for you to have plenty of choices in character creation?
- Can you be more yourself when you play games?
- Have you ever stopped playing because there were too few choices in the character creation process

# Appendix 6 – Questionnaire for the Follow-ups

- 1. Which character was chosen and why?
- 2. Is it more important that you like your character than that it is unique?
- 3. Do you care about how your character looks when you play?
- 4. Is it more fun to create / play a female character?
- 5. Do other players treat you differently depending on what gender you are playing?
- 6. Do you care more about making a female character attractive?
- 7. What is most important feature to change today?
- 8. Do you need to have a randomize function?
- 9. How much did the character creation influence your choice of character?
- 10. Is the character more unique now?

# Christina

Christina	T
English Quote	Swedish Quote
"I'd say kill as much as possible!"	"Jag skulle säga slå ihjäl så mycket som möjligt!"
"Since this is, a sort of role play you	"Eftersom det här är ju då, det här är ju
are able to be someone that you actually	ett typ av rollspel så kan man vara
aren't or maybe such as you really	någon som man egentligen inte är eller
would like to be"	som man kanske skulle vilja vara"
"I think it's a little fun, since in World of	"Jag tycker att det är lite kul eftersom
Warcraft it is so much, it's almost all the	world of warcraft är så himla mycket, det
time that you meet guys, so that's why I	är nästan hela tiden som man möter
think it is it is why it's fun, and that is	killar, så då tycker jag att det är därför
also the reason to why I have played	är det kul, det är därför jag har spelat
mostly with the girl there"	mest med tjejen där"
"A combination I think Yeah a	"En kombination tror jag mmm, en
combination, you can call it fantasy in a	kombination tror jag, man kan kalla det
way that is fantasy for me That's how	för fantasy på ett sätt som jag tycker är
I'll put it, and then it was both the	fantasy för mig så kan jag säga, och då
character as well as the game that	blir det både karaktären och spelet som
worked, it was, there were two parts. In	fungerade, det var, där var båda delar. I
the other [games] I did do the character	dom andra, karaktären gjorde jag ju som
the way that I wanted it but Those	jag ville ha den, men där spelet lockar
games just don't appeal as much"	inte lika mycket"
"Yeah I think it is, that you connect with	"Ja, det tror jag, att man connectar med
it somehow and then what it is that	den på något sätt Och sen vad det är
does that, well it's hard to put your	som gör det, det är så svårt att sätta
finger on what exactly it is, but"	fingret på exakt vad det är men"
Jinger on what exactly it is, but	imgret på exakt vad det är men
"Yes, well it's not necessary for me, I	"Ja den är inte jättenödvändig för min
mean I think it's much more fun to make	del, alltså jag, jag tycker att det är
it yourself, but it could be fun to still	roligare att göra den själv, men det kan
have it, because you can always try it	vara kul o ha den ändå för att man kan ju
out, if you have a complete blackout you	testa, om man liksom har fullständig
can press it, and it could be perfect"	blackout så kan man trycka, och det kan
1 1	ju bli perfekt''
"Then it's a part of me there, then it's my	"Då är det en bit av mig där, då är det
character, and then it's no one else's	min karaktär, och då är det ingen annans
character, but my own character [] It	karaktär utan då är det min karaktär
is my mark, my watermark on it"	[]Det är min stämpel, det är min
	vattenstämpel på den"
"I've been in the same group, and they	"Jag har varit med i samma grupp, och
are kind of, they have higher demands on	dom är liksom, dom ställer högre krav på
Magnus, while they are kinder to me, for	Magnus, medan dom är lite snällare mot
some reason [] but I notice that they	mig av någon anledning []men jag
have a much harder vocabulary towards	märker att dom har haft ett hårdare
him, then they have had towards me	vokabulär mot honom, än vad det har
when I was there"	varit när jag har varit med"
	, , ,

# Erik

"I guess it depends on what you consider to be yourself like I mentioned before, sometimes you might play that harmonic Vulcan-human, who only cares about logic. And at other times you might play that brutal little dwarf who is one and a half meter tall and slashes everything that gets in his way, so it all depends on the mood"	"Det beror väl på vad som är en själv som jag nämnde innan så ibland kanske man spelar den här harmoniska vulcanmänniskan som går bara på logiken, och andra gånger så kanske man spelar den där brutala lilla dvärgen som är en och en halv meter hög och slaffsar ner allting i sin väg, så det hänger väl lite mer på sinnesstämningen"
"more like me"	"mer som jag"
"it didn't feel like me",	"det kändes inte som jag"
"Yes, although the looks are only the exterior, then there is always the behavior and that is still, well it's like I said before, the same, the same me".	"Ja, fast utseendet är bara det yttre, sen har man ju ändå sättet o det är ju fortfarande, det är ju som jag sa innan det är ju samma, samma jag ändå"
"If I now have created her in the way I imagined that this person would look, then she must have a name that this person actually could be called."	"Om jag nu har skapat henne som jag skulle tänka mig att den här personen ser ut så måste hon ju heta något som den här personen ser ut att kunna heta."
"Oh my god Yeah, there were a decent amount of color choices actually, and I get decision anxiety over where I should park my car, this was quite difficult actually".	"Herregud ja, det är ju hyfsat många färgval faktiskt, och jag som har beslutsångest oftast bara var jag ska parkera, det här var ju riktigt jobbigt faktiskt"
"But what do you do, I mean city of heroes, a town full of superheroes what do you do? What's the point, what should I do?"	"Men vad gör man som, alltså city of heroes, en stad med superhjältar vad gör man, vad går det ut på, vad ska jag göra?"
"I mean, first you pick the race, and then the class, and those two steps then determines how the appearance will be and how one acts I think [] If I for example play a male dwarf, I might not pick rouge or a thief, it's not that sneaky to run around like that, feels like being one and a half meter tall and just as wide. Then perhaps it's a more physical class one chooses in that case."	"Alltså, man väljer ju först rasen o sen klassen och dom två momenten bestämmer väl hur utseendet blir och hur man beter sig tycker jag [] Spelar jag en manlig dvärg till exempel så kanske jag inte väljer rouge som är tjuv, det är inte så jävla smygigt o springa omkring som det, känns som o va en och en halv meter hög o lika bred. Då kanske det är mer någon fysisk klass som man väljer i såna fall."
"And somehow it doesn't feel like I will ever get satisfied with it Just because It's the same all the time, I	"Och på nåt sätt, det känns inte som att jag nånsin kommer att kunna bli nöjd med den just på grund av att det är

mean if we all had the same face but different beards, it wouldn't make much of a difference anyway"	samma egentligen hela tiden, alltså om vi alla hade samma ansikte, men vi hade olika skägg, det skulle inte bli så stor skillnad ändå"
"it's an MMO so people might be nicer to ladies"	"Det är ett MMO och folk kanske är trevligare mot damer"
"Well, there has to be a reason as to why I still play WoW, or that they have 14 million players even though you can't change the body at all."	"Jo det finns ju en anledning till att man fortfarande spelar WoW, eller att dom har 14 miljoner spelare trots att man inte kan ändra kroppen nånting"
"No! I have a knife!"	"Jag har en kniv!"
"A moderate amount of choices no but for example in WoW, you can get very annoyed because there are only for example 5 faces or 6 While in STO you can get a bit confused because there you can determine the length between the eyes, how big the eyes should be, how the angle of the eyes should be, how big the nose should be, how big the right nostril should be, and left nostril should be So there it becomes a bit much"	"Lagom med alternativ nej men till exempel i wow så kan man bli irriterad för där finns till exempel 5 ansikten eller 6 medan kanske i STO så blir man lite förvirrad för där kan du ställa in hur långt mellan ögonen, hur stora ska ögonen va, hur ska lutningen på ögonen va, hur stor ska näsan va, hur stor ska höger näsborre va, och vänster näsborre va Så att där blir det lite väl mycket"
"If you play evil, you cannot have pink hair if you don't have a good reason for why she has pink hair for example"	"Spelar man ond så ska man inte ha rosa hår om man inte har nån bra anledning till varför hon har rosa hår till exempel"
"or else there wouldn't be a market for plastic surgery either"	"annars skulle det ju inte finnas någon marknad för plastikkirurger heller"
"I mean, if you for example start playing a new game or so, then you will be treated in a better way if you play a female character"	"Alltså om man till exempel börjar på ett nytt spel eller så, så möts man ju oftast på ett bättre sätt om man spelar en kvinnlig karaktär"

## Lars

Zars	
"More me then you".	"Mer jag än du"
"That could be very weird, it would be like someone else were choosing instead of you"	"Det kan ju bli hur konstigt som helst, det är ju som att någon annan väljer istället"
"It was too bad that you couldn't zoom in closer on the hands while you were	"Det var synd att man inte kunde zooma in närmare på händerna när man gjorde
making them, because it would have been	dom, för det hade varit kul att se så att det

fun to be able to detect if it looked really weird with long fingers might be too long, but you can't really see"	inte ser jättekonstigt ut med långa fingrar kanske är för långa men man ser inte riktigt Ja, ja, vi kör så tror jag"
"The only difference [among men and women] is some parts on the body; otherwise it's pretty much the same between us".	"Enda som skiljer är väl lite delar på kroppen annars så är det väl ungefär samma mellan oss"
"Yeah but I think They have succeeded with the colors and I mean They haven't tried to make it to realistic; instead it has seemed a bit more cartoonish kind of That's good and also I do know some people who plays there as well, and then it becomes easier to remain there cause then I could just jump in and Role play a bit with them and so on"	"Ja men jag tyckte Dom har som lyckats med färgerna och alltså dom har inte försökt göra det alltför verkligt utan man har det som lite tecknat liksom det blir väl bra och sedan känner jag lite folk som spelar där med, då var det lättare att hänga kvar där för då kunde man ju bara hoppa in och rollspela lite med dom och så"
"Now, I've had time to start creating a background for them and figure out how their personality should be and so so now they're much more alive I think [] Now they have grown and seen some things and then you change, so of course they will grow all the time and it's not over here, they will keep on growing and experience new things."	"Nu har jag ju hunnit börja skapa bakgrund till dom och fundera ut hur dom ska vara som personlighet och så så nu är dom ju mer levande tycker jag [] Nu har dom ju vuxit och sett lite saker då förändras man ju lite så det är klart dom växer ju hela tiden och det är väl inte slut här dom kommer ju fortsätta att växa och uppleva nya saker"
"No, I don't think so, I mean it's as I said if I'm walking around and I mean, If you're going to do a role play event with some people and are, well then you have to think about how they should look, so that the clothes fit in and as I said before, I have different clothes for whatever I'm up to, if I'm going fishing, or picking flowers or yes oh my god, when you're traveling around mining a lot of minerals and such you have special clothes for that as well No, so I do think that appearance matters all the time."	Nej men det tycker jag inte, alltså det är ju som sagt om jag går runt och ska alltså man gör ngt rollspels event med ngt folk och håller på då måste man ju tänka på hur dom ser ut, att kläderna passar in rätt och som sagt jag har olika kläder för vad man än hittar på, ska man fiska eller man ska plocka blommor eller ja herre gud då man åker runt och tar massa mineraler och spånt har man ju speciella kläder för det med nej så jag tycker nog utseendet spelar roll hela tiden
"but it's the same if you're out on the town and you check the billboards for H&M or Dressman or any other business they don't have a chubby little 40-year old, half bold who stands there	"det är ju samma sak om du är ute på stan med om du kollar för reklampelarna för HM eller Dressman och vad det är dom har ju ingen plufsig liten 40-åring med halvflintis som står och har skjorta på

with a shirt on him... its some guy with a six-pack on the belly"

sig... det är ju ngn kille med 6-pack på magen..."

#### Anthon

"When you play World of Warcraft it is a completely different thing, there it is also, the appearance of your character will only have any significance until you reach level 20-30 something, because then you stop seeing your character because of all the stuff it's wearing, then the gear becomes more important."

"Ja, men just när man spelar world of warcraft då är det ju en annan sak men där är det ju också, utseendet på karaktären har egentligen bara betydelse tills du kommer till level 20-30 nånting, för sen ser du inte din karaktär längre för alla grejer den har på sig, då är det mer utrustningen som är det viktiga."

"Yes and then I'll make, just because I'm so against women having huge breasts I'll do it like this... It's so, and to think that this girl will be out fighting it's so inflexible with big breasts"

"Ja, och då gör, just för att jag är så emot att tjejer ska ha stora bröst gör jag sådär... Det är så, och med tanke på att den här tjejen ska vara ute och slåss, det är så osmidigt med stora bröst"

"But here it does not matter ... to play a woman or a man that's, yes it is very many ... mostly macho guys, I think ... yes , those who are as macho as it is possible to be when actually playing MMORPGs, but who refuses to play female characters .... They refuse to play female characters because ... well, I do not really know why, because there, they must think that it is only homosexual men and women who play female characters. But for me it is the same thing, I can relate equally well to a woman, a female character, as I can relate to an orc you know, it's not harder vou know ... it's even more difficult to relate to an orc, than a female human being, for example, if you see it that way, and I don't care if I play a character who doesn't have a penis you know..."

"Men här så spelar det inte någon roll... att spela en kvinna eller en man det är ju, ja det är jättemånga... främst machokillar tror jag... ja, dom som är så macho som det går som faktiskt spelar MMORPGs, men som vägrar spela kvinnliga karaktärer... Dom vägrar spela kvinnliga karaktärer för att... ja, jag vet inte riktigt varför, för att det, dom tycker väl bara att det är homosexuella män och kvinnor som spelar kvinnliga karaktärer. Men för mig så är det ju samma sak, jag kan relatera lika bra till en kvinna, en kvinnlig karaktär, som jag kan relatera till en orc liksom, det är ju inte svårare liksom... det är ju svårare o relatera till en orc, än en kvinnlig människa till exempel, alltså om man ser det så, och jag bryr mig ju inte om att jag spelar en karaktär som inte har en snopp liksom..."

"With the appearance it is much more fun to make a girl than to make a guy, the guys still looks, generally speaking, just the same... Just because they have much, or here, we have as much choice but he looks beefy, then it's there, he's very ... or, he has a very impersonal appearance. He looks like everyone else, he looks like "Utseendet är roligare att göra en tjej än o göra en kille, för killarna ser ändå, i stort sätt, likadant ut... Just för att dom har mycket, eller här har vi ju lika mycket valmöjligheter men han ser ut som en biff, då är det det, han är väldigt... eller, opersonligt utseende... Han ser ut som alla andra, han ser ut som

one of all the others, but it is also that for girls, there are much more different types, have been many more different kinds of ideals and what looks attractive ... guys, it has virtually always been the same deal "

en av dom där alla andra, men det är också det att för tjejer så finns det ju många fler olika typer av, har funnits många fler olika typer av ideal och vad som är snyggt... killar har det i stort sätt alltid varit samma sak"

"Yeah, we just don't care as much, we don't really care as much, I said so also before when we, when you create the character then you care, but once you've started playing you pretty much don't give a crap about how it looks most of the time, you don't think about how your character looks while you're playing."

"Ja, vi bryr oss inte lika mycket, vi bryr ju oss egentligen inte lika mycket, det sa jag också när vi, när man skapar karaktären att när man skapar karaktären då bryr man sig, men när man väl spelar skiter man ganska mycket i hur den ser ut oftast... man tänker inte på hur ens karaktär ser ut när man väl spelar..."

"No but I think it can have to do with the fact that male players are more often power gamers than female players... So we just don't care that much about the character in the end. We can make a character that we have an idea about, but we only care for a small amount of time, but in the end, we are just there... to play, to PvP, to kill other people, or kind of... get as good gear as possible, so we care less about the character then we do about the gear the character obtains, and what we are able to achieve or ... what we are able to achieve with are character... So that's why we don't care as much about the character later either... but instead that we might just occasionally care about the character as a character"

"Nej men jag tror det kan ha betydelse för att män är ofta mer powergamers än vad kvinnor är... så att vi bryr oss inte lika mycket om karaktären i slutändan... Vi kan göra en karaktär som vi har en idé med, men vi bryr oss om den en stund men i slutändan så... är vi där för att... för att spela, för att pvp:a, för att döda andra människor eller liksom... eller få så bra utrustning som möjligt så att vi bryr oss mindre om karaktären än om utrustningen karaktären får, och det vi lyckas åstadkomma eller så, det vi lyckas göra med karaktären... Så därför bryr vi oss inte lika mycket om karaktären sen heller... utan att vi kanske bara stundvis bryr oss om karaktären som en karaktär..."

"You don't write LoL[Laugh out loud] all the time, you don't use as many abbreviations, I use... I prefer to use a very... also very, ehm, what is it called, authentic, ehm, correct English when I speak, and that is also something that most guys don't do... I think... or most guys think that there is someone who doesn't write a lot of abbreviations and stuff all the time so... it became more authentic somehow, they knew I had a female character and I spoke in a more correct manner..."

"Man skriver inte Lol hela tiden, man använder inte lika mycket förkortningar, jag använder... jag föredrar ju att använda väldigt... ehm, vad heter det, autentisk, ehm, korrekt engelska när jag pratar, och det är också nånting som dom flesta killar inte gör... tror jag... eller dom flesta killar tänker att där är nån som inte skriver en massa förkortningar o sånt hela tiden så att... det blev liksom mer autentiskt på nåt sätt, dom visste att jag hade en kvinnlig karaktär och jag pratade på ett korrekt sätt..."

#### Eva

Eva	
"Stop glancing at only one direction, you will get shortened eye muscles on the other side!"	"Sluta snegla åt bara ett håll, du kommer få förkortade ögonmuskler åt andra hållet!"
"His mother has pattern knitted that sweatshirt, she spent a lot of hours I tell you!"	"Hans mamma har mönsterstickat den tröjan, hon har lagt ner många timmar ska jag säga!"
"Well, with the female characters I could identify, but when I created a male character that wasn't possible, I thought it would be easier, but it didn't work. He looks a lot harder than I had imagined, and then the thought was to give him a name like "Olle", so he could seem more soft and rustic."	"Ja, dom kvinnliga karaktärerna har jag identifierat mig själv med, när jag gjorde en manlig karaktär så gick det inte, jag trodde det skulle vara lättare men det gick inte och han ser hårdare ut än vad jag, tanken var, och då fick han ett namn som Olle som skulle vara lite mjukare och bonnigt"
"She could have looked awful, and then I could have taken that away, she could have looked evil, and then I could have made her look kind instead".	"Hon kunde sett fruktansvärd ut, och då kunde jag ta bort det, hon kunde sett ondskefull ut, och då hade jag kunnat göra så hon ser god ut istället."
"It wasn't easy to make a character based only on the appearance. When one did the female characters one could give them such an appearance that that actually or you could with just the appearance get them to express what I wanted, but in his case, I had to add a text".	"Det var inte lätt att göra en karaktär bara på utseendet, när man gjorde dom kvinnliga karaktärerna kunde man ge dom sånt utseende som som egentligen eller kunde man med bara utseendet få dom att utstråla det som jag ville, men i hans fall var jag tvungen att lägga till en text"
"Because I'm so new in this game, with gaming So I want to be able to identify myself with the character and then it should be in a way so that I can handle it On such a level, and then it gets realistic for me."	"Därför att jag är så ny i det här spel, med spelandet Så att jag vill kunna identifiera mig lite med den karaktären och då ska det va på ett sätt där jag kan hantera den på ett sånt plan, och då blir det realistiskt för mig"
"But I actually think they are exploiting the woman in the wrong way in those games, it has to be big breasts and it has to be short skirts and well you shouldn't do that, it's wrong!"	"Men jag tycker faktiskt att man exploaterar kvinnan på fel sätt i dom spelen, det ska vara stora bröst och det ska vara korta kjolar och Man ska inte göra så, det är fel!"

#### **Conversations/Discussions**

Researcher: So you're going with this

style

Eva: Yes, if it is okay that I go

for the same

Researcher: Please do, this is only

more...

Eva: I feel, what a boring

person who cannot change

herself

Researcher: It can also be just that you

haven't played so you don't know how the game works. You have never tried this before so that means that it might be difficult to make a lot of

different...

Eva: Yes, but I think, yes that's

right, I think I might need to have the character within a safe sphere somehow, that won't differ to much from what I think Intervjuare: Ja, du kör på den stilen helt

enkelt

Eva: Ja... om det inte gör nåt att man kör

på samma

Intervjuare: nej men snälla, nej nej, absolut inte, det är ju mer bara...

Eva: Jag känner mig bara, vilken tråkig

människa som inte kan variera

Intervjuare: Nej! Men sen kan det ju också vara det att just du har inte spelat, du vet inte hur det fungerar i spelet, du har aldrig provat det här så att då kan det ju också vara svårt o göra många olika

och liksom...

Eva: ja, men jag tror, ja just det, jag tror att jag behöver ha karaktären inom en trygg sfär på nåt vis, som inte avviker för mycket från det jag tycker

Researcher: It is quite interesting

because you have all along said, it is me, or it's for me and such, but here...

Erik: *Yeah but not here* 

Researcher: Here you say to the chick

Erik: Yes

Researcher: Well, it feels as though you

have a certain...

Erik: *A certain distance*...

Researcher: Yeah

Erik: *Yeah, I got to say that there* 

medieval world

is... I can however not explain it, why I feel more distanced to this... it is probably, a superhero is... it's something you read about, a grumpy dwarf or werewolf, that is something you are! [...] Yeah I got to say, that no matter how sick it sounds, in my world it is more realistic to be on a spaceship or in a virtual

Intervjuare: Det är rätt så intressant, för du har hela tiden sagt, innan i spelen så har du sagt, det är ju mig och till mig och så, fast här...

Erik: Ja, fast det är det inte här

Intervjuare: ...här säger du till donnan...

Erik: Ja...

Intervjuare: Alltså, det känns som att du

har ett visst...

Erik: En viss distans...

Intervjuare: Mmm

Erik: Jo det måste jag väl säga att det är... Jag kan däremot inte förklara det, varför jag känner mig så distanstagande till den här... det är väl mer som sagt, alltså superhjälte det är... nåt man läser, en butter dvärg eller en varulv, det är nånting som man är!

[...] Ja... ja, det måste jag väl säga... Hur

		sjukt det än låter så att ja, i min värld så är
		det mer realistiskt men en o va på ett
		rymdskepp eller i en virituell medeltida värld
Eva:	She has no normal breasts	Eva: Hon har inga normala bröst heller,
	either; she has put silicon in them!	hon har siliconopererat sig!
	I think you can change that too if you'd like	Intervjuare: Jag tror du kan ändra det också om du skulle vilja
Eva:	No! If she has done it she has to live with it, that's just how it is.	Eva: Nej! Har hon gjort det får hon stå för det alltså så är det bara!
Researcher:	Okay	
Eva:	She decided it all by herself! Her mother had	Intervjuare: Okej
	nothing to say in the matter	Eva: Hon bestämde det själv! Hennes mamma hade ingenting o säga till om
Researcher:	But do you feel that it is	Intervjuare: Men är det viktigt för dig att
	important for you to create a unique character?	kunna skapa en unik karaktär?
Anthon:	If you can create a unique	Anthon: Kan man, alltså kan man skapa
	character in a game, then	en unik karaktär i ett spel så är det viktigt,
	it's important or maybe	eller så känner jag att det är viktigt o göra
	that I feel that it is	en karaktär, inte som är unik, men en
	important to make a	karaktär som jag tycker om Men kan
	character, that is not unique, but a character	man inte göra det som i world of warcraft, då bryr man sig inte så mycket
	that I like But if you	ändå
	can't do it, like in World of	unda
	Warcraft, then you just	Intervjuare: nej det är inte avgörande
	don't care that much	liksom?
Researcher:	anyway. No, it isn't crucial	Anthon: Nej, det är ju, du spelar ju spelet
somehow	No, it's like; you play the	för att du tycker att det är ett bra spel, inte för att du kan göra en unik karaktär
1 2210210	game because you feel that	Total was and a good on one can always and a control of the contro
	it's a good game, not	Intervjuare: Okej
	because you can create a	
	unique character	Anthon: Eller så, man, även om du, jag
Researcher:	Okay	menar i the sims kan du ju göra en jävligt
Anthon:	Or, I mean, even if you, I	unik karaktär, men det är inte så jäkla kul
	mean in Sims you can make	ändå kanske
	a damn unique character, but it's not so damn funny	
	anyway perhaps	
Researcher:	When you were on the	Intervjuare: På håret så var det också det
	hair, it was also this,	här att den ska smälta in lite mer är det
	blending in a bit more Is	så du känner, du har ju ändå gjort henne
	that how you feel, I mean	lite mer som du, om man säger att du

Erik:	you have made her a bit more like you, if you were a girl that is, is that something that you're aiming for [in your real life] fitting in if it's not to personal, you are welcome to say that you don't want to answer.  No but I guess, that is a pretty good perception I mean, to try and make it look as normal as possible, it's the same in WoW  [World of Warcraft] this character is going to represent me	skulle va tjej då, är det så lite du vill va, alltså smälta in lite om det inte är för personligt, du får gärna säga att du inte vill svara  Erik: Nej, men det är väl en bra uppfattning alltså å försöka få det o se normalt ut, alltså, samma sak som i wow så ska ju den här karaktären representera mig
Researcher:	Yes, so the name is hard?	Intervjuare: Ja så namnet är svårt
Lars: Researcher:	Yeah Is there any particular	Lars: jo
	reason for this?	
Lars:	It's in the name much of it lies	Intervjuare: Är det någon anledning till det?
Lars: Researcher:	3	Lars: Det är ju som i namnet mycket av det ligger
Lars:	Well I mean you have to understand that if this is a warrior who has been	Intervjuare: okMycket av?
	doing this for 20 to 30	Lars: Han som person!
	years and been all around, he cannot be called Timmy!	Intervjuare: okej
	·	Lars: Ja men jag menar du måste ju förstå om det här är en krigare som har hållit på i 20-30 år och varit runt kan han ju inte heta Timmy!
Eva:	It wasn't fun to make a	Eva: Det var inte roligt o göra en man
Researcher: Eva:	male character actually Then go back No, I'll make a man just because of that!	egentligen Intervjuare: Gå tillbaka då
[] Eva:	No, I'm not really happy with him	Eva: nej, jag ska göra en man bara för det! [] Eva: Nej jag är egentligen inte nöjd med
Researcher: Eva:	You're not satisfied? Why?  He looks too rough	honom
	Would you like to go back and change?	Intervjuare: är du inte nöjd? Vad är det som

Eva:	No I'll settle for this, he might have a heart of gold	Eva: Nej, han ser för hård ut
		Intervjuare: Vill du gå tillbaka och ändra?  Eva: nej jag tar det så han kanske har ett hjärta av guld
Researcher:	But do you see it more as a game piece or as a representation of yourself, or?	Intervjuare: Men ser du det mer som en spelpjäs eller som en representation av dig själv eller
Erik:	No, but I mean it's not I cannot see it as a representation of me because I am a guy and	Erik: Nej men alltså det är ju inte jag kan ju inte se det som en representation av mig eftersom jag är kille och hon är tjej.
Researcher:	she's a girl. And that is important, I	Intervjuare: Jaha, det är viktigt, alltså så?
mean Erik:	No, no but no, but I mean, that's not me, but of course she represents me in the game, so I would never behave completely different from the way I	Erik: Nej, nej men nej, men alltså det är ju inte jag, men självklart så representerar ju hon mig i spelet, så jag skulle ju aldrig bete mig helt annorlunda än jag beter mig i verkligheten ändå  Intervjuare: Men ändå så tycker du inte
Dagaarahari	behave in real life anyway	riktigt att en tjej kan representera dig?
Researcher.	But yet you do not think that a girl could really represent	Erik: *suckar*ja, okej då Ja, men
Erik:	you? [Sighs] Yes Well okay then Yes, but I actually have to agree that it can, that she can, I can, it can,	det måste jag ju faktiskt hålla med om då det kan, det kan hon ju, jag ju, den ju, herregud nu blir jag riktigt schizofren []
	my God now I'm really starting to get schizophrenic []	Intervjuare: Du har spelat mycket med kvinnliga karaktärer, känner du inte att dom representerar dig
Researcher:	You have played a lot with female characters, don't you feel that they represent you	Erik: Jo det är klart dom gör, för dom som jag spelar med så är ju dom jag, så då är det ju självklart att dom representerar den
Erik:	Well of course they do, for the ones that I play with they are me, so then it is obvious that they represent who I am Ehm Of course!	jag är Ehm Såklart!
Anthon:	Or rather I should change that, it's not the face that is the most important, it's the	Anthon: Eller jag snarare kanske ska ändra det med att, det är ju inte ansiktet som är viktigast utan det är huvet Så

Erik: Anthon:	head Yeah that would be more correct, just because the hair does so much for the face as well, if the hair doesn't fit the face then it will look horrible! Yeah, I agree, it has to fit together Yes, so the head simply is	skulle nog vara mer korrekt, just för att håret gör så pass mycket på ansiktet också, passar inte håret med ansiktet så ser det förjävligt ut  Erik: Ja, men det håller jag med om, det måste ju passa ihop  Anthon: Ja, så huvet är det som är
	the most important	viktigast helt enkelt
Anthon:	It is what people see	Anthon: Det är det folk ser
Erik: Researcher: Anthon:	Exactly What people see? It is what they will identify	Erik: Precis
Erik:	you with That is what is visible in	Intervjuare: Det är det folk ser?
	the chat	Anthon: Det är det dom kommer att
Anthon:	Yes, precisely, your name is who you are Until they	identifiera dig med
	meet your character, but even then, the name has	Erik: Det är det som syns i chatten
	more importance than the appearance of the character has.	Anthon: Ja, precis, ditt namn är den du är Tills dom träffar din karaktär men då har fortfarande namnet mer betydelse än själva karaktärens utseende har
Anthon:	It's either that it is a very	Anthon: Det, antingen så är det en oseriös
	unserious person, or it is a 13-year old	person eller så är det en trettonåring
Erik: Anthon:	Yeah Kind of	Erik: Ja
Erik:	If you put a little effort into the name, you will see that,	Anthon: Ungefär
	well this seems to be a serious name, someone, this person has thought a little about the name If only just in a chat where they scream out that they need help with something then you'd rather help someone like that then someone with a silly name	Erik: Utan lägger man lite mer vikt på namnet, så att man ser att jamen det här verkar ju va ett vettigt namn, nån, den här människan har tänkt till lite grann på namnet om det så bara är en chatt och dom skriker ut att dom vill ha hjälp med nånting så hjälper man ju hellre en sån, än nån som heter nåt annat fånigt
Eva:	Okay, so it's a way to sell more products, but that shows that people	Eva: Okej, det är en försäljnings sak alltså, men det visar ju att folk över
Anthon:	I mean, everyone wants to exploit women because they	Anthon: Alltså just, alla vill exploatera kvinnor för att dom vet att det genererar

Eva:	know it generates money Yes It is It's the money	pengar
	that matters, not moral and ethics	Eva: Ja det är det är pengar som styr inte moral och etik
Anthon:	That's because they are exploited in all Medias, they do it no matter what it concerns	Anthon: Det är ju för att dom exploateras i alla medier, dom gör ju det oavsett vad det handlar om
Erik:	Yes, but of course, it all comes down to supply and demand, I mean if it is 80 % guys who plays, and guys generally wants to see bigger breasts on women, then they have to provide what the majority of the market wants. If there are 2 % that thinks that, no, now let's burn our bras and refuse to shave our armpits, and women should not have breasts at all,	Erik: Ja, men det är ju klart, det handlar om utbud och efterfrågan, alltså om det nu är 80 % killar som spelar, killar vill generellt se större bröst på kvinnor så måste dom ju tillgodose den större delen av marknaden som det gäller. Om det är 2 % som tycker att, nej nu ska vi bränna våra behåar och vägra raka armhålorna och kvinnor ska inte ha några bröst alls, då gör dom ju inte så att dom tillgodoser dom 2 % och skiter i dom andra 98 % som tycker om spelet Det är ju ren marknadsföringsprincip
	then they won't make it so that they provide what these 2 % wants and ignore what the other 98 % think of the game. It is	Eva: Sen så kan man tänka dom här spelen, varför ska det komma såna aspekter in i dessa spelen för dom handlar ju om andra saker.
Eva:	marketing Then you can think about these games, why should	Erik: Det är ju du som lägger in dom i spelet
	there be such aspects in these games, because they	Eva: Nej! Det är det ju inte
Erik:	are about other things  It's you who put them in the game	Erik: jo det är det ju för att du har sagt hittills att kvinnor exploatering 3 gånger på 5 minuter så du är ju väldigt fast på att
Eva: Erik:	No it's not Yes it is, because so far you've said that women are	det är det det beror på  Eva: Ja, men jag tycker det är fel
	exploited three times in five minutes, so you are very stuck on that	Erik: Jag har aldrig reflekterat över det
Eva: Erik: it	Yes but I think it's wrong I have never reflected over	
Eva:	Yes, I kind of think so that the women look more to the characteristics to	Eva: Ja, jag tror nästan det att kvinnorna ser mer till egenskaperna till själen eller vad man ska säga till det

the soul or what you want to call it... to the mental, to how the person is...

Researcher: And that is then reflected in

the appearance?

Eva: Yes, it reflects in the eyes,

and the facial expression and a little bit hair style

and such

Erik: You state that when both

myself and Anthon are sitting here saying that we play the personality more than the character... mentala, till hur personen är... hur karaktären är...

Intervjuare: Och det speglas i utseendet

då?

Eva: Ja, det speglas i ögonen... och ansiktsuttryck och... lite frisyr och så

Erik: Det säger du när både jag och Anthon sitter och säger att man spelar personligheten mer än man spelar karaktären...



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