World of Warcraft as leisure practice: sociability and conflict "at stake" in cyberspace

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Summary: *World of Warcraft* is a well-known digital game that is played worldwide. In the virtual world of the game, thousands of people connect to the internet and come together to interact, relate and share the experience of playing. This text is a summary of the main findings of an ethnographic study that addressed the game as a leisure practice from players' perspective. The main topics discussed include issues related to performance, competition, sociability and violence.
Keywords: Digital video games. Leisure. Sociability. Violence.

1 INTRODUCTION

This text is a summary of the main findings of a study involving players of the computer game *World of Warcraft*. As the most popular and well known game of its kind, it was used to develop doctoral research in Physical Education (REIS, 2013) focusing on interpreting, in the context of the Brazilian community of players, how different *playing experiences* were built from the interweaving between *playing* and socially *interacting*.

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At first glance, it may seem paradoxical to discuss, in a journal whose title refers to the idea of displacement, of change of place, of action in space, that is, of "movement", a type of practice that requires little or no body movement according to standards of traditional motor-related games: the practice of digital games.

However pedagogical discussions and experiences in Physical Education are known to have forged close links with the practices of digital games – for over a decade, as anticipated by the work of Feres Neto (2001) on virtualization of sports.

Previously missing or too discreet, the incorporation of body movements into the practices of digital games now features prominently in the news, advertisements and commercials of the segment. Last generation consoles include mechanisms that capture body movements and offer games that replace pushing buttons with swinging limbs, hopping, keeping balance, dancing, etc. In their boldest uses as electronic devices for leisure, fun and entertainment, they have become fitness equipment in gyms and instruments for therapeutic treatment in physical therapy clinics. Academic studies such as Peng, Crouse and Lin (2013) have even tried to map the current state of the art of research involving the efficiency of the newly named exergames (EXG) or active video games (AVG).

Entering the school field, the issue of digital games also seems to have found space in the midst of the discussion of the pedagogical practices of Physical Education, being considered "relevant mechanisms for socialization, fun and learning" (ARAUJO *et al*., 2011, p. 607). It could not be different: a school practice that intends to remain updated and open to students' experiences of out of it could not fail to refer to and address everyday and significant practices that permeate those students' everyday lives and their imaginaries – as is the case of digital games. There are reports on pedagogical experiences that, after realizing students' seduction by games and other current media, proposed adding and updating those experiences within the context of curricular educational practices – as proposed by works such as Costa's (2006) – or using the very

digital games as stimulators of motor learning – as in Baracho *et al*. (2012).

The relationship between the practice of digital games and the universe of body culture of movement is not limited to the more evident relationships mentioned above. Pereira (2009), for example, argues that the construction of subjects' experiences in virtual environments – digital games or socialization platforms like *Second Life* – is also linked to notions of *body* and *movement* and therefore to classical objects of Physical Education. Whether they are virtual or not, body and movement would be mediators of our relationship with the world. The body culture of movement seen that way would still be present in and through cyberspace – a place for "experience/projection/non-incarnated body representation" as explored in a similar work by Cruz Júnior and Silva (2010).

Finally, digital games are close to Physical Education as they are seen as cultural expressions of leisure, because studies and research developed in the field of leisure in Brazil are historically linked to Physical Education, and the area is home to more researchers and research groups concerned with the topic. I started from this area to discuss a particular practice: playing *World of Warcraft*.

2 About *World of Warcraft*

> Having established a new paradigm in the market of digital games and become a reference for such games, World of Warcraft – or simply WoW – is the best known and most often mentioned – as well as the most played – of paid MMORPGs (BAINBRIDGE, 2010). In Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, thousands and even millions of players continuously share the experience of playing in the same virtual world. Games are created precisely to provide greater social interaction among players, allowing some kind of more or less intense and lasting social relationship.

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In the playful virtual universe of WoW, thousands of players of different ages, from different socio-cultural contexts and several places around the world get together to play, compete, interact and socialize (NARDI, 2010). It is available in over nine languages, including Portuguese. In early 2013, it had over 10 million subscribers who paid monthly fees to access the game, asserting itself as a leisure practice with high access in the game environment. It is undoubtedly a milestone in the history of games.

WoW takes place in a three-dimensional environment synthetically created by graphic processing which simulates physical (gravity, spatiality, etc.), visual and sound characteristics based on our world (Figure 1). In it, players can use their characters (avatars) to move through space, interact with its elements and relate with other players online. It is in this virtual space that playing itself occurs. That is, there is where players can perform actions and tasks enabled by the game: to complete missions and adventures, to fight monsters and creatures, to confront other players, to conduct business at the auction house, to participate in group activities and battles, to collect treasures and rewards, to socialize, etc.

Figure 1 – Character in the virtual world

Source: World of Warcraft screen. Author's collection.

In contrast to the image shown in Figure 1, Figure 2 shows a scene of team action – a fight with other players – in that virtual scenario.

Figure 2 – The fight: brightness, lights and explosions, added to numerous windows and interface buttons

Source: World of Warcraft screen. Author's collection.

A success in the growing universe of games, WoW can also be considered as an important object and field of study in several areas, especially those that establish lines of research in dialogue with themes related to technology, media, cyberculture, digital culture and the like.

Among academic articles exclusively related to WoW in the international arena (either as an object or as a field of study), as well as several articles published in newspapers and magazines, I had access to at least three books: "*My life as a Night Elf Priest: an anthropological account of World of Warcraft*" (NARDI, 2010), written from an anthropological point of view; "*The Warcraft Civilization: social Science in a Virtual World*" (BAINBRIDGE, 2010), from a sociological perspective; and the collection

"Digital Culture, play and identity: a World of Warcraftreader" (CORNELIUSSEN; RETTBERG, 2008), which included researchers from different areas. In the national research scenario of graduate studies, I found 11 master's theses on the Capes Theses Database that included the term World of Warcraft in their abstract or keywords. In addition, other 14 graduate level productions were associated with the broader term MMORPG.

That shows that World of Warcraft has drawn the attention of the academic community and was considered relevant as an object and a field of study. The approach presented throughout this work is unique in that it seeks to interpret it as leisure practice, from the point of view of players and their experience with the game.

3 Methodology

Having ethnography as a starting point and using the method of data collection and analysis, I assumed the condition of player-researcher and immersed myself in the field of study – the game's virtual world – following about 18 months of almost daily activities of native players in their social groupings within the game – the so-called guilds.[1]

Originating in anthropological studies and still new to research involving cyberspace, ethnography has been frequently used in research about the internet and virtual worlds, producing satisfactory results in these new fields of study – especially, as underscored by Pearce (2009), when the objects of study involve social dynamics and cultural constructions. Although I was familiar with games in general, I was completely unaware of the cultural

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[1]Guilds are formal structures in the game that enable players to group around common interests (goals in the game, friendship, kinship ties, etc.). Guilds have different dynamics, depending on their members' profiles, preferences, interests and ways of being. Joining a guild makes performing activities with other members easier, but it does not hamper activities or conversations with non-members.

practices produced and reproduced within the virtual universe of MMORPG games: thus, I was a strange who learned, assimilated and was socialized[2] in/by the native culture. In such dubious relationship, "transforming the exotic into familiar and vice-versa" (RIFIOTIS, 2010, p. 16) of ethnographic practices would make perfect sense.

As in traditional ethnography, the primary means for data collection took place through field work, with immersion in the cultural context under investigation, intense contact with natives and thick description of their cultural practices (GEERTZ, 1989).

In the most intense periods of activities I was connected to the game during 15 to 25 hours a week, especially at night – when more people are playing. Throughout this period, I played along with a countless amount of players – including many foreigners – in collective activities in which the game system automatically and randomly grouped players. Frequent contact and more intimate relationships, however, happened with few of them, restricted to the sphere of the guilds. Social contact was established via the game's chat[3], voice communication software[4] and more rarely, email.

As an accessory tool for field research, online questionnaires were made available on the Internet, inviting players to answer them. Two hundred and fifty-one players answered about socio-economic topics, leisure habits and their involvement with the game. I also interviewed formally – and remotely, via voice communication – eight other players with whom I talked about their personal, family and professional lives and also about their preferences regarding leisure activities and their views on playing.

Analyses of social relations produced in virtual environments

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[2]Socialization in cyberspace can be understood as "a complex set of affinities, interests, practices and discourses that occur as an initiation process in which online and offline experiences interact" (RIFIOTIS, 2010, p. 22)

[3]Similar to chat rooms found in websites, as on the UOL portal or TERRA chat.

[4]Software such as Skype, Ventrillo, TeamSpeaker and RaidCall (the latter was the most often used by the cores and guilds I participated in and so it is mentioned more often throughout the text).

were undertaken with the aid of reflections arising from sociological and anthropological sciences and research on gender games. The cyberspace territory studied (the virtual world of *World of Warcraft and its several virtual environments of sociability*) was understood as a constitutive dimension of modern complex societies as characterized by Velho (1994) – societies marked "by a strong process of interaction between different segments and high material and symbolic mobility", as discussed by Maximo (2010, p. 31.

I started from the premise that all knowledge built about human societies and their cultures, especially complex, urbanized and contemporary societies, is useful to understand social relations produced even in networks and social settings whose social and symbolic exchanges are mediated by modern technological devices and conducted only at a distance, as in the case of games. Paraphrasing Guimarães (2000) in his anthropological study in the virtual environment created by the Palace platform, it is not a study on the cyberspace, but rather a study in cyberspace.

In other words, cyberspace was not investigated here as an object of study lacking an interpretive lens exclusively built for its analysis; it was rather seen as a social space attended (even virtually) by individuals whose relations could be interpreted in the light of theories and knowledge traditionally applied to materially constituted (physical) spaces.

4 Results

Next, I present some of the themes discussed in the study, grouped under the following topics: player profiles; leisure practices; performance and competition; sociability; and conflict and violence.

4.1 Subjects' profiles: diversity

The questionnaire, comparisons with other studies and reports on the specific game (NARDI, 2010; CAMPEDELLI, 2009) and similar games (SALGADO, 2011; ALVES; HETKOWSKI, 2007) as well as studies on demography in the virtual worlds of MMORPGs games in general (YEE, 2006) suggests that WoW players are predominantly male and about 20-30 years old.[5]

This, however, does not reveal the subtleties in the diversity and heterogeneity of the social atmosphere and the relationships established within groups of players influenced by the presence of people with heterogeneous ages and from both sexes, which fall out of this average. The very participant observation revealed diversity that would be concealed by the definition of profiles or social trends.

Observation on an individual basis (through daily contact with players and the interview itself) revealed that the subjects, idiosyncratic as they are, have very particular lifestyles in terms of profession, education, family relations, and leisure habits. The players interviewed, for example – all members of the same guild and playing partners – confirmed that diversity: a 28-year-old father of two children who works as a "schoolyard inspector" and whose fun was restricted to WoW; a young Law School freshman who works in a flower shop and said he loved surfing and jiu-jitsu; a 31-years-old pregnant teacher who played with her husband; a 28-year-old civil servant who lived alone and whose leisure was chiefly related to socializing in bars; finally, a variety of subjects were possibly masked in an observation at macro-sociological level. The table below summarizes elements of some of the respondents and expresses that diversity.

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[5]Average age of 251 respondents for this survey: 24.5, ranging from 12 to 46 years of age.

Table 1 - Overall Summary of four players interviewed

		Alessandro	Sônia	Marcos	Thiago
Identification	Nickname	Alessandro	Sônia	Marcos	Thiago
	Sex	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Age	28	31	28	19
	City	Paraná; not capital	Goiânia	Brasília	Porto Alegre
	Marital status	Married	Married	Single	Dating
	Lives with	3-year-old girl	Husband (she is pregnant	Alone	Mother+ 9-year-old twin brothers
Occupation	Profession	Educational agent(inspector) + chess instructor (teaches and follows students)	Elementary school teacher	Public servant	Law intern+ Flower shop on Saturdays
	Weekly hours	40	38	30	20
	Family income (Brazilian currency)	927,00-1669,00	3111,00-6220,00	3111,00-6220,00	
	Education	College – not completed (dropped out of mathematics)	College (Biology) + Graduate studies (Psychopedagogy)	Started 6 college courses and never finished them	College – not completed (now in the 1st year of Law School)
Leisure	Physical activity, sports	Plays football sometimes, but admits he is a little slow because he needs a surgery	Started activities to lose weight, preparing for pregnancy, but says that she does that "out of obligation"	Not frequent: trail; table tennis	Has practiced Jiu-jitsu for 4 years; has practiced surf since he was 5 (father owns a surf material factory). Says he "loves" those practices.
	Leisure	"Weekends and evening it's always WoW", he says.	Mainly resting on weekends, with movies, novels and visits to relatives; admits he likes cultural practices for adolescents (sees that as an advantage in his profession.	Bars; Pubs (Rock and Roll); visit to friends on weekends; literature; series; mangas; and animes; European and old movies; puzzles, electronics as a hobby (p. ex.: he is now assembling a 3D printer)	

	Hours spent playing a week	15	15-25	30	
Playing	Face-to-face contact with friends and acquaintances known through WoW	He and his friends set up a meeting at an internet cafe with people from the neighboring town and spent an afternoon there.	Her husband also plays, they have visited player couples in Brasília (on tourism) and Belo Horizonte (husband travelled on business). She says that her main motivation in the game is socializing and making friends.	Says he has two great friends (from other states), but "still" has not met them personally because of his own "neglect"; there were even supposed to spent the last carnival together; talk often via Skype.	Has gone clubbing with player friends.
Observations	General	Quiet; speaks little; most bullied in the game (often criticized by colleagues and laughed at); he says he "takes it easy", getting angry only at himself for his incompetence.	Friendly; likes the social aspect of the game a lot; harshly criticizes the excessive use of the game; No longer plays as she used to because her "priorities" have changed (because of her pregnancy).	Often talks about himself and tells stories; laughs a lot; considers himself and is treated as a beginner in the game; played for a long time alone (but logged to RC); says he now plays WoW as a replacement for the habit of going to bars;	Likes the competitive and performative style of playing; acknowledges that he gets stressed easily in the game and complains a lot.

Source: Prepared by the author.

In addition to being diverse, the subjects clearly construct their playing experiences differently, ascribing heterogeneous meanings and significances to the practice, very similarly to what was found in the universe of sports experiences and described in works such as Stigger (2002) and Silveira (2008). That is, they are playing together, but not exactly for the same reasons and with similar expectations. Those differences must be negotiated during the game, not always without tension. Works such as the author's show that between professional sport and playing ball in the streets there are plenty of ways in which subjects manipulate the meaning of sport in their lives and the use they made of it. WoW could be thought of in the same line.

In the case of the respondents presented in the table, each of them justified his or her participation in the game and appropriated it differently. While Sônia said she played almost exclusively because

of sociability, in order to interact, relate and establish friendships with other players, Thiago seemed to be more concerned about his performance. For him, the game was a competition where he could assert himself, be the best, win. Because of this perception of and relation to the game, Thiago sometimes focused on his desire to progress in the game and search for new challenges at the expense of his fidelity to the group of friends and colleagues – fidelity in the sense of consistence rather than loyalty. Sônia would certainly make the reverse movement: she would put progression and competition aside to favor social activities and play more unpretentiously and playfully.

Alessandro's concern about his performance and about maintaining sociability (particularly the strong emotional bond he had with another player) appeared to be equally important elements in the construction of the meaning of his participation in the game. For Marcos, in turn, the competitive element also seemed to be present, but it was more connected to an idea of mastery, of learning to have better control rather than a performance concern towards exhibition. For his comments, Marcos also seemed to appreciate the game's aesthetics and narrative.

4.2 Leisure Practice

It was found that World of Warcraft is mostly enjoyed as a domestic leisure practice[6] and thus part of the dynamics of the home and linked to commitments related to it, being susceptible, for example, to parental control or social compulsion toward family members.

Being domestic, it is a practice that sometimes competes, sometimes alternates, sometimes synchronizes with other home activities, whether they are related to leisure (internet, television, music, conversation, etc.) or not (family, hygiene, biological

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6   Unlike the Chinese, most of whom play at Internet cafes (NARDI, 2010), I had no contact with players who did not play WoW on their own equipments.

needs, etc.). Also because of that, physical access to it is easy: it does not require displacement or expenditure of time or money with transportation. This convenience and ease of access allows (but does not explain) the relatively high time people spend in the practice (in terms of hours played). According to the questionnaire, the 251 participants used an average of 19.95 hours/week – which is compatible with findings of other studies involving significant sampling, as in Yee (2006), whose average for 30,000 participants (of several MMORPGs) was 22 hours/week.

Players' perception about obligation, commitment and need was found to be relative, generating different ways of dealing with WoW in terms of the several daily activities (work, study, family, etc.). As already known, leisure will always appear connected to other dimensions of everyday life, "establishing dialectical relations with needs, duties and obligations, especially with productive work" (GOMES, 2004, p. 125). Consciously or not, players are aware of it, always negotiating the use of their time, with varying degrees of conflict depending on their higher or lower interest in the game and the rigidity or flexibility of their obligations.

4.3 Performance and competition

Although it offers a wide range of activities to keep its players busy, most WoW activities has a common guiding principle embedded in it: performance. It is the search for achievement, for working towards better results, especially in public (in the presence other of players, even if virtual). Performance – which takes places in different ways in the game, especially when demonstrating superiority through knowledge (know) and skills (know-how) and the accumulation of symbolic goods and materials (titles, items, treasures, etc.), is the game's core element made possible only by its social nature.

It is social because the game is not built or put into operation as traditional digital games, only for its structure, architecture and mechanics – predetermined by the developers – but rather for the

inter-relationship of those with complex and deeply rooted social dynamics that regulates, guides, shapes and determines ways of playing and of acting and behaving in the game, and that is formed only by players' interdependent relationship with each other in the playing context – a fact that goes somewhat unnoticed by most studies of the sort.[7]

Another point to stress is that strong competition, coupled with the complexity and difficulty typical of certain collective activities (held in groups like sports teams) is not always experienced as harmoniously as shown in analyses by Nardi's (2010) and other researchers. Therefore, they are not always "generative of an amazing level of amiability and positive sociability [and] designed to encourage bonhomie and cordiality among peers"(NARDI, 2010, p. 120), as the researcher saw it.

Sometimes they result in the explosion of emotions and feelings that end in episodes of high tension and conflict. Protected by time and deeply excited by the heat of the game, it is not uncommon at all to see players interacting in aggressive and symbolically violent ways[8] (exchanges of verbal abuse when communicating by voice or chat channels; expelled players).

I have witnessed several situations in which, although they were expelled from their teams (which is very common), players had their performance evaluated negatively, followed by more acid comments and even insults. In these cases, players criticized are often derogatorily called noobs. Unlike being called a *perna-de-pau* in Brazilian football, for example, where the term denotes motor inability or incompetence – "physical" lack of skills – being called a noob can be a more serious offense, since lack of ability at the game is not interpreted as a result of a motor difficulty, but rather as intellectual difficulty: inability to research and better understand

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[7]The main exception would be Chagas' (2010) study.

[8]Symbolic violence understood as that which operates through symbols, notably language, and that can hurt individuals not physically, but in their consciousness, self-esteem, morale, reputation or prestige (cf. ELIAS, 1993; ZALUAR; LEAL, 2001).

the game, to know "details, tricks"; to know what to do in each situation. Thus, in the context of performance evaluation, being called a noob might well mean being called ignorant, mentally incompetent or stupid. I saw, for example, players announce openings in their teams with requirements like "must have brains."

In group activities, players' use of accessory applications that monitor team members' performance and provide quantitative data about the actions of each player (equivalent to scouts in sports) allows complete rationalization of performance and establishes permanent states of surveillance: error is easily identified and proven.

Given the dynamic established – the game's difficulty and complexity, constant surveillance, group pressure, the fatality of error, fierce competitiveness, the primacy of performance and its rationalization and quantification, the mixture of unknown players (including different nationalities) with significant differences in skill levels – the practice of certain activities in WoW can be truly tense and exciting (ELIAS; DUNNING, 1992) and therefore favorable to letting emotions out, from the delirious joy of a victory after days or weeks of failed attempts to deep anger at a colleague who does not act correctly or who persistently and impatiently demands and requires proper actions. Also, for all these reasons, it is not always fun and pleasurable: players can be particularly troubled and saddened because of their own performance – more specifically, the public evaluation of their performance – or because of other player's performance, which, being insufficient, prevents their desired success.

4.4 Sociability

The presence of *sociability* – the pleasure of being together and living amicably with each other as an ultimate purpose (SIMMEL, 1983) – while constantly referred to as the cornerstone

of MMORPGs[9] games, is dubious at least in WoW. From one perspective, the virtual universe of the game is certainly configured as a social space conducive to the establishment of specific social interactions whose recurrence in time inevitably leads to construction or consolidation of affective social bonds that may be intense and long-lasting.

The possibility of "making friends" and "meeting people", widely quoted in questionnaires and forums and often observed in field research, can be considered to have an impact in the sphere of the game. There were those who admitted to continue playing only because of friends they made through the game and others who reported having even traveled to meet new friends in person. While for some WoW represented a social space distant from everyday reality, but still a place where one could meet people and make friends like in any other place, for others it represented a sort of extension of everyday social spaces, i. e., one more leisure place to which one would go with friends, acquaintances and family to have fun.

It was also noted that playing alone cannot be taken as a parameter for interaction and social relations since, for those who value sociability, a considerable part of playing can happen in the "alone, but together" format: alone in the activity itself and geographically distant in virtual environment, but together with colleagues and friends via voice or written communication. In all these cases, sociability is certainly an important element – decisive for some – in the playing experience.

From another perspective, we found the opposite, but also common situation in the game: playing *together, but alone*. Many players who are keen to socialize, to meet other players to talk and "chat" in the game – but also those who cherish in-game sociability – come together in random activities with purely associative goals, without further purpose than simply and purely doing them. They

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9   Sociability and social interaction issues are analyzed and described in several studies about this genre of games, such as Alves Silva (2010), Andrade (2007), Campedeli (2009), Falcão (2010), Ibargoyen (2011), Salgado (2011), Sepe (2007), to name Brazilian graduate-level studies.

actually do them in the most pragmatic, fast and straightforward way; playing that turns *the other* and the activity itself only into a means to fulfill a goal: obtaining items, achievements, points and other goods and assets embedded in the game's reward system. Hence the notion of playing *together with* other players, but at the same time with the sensation of being alone, with feelings of loneliness, since the dependent relationship between players is practically nonexistent, so much so that it can be broken at any moment and a player will be immediately replaced (by the game system itself that automatically groups players). One cannot count on *others* or need his or her help, neither can one depend or rely them – after all, they are only "taking the same boat" – to borrow a quote from a player – in that given activity and will never meet again.

4.5 Conflict and symbolic violence

Importantly, in the *together but alone* condition, even though players are not socializing, talking friendly and actively interacting with each other, that does not mean they are free from others' social influences. There might be no conversation, dialogue or explicit agreements, but players know that there are players on the other side expecting them to act in a certain way; they know that not meeting others' expectations or acting carelessly can create stress, conflict and violence that may even result in their total rejection: being "kicked" out of group.

There are ways of playing that are socially accepted and others that are not. In their history and constitution as subject-players, individuals will undergo successive *socialization* processes (RIFIOTIS, 2010) based on values, labels, rules of conduct, self-control standards, correct ways of playing, which will shape their participation in the game more or less sharply, which, by extension, will resonate and reinforce the process of socialization and conformation of beginners' play. Before they know it, they are all playing in much the same way, appreciating more or less the same things, without making any explicit agreement about it.

The analysis makes us say that WoW is essentially a social game, regardless of favoring sociability – social relationship, communication with others as an end in itself (SIMMEL, 1983) – and the fact that it *is social* has deep implications for how different experiences of playing are organized. In their relationships with each other and in constant negotiation with the software's limitations/ determinations (mechanics, design, the standard structure), players establish and guide in an *unplanned* way how the game should be played.

Another point to note is that relationships established in the game's virtual world are not necessarily harmonic and the interaction does not always take place in a friendly, cordial and peaceful manner.

The presence of players – physically distant but virtualized through their avatars – establishes *power relations* (ELIAS, 1999) resulting from the challenges of playing. The more the activity is difficult and the more members of the group are *unknown* to each other, the higher the tension can be. And as players get more experienced, more skilled, more knowledgeable of the game, more established as members of the *elite* and their characters gets more competitive and equipped, more will the balance of power hang to their side. More authority will they have to negotiate or impose their will or opinion on others, especially regarding the less skilled, inexperienced, novice – noobs. And where there are power relations, that is, in any *social setting* (ELIAS, 1993), there are always possibilities that with tension in relations, with the collision of interests and disputes over privileges, recognition and prestige, social states of relative discomfort, frustration and crisis are sporadically or permanently established, perhaps leading into situations of intense conflict and even symbolic violence. Ruptures and rearrangements in social webs become inevitable.

Intolerant, aggressive and violent behavior was indeed witnessed in several episodes and confirmed by numerous reports and expressions by players in forums and on the questionnaire.

The episode described below shows how tension-excitement can degenerate into a situation of intolerance and symbolic violence.

The group had 25 players. With the exception of a few of them – some seven or eight that made up the core and who were organizing the activity (they came from the same guild) – the others came from different guilds and therefore did not know each other. The whole group was already assembled and had been continually playing for nearly three hours. Many were tired, exhausted, and the organizers of the activity were somewhat impatient. After three other very disorganized attempts to perform an activity, both resulting in defeat (death of all the characters) and seeing that the fourth attempt was also going down, players from the main core (known to each other) lost patience and got angry (through the voice system):

> **Player 1**, indignantly:
>
> - Gee ... they are too stupid! [referring to other players in the group who were not acting properly, without naming names, without saying exactly who].
>
> - Man, seriously, how can a human being be such as sucker. [someone laughs in the background].
>
> - I don't understand how we're the fucking master race. Seriously, man. [none of those criticized responds]
>
> **Player 2**, giving necessary instructions to the activity, but in a mocking tone:
>
> - Take all these adds [monsters] over there near the boss and you can kill them.
>
> - Take'm all, guys! Take'm all!
>
> He stresses the mocking tone, implying that everyone should already know what to do:
>
> - Yeah, yeah, it's so easy...

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- Look, for example, if you're close to the tank, go!

Go! [the instruction is uttered in a very mocking tone. In the background, a female laughter is heard]

- It's easy. Take his hand. It is something to take the guy' hand and do like this:

[switches to a paternal tone, as if teaching one's son]

- No... It's, wrong my son ... It's not like that. Come here.

Player 1 adds:

- Don't take his hand! You've gotta kill the sucker!

There was no response to the provocation. The example shows some players' indignation against the performance of others in the group. Even without directing the criticism and pointing out who were responsible for the failure, attentive players can tell if criticisms are directed at them or not.

Analyzes and interpretations made during the study indicated conditions that seem to be favorable to such episodes:

a) Heterogeneity of senses and meanings attributed to the same activity and the associated difficulty of negotiating these different meanings as the playing unfolds;

b) Hegemony of performance and competitive dynamics in playing, that is, prevalence of the search for results in the game (items, reputation, etc.);

c) Rationalization and quantification of performance, enabling mutual evaluation and comparison of performance through quantitative data (scouts), captured and systematized by applications accessory to the game, establishing states of high and

constant surveillance;

d) Amplitude and discrepancy in the levels of knowledge and skill of members of a group;

e) Volatile and ephemeral presence of anonymous players, unknown to each other but grouped automatically and all the time by the game;

f) Relative lax standards for self-control and regulation of conduct propitiated by ineffective presence or a feeling of absence of monopoly of symbolic violence and of effective mechanisms to control its use in the game's virtual world.

5 Final Remarks

The study revealed that WoW is an essentially domestic leisure practice. While it gathers, as in other MMORPGs, mainly 20-30-year-old male players, it also attracts individuals who, when examined singularly, present socioeconomic and quite varied leisure habit profiles, giving certain heterogeneity to groups (guilds). Enjoyment of the game as a leisure activity occurs in a very different way: as in sports activities, WoW players attribute different meanings and significances to their practice.

Beyond sociability (certainly an important feature), the game's social aspect is absolutely determinant for the experience of playing, present in the hierarchy of results, in the public display of performances and achievements, in the appreciation of rewards and ways of playing and, of course, in the way of acting and behaving online. This social aspects is built by the dynamic interweaving of players' experiences with playing and relating to each other.

I close by saying that, contrary to what is generally observed and emphasized about the alleged violence present in digital games and used to describe them as violent or as drivers of violent behavior (SETZER, 2001), in the case of WoW and possibly other similar games, the main type of violence that players are subject to does not

lie in the bellicose aspect of the game, the graphic representations of weapons, monsters, fights or deaths, but primarily in the *social relationship established between players*.

Therefore, it would be important to reflect and check if, in the everyday life of sports activities including participation of groups formed by subjects who do not share the same senses and meanings attributed to the practice, especially in situations of heightened competiveness or when they involve quantitative records of performance, some episodes of symbolic violence are not covertly tarnishing relations and the very pedagogical doing.

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