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Inescapably Social: Dimensions of Self Construction in the Virtual Social World of Runescape

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in the Virtual Social World of Runescape

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ABSTRACT

Inescapably Social: Dimensions of Self Construction
in the Virtual Social World of Runescape

by

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This thesis examines the virtual social world of the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game, Runescape. I observed several locations in the Runescape world, conducted in-depth interviews with players, and participated in clan activities. I analyzed how individual players develop and extend concepts of self through their participation in the game. Players attach patterned meanings to in-game social objects, particularly their character (avatar) that mediates their experiences in the game. Many players refer to their character's appearance and accomplishments as an extension of the self, particularly when they master game skills or accumulate in-game wealth. How players spend and think about time in the game suggests that they experience a blurred boundary between "play" and "work."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the most prevalent functions of the modern-day internet medium is entertainment, and as a subset of entertainment, gaming. Different forms of online gaming have existed for around 30 years and have become more complex and more widespread (Egenfeldt-Neilsen, Smith, and Tosca 2016). Early computer scientists created computer-based games such as a text based version of tic-tac-toe for the world's first stored-program computer shortly after World War 2, but they rapidly became more complex and interactive (Kirriemuir 2006). Today, games like World of Warcraft, Runescape, and Eve Online have millions of players who join together to adventure through complex three-dimensional worlds and participate in scores of different activities; because of those features these games qualify as Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs).

Mobile phone gaming is another part of the gaming community that has gained momentum in the past few years. Like computer-based games, mobile games started with basic games that had online high-score charts for players to see how they measure up to others. Mobile games quickly evolved to allow people to play against each other in real time. World of Warcraft, Runescape, and Eve Online all have mobile companion apps to accompany their games, and some simple mobile-based MMORPGs have emerged, but they lacked the complexity of computer-based games until recently. Jagex Ltd. launched Runescape-Mobile in the second half of 2017, which allows players to participate in the game through their smartphones.

Online gaming is important to the field of sociology because of the complexity of the social phenomena that exist in them. People spend time and money to play online games; some

participants spend thousands of hours per year in these games. The variety of games that now exist, the amount of time and energy people put into and around these games, and the sheer number of participants suggest that these players develop socially in a virtual environment. MMORPGs provide a medium for intense player interactions that may elicit emotional highs and lows, which adds to players' social development. A game that produces emotional reactions is more likely to be played socially, or at least discussed socially (Williams 2016). After considering these factors, it is clear that online games present an ideal arena for sociological study.

The MMORPG Runescape (*Rune-Scape*) was released by Jagex Ltd. in 2001 and has maintained a continuous presence in the online gaming community to the present day. The virtual world of Runescape is designed as a medieval fantasy game. When a player logs onto the game they may select one of 141 identical "worlds" or servers. Each world has several large virtual cities and smaller towns connected by roads that players travel in between for different tasks or goals. Some of these worlds are given no specific purpose. Although there is no difference between the worlds, many of them are designated for certain game-related activities, which shapes where players gather with other players. These activities are based around one of the 27 attributes or "skills" that each player can develop. The game skills are purpose driven and represent specific survival and cultural activities. There is a fishing skill that allows players to catch different types of marine life in many locations in the game. There is a crafting skill that allows players to create wearable jewelry and several types of leather armor(s). There is a smithing skill that allows players to refine and work with several types of metal to create armor and weapons; this is accompanied by the mining skill that allows players to gather metal ores that they can refine and smith into weapons and armors.

This specific study is a qualitative exploration of Runescape's social world that involved interviewing several players, observing several public settings in the game, and extensively participating in a developed Runescape clan. Games like these present a unique opportunity for sociologists and other social scientists, because their environment is highly similar to the real world yet with far fewer research impediments. There is often no cost to travel in a virtual world, anonymity can be guaranteed, and quick access to potential participants for a study is possible.

Runescape players may choose to join a clan and experience the game socially alongside other clan members. Runescape clans are informal groups of players that may only be joined by invitation from a member. These clans vary in members' level of devotion to the medieval fantasy of the game and the game-related activities on which they focus. Many clans are nothing more than loosely associated players who discuss the game as they experience it. All Runescape clans enable social interactions in the game that blend with the rest of the online gaming experience for players who choose to join them.

Runescape is similar to many online games in that a person may create an account and play for free, but may also pay a small monthly membership fee for access to a larger game-world. The low cost of participation means that a wide variety people can play the game. The game may be played on any internet-capable computer either directly through the Runescape website, or through a client available for download on the website. At any given time, there are around 50,000 total players logged onto Runescape worldwide, with that number constantly changing. As of 2017 Runescape and its companion games are still owned by Jagex Ltd., and amount to a roughly $750M franchise (HTTPS://WWW.JAGEX.COM/PRODUCTS).

Numerous examples of sociological concepts presented themselves during this study ranging from basic principles of symbolic interactionist theory to developed concepts of self,

wealth, and social standing. Although Runescape is supposed to be played for fun, I discovered that the boundary between "play" and "work" was often blurred. Many people play the game on such a regular basis that they develop a sort of alter-ego that they use to interact with other players in the game. For some players this means following various pathways to in-game wealth and enjoying the benefits that accompany wealth. For other players it involves following pathways to social success by being part of a clan or acquiring game items that are valuable or difficult to obtain. For many players the appeal of the game is multi-faceted.

The remainder of this chapter is an overview of relevant literature related to online games and gaming and the social development of people who participate in them. Previous research of online gaming is briefly covered, along with literature that helps frame the virtual physical environment people experience when playing Runescape, and how aspects of the game mirror the real world. The following chapter discusses the qualitative methods I used to study the Runescape world and the social actors who participate in it. Following that discussion, I present my analysis of aspects of the social development of Runescape players on several levels including character development and commitment to the game. I conclude by commenting on the final considerations that can be taken away from this study, and how further research might be done in virtual worlds.

Public Space and Interaction

A basic definition of virtual social worlds is given in *Synthetic Worlds* by stating that they are "crafted places inside computers that are designed to accommodate large numbers of people" (Castronova 2005:4). Cheng (2011) outlines the differences between space and place, and extends these descriptions to public spaces and places in a manner that is useful for

understanding virtual worlds. Space is an actual physical location or structure designed to make things happen in a certain way or on a certain schedule. Place is grounded in the interaction between people and a given space. As people interact with and respond to an environment, they engage in a meaning-making process that turns a space into a place (Cheng 2011). A public space is one that any person has an equal right and ability to occupy, and public places attract the largest number of people, usually due to the presence of resources and functionality (Cheng 2011). These concepts help to describe the socially constructed virtual world that exists in almost every MMORPG. The games contain public spaces such as parks and roads that connect virtual cities. There are also public places where players can store acquisitions and obtain resources. MMORPGs also provide "private" spaces and places that players can access through achievement, similar to the real world. Although MMORPGs do not physically exist as the real world does, references to space and place help one understand social phenomena in online interactive games. In the virtual world of Runescape, there is a central trading area where players congregate for many purposes because of the functionality and availability of resources. Players may also own private virtual houses that their characters can use for a variety of purposes.

The internet was still in its youthful stages when Mike Crang (2000) wrote "Public Space, Urban Space, Electronic Space: Would the Real City Please Stand Up?" Crang predicted that the interaction between the physical world and emerging electronic world could cause "the breakdown of conventional boundaries" (Crang 2000:13). When ancient Greek cities shifted from a centralized focus on an acropolis typically built on a prominent hilltop, to an *agora* or public meeting place, people exchanged new ideas, social networks, and cultures. The effect of an emerging electronic world may be highly similar. Crang cautions that real world ideas, beliefs, societies, etc., may be represented in electronic worlds but also that these online worlds

are necessarily artificial. Yet the boundary between "online" and "real world" social interactions can be permeable. Online social interaction may influence real world social norms. My analysis pays attention to how firm or permeable the online/real-world boundary is in the virtual world of the MMORPG Runescape.

Comparing the activities of an MMORPG to similar activities in the real world can frame how people develop concepts of self in these games. Many real-world workers may choose monotonous roles over more complex ones. Workers do not necessarily enjoy such work, but may choose such roles because predictability is often seen as preferable over the stress of more complicated roles with conflicting responsibilities (Molstad 1986: 221). This discovery goes a great distance to explain why some people become devoted to online games. Players of these games must often complete a repetitive task thousands of times in order to achieve a certain goal. There may be hundreds of goals and challenges to meet in online games that require a similar level of repetitive activity. Players choose to do extremely repetitive activities, and do them tens of thousands of times or more, because they present a highly predictable and definable goal, in striking contrast to many roles in the real world.

Crowe and Bradford (2006) discuss how the virtual world of Runescape is structured, including the similarities and differences it shares with the real world. They explain how the visible world of Runescape mimics structures and processes that are present in the real world. It is a "Tolkeinesque quasi-medieval environment" (Crowe and Bradford 2006:335). Players may travel through a variety of towns and villages in addition to many different landscapes and biomes in a world that is shared by all players experiencing the game. Runescape players can regulate whether or not and how they interact with other players' characters. They may choose to spend time in places where they will be visible to other players. They may advertise their

possession of a rare item, or spend time with acquainted players. Runescape players may also avoid interaction by choice or necessity. Some areas of the Runescape world are accessible only after certain goals or tasks have been completed. Most areas in virtual worlds like Runescape present an attractive (public) environment as a leisure setting for many young people who may have limited access to similar environments in the physical world (Crowe and Bradford 2006).

When people interact online, they may follow real-world social norms. They are not likely to construct new languages and social norms from scratch. For example, Hirschauer (2005) reports that people practice civil inattention when they interact with strangers online. Unacquainted people in a public space online may avoid signaling overt willingness to communicate with others without actively disdaining them, practicing "disinterestedness without disregard" (Hirschauer 2005:42). This disinterestedness holds true in MMORPGs. Hirschauer describes that strangers are people who lack personal social ties and "formal and informal links in organizations and networks" (Hirschauer 2005:42). Just as strangers are people you might pass on the sidewalk or sit next to at a bus stop, they can exist in MMORPG's in the same way. MMORPGs provide common areas of the game that many players may travel through without much interaction. I will explain in the next chapter how my research methods included data collection from a variety of public settings, some more interactive than others, to observe situated norms.

The norm of anonymity, the everyday practice of being among strangers, is one of the dominant forms of interaction in many public social settings (Lofland 1998). However, Mellinger (2011) describes common exceptions to this routine. When we are in a public setting and the situation merits a breach in normality, there is a good chance that these unspoken norms may be broken. The author gives several examples: a lost person asking for directions, strangers

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making brief comments to one another after an incident at a gas station, and two people acknowledging each other verbally in public because of similar dress, among others. Strangers are more likely to interact in some places than others--where people give off specific cues about themselves. Gyms, airports, concerts, political rallies, or any location where people's presence and actions give clues about them enable social interaction among strangers. Certain people are more approachable, such those in uniform, those who work with the public, and women (Goffman 1959).

Goffman's ideas of appearance and manner, and the features of our presentation of self to communicate them, help explain why these facts hold true. A person experiencing face to face physical co-presence in a social setting may be able to infer important information about other people from what they can see, which Goffman generally referred to as appearance. The concept of appearance is relevant in Runescape. Players quickly learn how to interpret the physical appearance of other players' avatars. Knowing information about others helps social actors in the physical and virtual world(s) gauge the definition of the situation, obtain favorable responses, and interact with similar individuals in the future. The small pieces of descriptive information we gather from appearance are called sign vehicles (Goffman 1959) and exist in two forms: the signs we deliberately give to others which are typically verbal, and the signs we unconsciously give off based on location, the definition of the situation, or physical attributes. Runescape players present sign vehicles in the same way that social actors in the real world do. Players develop verbal mannerisms by participating in the game socially, and convey further information through the items they adorn their avatar with. If certain individuals seem more approachable in any social setting it is likely because their observable traits, and the beliefs we attach to them, convey that information to others.

Understanding Object Attachment

The basic principles of Symbolic Interaction (SI) can be effectively applied to virtual environments like Runescape. For example, the SI perspective posits that objects have no inherent meaning. Their meanings arise out of, and are modified through, social interaction (Blumer 1969). In any MMORPG, virtual objects hold game-specific meanings. A blue party hat is insignificant to anyone who has never played Runescape, but is widely understood as a symbol of great wealth by Runescape players. SI principles also suggest that people act towards objects based on the meanings they have learned from others, and that these meanings undergo a continual interpretive process (Blumer 1969). MMORPG players will learn the meaning of game objects through interacting socially with players who have already learned how to interpret such objects. The meanings of objects in a virtual world are important to understand, even if they are mere electrons, because of how they can mirror meanings that objects acquire in the real world. Virtual objects can become symbolic the same way that paper money has acquired value as a social symbol in the real world.

An online game itself is comprised of organized electrons presented on a computer screen but that does not mean it has no salience in the real world. In 2012 two Dutch teenagers threatened a mutual acquaintance at knife point and coerced him into logging into his Runescape account in order to transfer virtual items he possessed in the game to their own Runescape accounts. Without considering the violent act of threatening someone at knifepoint, this brings into light the questions of whether or not it is possible to steal something that arguably only exists as organized electrons. Article 310 of Dutch Criminal Code rules that "Any person who removes any goods belonging wholly or partially to any other person with the intention of unlawful appropriation is guilty of theft" (Wolswijk 2012:459) The court ruled the defendants

guilty due to the fact that the items had genuine value to both the victim and the defendants, the victim expended time and effort to acquire control over the items, and the victim lost control of those items due to the actions of the defendants (Wolswijk 2012:460). In the regular course of participating in any MMORPG, individuals and groups will spend time and effort to acquire objects of importance. That such actions ever drew a court ruling give the social meaning of the game and the items in the game real world significance. The events exemplify the conflict between the socially created value of a virtual object and the laws of the real world in which players also participate.

In Western cultures people tend to use objects, especially possessions, to create and perpetuate their desired social identities. Objects may include anything from the tools a person uses in their profession to personal possessions. These objects can help people define who they are and establish their social position. Maryam Afshar asserts that "Objects also work as signs that regulate interpersonal relationships and therefore create social order" (Afshar 2014:10). Moral values in many Western cultures create a religious devaluation of material objects; however, they remain essential in defining most social settings. In the artificial world of an MMORPG, objects are central to social order. Some objects are particularly significant: the characters that players inhabit. The characters that people use in a game are both subjects and objects, just as the human self is in the real world (Mead 1934). More often than not, avatars are the only conception players have of each other. The understanding of how players assign meaning and act towards virtual objects includes participating in the game through an avatar. This means that understanding how players assign meanings to themselves is just as important as understanding other game objects.

The objects a player acquires and possesses in a game and the advantages they gained because of those objects are the most accurate marker of their social position in the game. In many instances, players' motivations for acquiring items are strong examples of conspicuous consumption as best described in Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). A person who plays Runescape, or any MMORPG, may acquire items not only for their utility but also because of the socially defined signals they send to other players. A set of armor may be useful to a player, but it also shows others what that player had to achieve to acquire the armor set. The creation and acquisition of status-affirming objects give credence to the study of an MMORPG as a functional social setting.

<center>*The Virtual Self*</center>

In his posthumously published book *Mind, Self, and Society,* George Herbert Mead (1934) provided one of the most succinct and effective ways to describe the idea of the self. According to Mead, the self is a gathering of social experiences that we use to conceptualize an image of our own person. The self we create is inherently social, it only exists in reference to the social actors and situations we use to define it. Mead also discusses the concept of self on a higher level, "After a self has arisen, it in a certain sense provides for itself its social experiences, and so we can conceive of an absolutely solitary self" (Mead 1934:1). A solitary self may continue to exist but it can only change, adapt, or grow in reference to the person who possesses it. Mead goes further in describing that most people possess a variety of "selves" that are appropriate to specific social settings: "What determines the amount of the self that gets into communication is the social experience itself" (Mead 1934:2).

In many senses, the virtual worlds presented by Runescape but also any MMORPG are appropriate settings for applying Mead's ideas about the self. The social environments of these games invite players to role-take. Players take on roles to accomplish game tasks and see where they stand in relation to other players. Role-taking also encourages the development of self through the reflected approval of other players. Taking on a particular role (or roles) in Runescape will typically require numerous social interactions and experiences that can allow a player to develop a self-concept as Mead described. All MMORPGs offer a large variety of social situations and enable game-related social gatherings. Even though an MMORPG is played through the internet, acquainted players may meet in real life to play for ease of communication. Each person has autonomous control of their character in the game and must be prepared to present themselves differently in the games' different social settings. These different gatherings and ways that players communicate with one another are further examples of social experiences that can lead to players developing self-concept(s).

Nicole Kramer and Stephan Winter (2008) describe what they call the "Web 2.0" and pose several considerations for understanding people's conceptions of self and self-presentation in online arenas. The authors refer directly to MySpace, YouTube, and Facebook, but the Web 2.0 can refer to any website people widely use to interact with other people. On such websites and social media platforms, users typically create and personalize an account and use it to interact with other users who have done the same. In this sense, any active MMORPG could be considered part of the Web 2.0. Runescape is a highly pertinent example because it has been active for 15 years, and holds several Guinness World Records, including "Most Users of an MMO Videogame," and "Most Prolifically Updated MMO Videogame" (HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/YD46XE7B). Kramer and Winter make it clear that while people do

not typically attempt to act as someone they are not, they do use this social environment to craft present an idealized version of themselves.

Peter Nagy and Bernadett Koles (2014) further emphasize the real-world significance of players' selves in a virtual environment. Their research participants created online avatars and selected certain possessions for them (based on personal preference) that existed only in the online world. All participants used their avatar to reflect socially desirable qualities. Male participants tended to use their avatar as a means of expressing aspects of themselves that they had little or no opportunity to express in the real world. Female participants tended to give their avatars items that reflected a socially idealized version of themselves. Female and male participants both used the virtual world to express and examine aspects of their self that they struggled to understand in the real world. Simon Gottschalk (2010) detailed highly similar concepts when studying another popular online social world called Second Life. Although Second Life gameplay is very different from many MMORPGs, Gottschalk found that Second Life participants also used their avatar to represent ideal versions of themselves. He also found that players may even use their avatar to "explore aspects of themselves they have always repressed" (Gottschalk 2010:508). Consciously and unconsciously, players develop complex understandings of themselves and others through their experience in online games. It is clear that studying players' actions in an MMORPG can yield valuable information about the concept of self that continues to change in the contemporary world.

Online identities may be created and used in a more controlled environment than is possible in the offline world, but their real-world significance should be carefully considered. Even an idealized version of a person can still reflect a great deal of a person's self-concept and their understanding of social structures. As Lori Kendall (1998) discovered, a person's self-

concept online is often affected by their self-concept offline. She also discovered that gender, social class, and race all have salience in the online world. Participants in her study even formed power relations in ways very similar to the real world despite participants' knowing that their shared identities may not be "real."

To tie together many of the social aspects of a virtual world, we must also understand what attracts people to play online games. J. Patrick Williams (2016) explores the contradiction that although many people play games because they are "fun," games are "equally likely to be *not* fun" (p. 116). Williams adds that, "The fun of gameplay is found in the social activities that comprise it, rather than only the games themselves" (Williams 2016:116). Even people who choose to play games that are solitary may derive a greater sense of "fun" from such a game when they discuss their in-game experiences and compare achievements with other people who play the game. There will always be exceptions, but it is becoming clear that many aspects of gaming are tied to the social experiences that players create (and receive) through playing the game. Although true in some sense for all types of gaming, these ideas are especially concrete in socially based MMORPGs such as World of Warcraft and Runescape. Crowe and Bradford (2006) specifically discuss the socially rooted aspects of Runescape by explaining that the creation and development of virtual identities is largely based in the interaction between players. It is clear that in many aspects, virtual spaces are increasingly valuable tools for studying social interaction and how players enact social selves through their characters.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

In the real world, studying basic social phenomena can be impeded by a number of factors such as time, access to potential participants, and cost to the researcher and/or participant, etc. I used the virtual social world of the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game *Runescape* to overcome some of these barriers and study how active players perceive their character and interact with others in the game. On any given day 30,000 to 90,000 players have populated Runescape's environment (www.misplaceditems.com). I employed both participant observation (sometimes participating more than observing) and personal interviews to gather qualitative data on Runescape players. Although the number of interviews was small (eight) I regularly interacted with about 50 clan members and observed hundreds of players in public domains of the game.

Interviews

I conducted text-based interviews with Runescape players using my personal computer on a secure internet server. All players I interviewed were vetted to ensure they were at least 18 years of age. To ensure privacy and reduce distractions, all interviews were conducted at my virtual "house" that exists within the game. Any player who did not follow up with a private message within 5 days of being asked to complete an interview was dropped from consideration.

The interviews began with basic questions related to the game, such as the year the user created his/her account, number of active years of play, and number of active friends. The next set of questions were intended to examine how Runescape players conceived the virtual avatar that represents them in the game. I also asked about players' thoughts, actions, emotions, and

some indicators of commitment to the game. All questions are listed in the Appendix. These questions strictly excluded any kind of identifying information such as a player's real name or place of residence. Once my interviewee and I were inside my virtual house, I conducted the interviews through a private in-game chat window, recorded via screenshot, and transferred the text to a Microsoft Word document.

Observations

I observed three public areas of Runescape for a minimum of one hour a week, for 4 weeks. The first location I observed was the Grand Exchange, the most common place for players to engage in trade. When a player logs into Runescape, "World 2" is designated as the primary trade world. The Grand Exchange on World 2 is typically the most populated area in all of Runescape. The virtual area is a large circular courtyard surrounded by a high wall with the appearance of stone. Inside this circle there are four identical hubs evenly spaced at focal points. Each hub has NPCs (non-player characters) that allow players to access their bank and the grand exchange trade network where all players may trade items. The northwestern and southwestern hubs typically have the most players around them. Trade-related messages permeate the public chat window in this area. The majority of trade-related messages were constant perfunctory and repetitive messages about the price of items. I made note of as many communications as possible that did not directly discuss prices. I also noted every interaction that was not trade-related.

The second location I observed is where players informally gather to train one of the 27 game skills. World 16 is designated as the "bonfires" world. Many Runescape players typically gather at the southwestern hub of the Grand Exchange on that world to train the "firemaking" skill. I chose this location on World 16 because players tend to be stationary when training the

firemaking skill and may engage in more conversation with other players. I did not change my normal behavior as a Runescape player while observing this location, and also recorded any conversations on topics beyond the game.

My third observation setting changed from my original research design. Players use a number of checkpoints, called lodestones, to move around the Runescape world quickly. My initial location for observing was the lodestone closest to the Grand Exchange on World 127, which is designated for clan recruitment. The lodestone is on the outer edge of a small virtual town made up of single story buildings and occupied by NPCs. There are almost always recruiting representatives (players) from different clans in this immediate area. Although there was a fair amount of chat from the clan recruiters, it became clear that most players entering the area immediately went to the nearby bank or to World 127's Grand Exchange. Because of the lack of player-to-player communication and sparse observational data, I shifted my observation to a different source of data: A large, active in-game clan that I joined during this study. The clan has over 400 members with 30-50 of them actively talking in the clan's devoted chat window every day. The clan's chat window is live and shared among all members of the clan, regardless of which Runescape world they are logged onto. I obtained permission to observe the clan's chat window from the clan's administrators. I participated in the clan's chat as I normally would. I observed by taking screen shots of the chat window for at least one hour on three separate days. I assigned pseudonyms to each clan member, and transcribed the conversation to a Microsoft Word document.

Although each clan member experienced Runescape individually, they shared thoughts, ideas, questions, and advice simultaneously. From everything I have come to understand about Runescape, clans attract players who seek to belong to a group for the shared benefits. I received

a great deal of support from my clan, and the bulk of my interviews were completed by clan members. Any Runescape player at any experience level may join the clan I am in. I witnessed different clan members recruiting new members in over a dozen different locations scattered throughout Runescape, including all of the areas where I collected observational data. The variety of areas that new clan members come from and the lack of requirements for entrance to the clan offer assurance that my convenience sample of interviews with clan members did not seem to bias my data.

Given the highly varied nature of this game and the large number of players, any of the three observation locations should have been ideal for recruiting potential interviewees. I recruited participants for interviews through the public chat window or my clan's devoted chat window. Potential interviewees added me to their "friends" list to gain access to a closed private chat window, which allowed us privacy, and a greater character limit. When using the public chat window, players are limited to 80 characters which would greatly hinder the efficiency of interviews. The private chat window allows 255 characters per message.

Analysis

To analyze both of my data sources I performed line-by-line coding of my transcripts to identify emergent themes regarding Runescape players' words, actions, and appearance. The codes I developed from observing public areas focused on the overarching social structures of the Runescape community. While recording fieldnotes for the public observation sessions I noted specific instances that were potential examples of sociological concepts at play. The codes I developed from observation were beneficial when coding interview transcripts. After I completed coding, I arranged the codes into related categories for further analysis and writing.

Limitations

Although observing the game went smoothly, I encountered a number of problems while attempting to recruit players for interviews. I made at least one public request to the players present in each observation site every time I collected observational data. I quickly discovered that civil inattention towards other players (including my requests for participants) was probably the most common unwritten rule of player conduct. Alongside my requests, many other players' requests/questions (both game-related and not) entered in the public chat window did not seem to receive any noticeable responses either. I did not receive a positive response from any of those public requests. In fact, while collecting observational data at the Grand Exchange on World 2, an unacquainted player requested that I stop making public requests for players to complete interviews. I ceased all such requests for several days, and never encountered that player again.

On two occasions I received truly negative feedback from players after asking about their willingness to complete interviews. I encountered a player at the Grand Exchange who was running a game of chance, which is strictly against Runescape's rules. After a brief polite conversation, I asked this player to add me to their friends list so I could send them a private message. I sent this player the same official script I sent to every player who indicated some interest in completing an interview. This player immediately became extremely aggressive and indicated they had reported me to Jagex because I had asked for identifying information (my IRB-approved protocol asked for no identifying information whatsoever). I checked the official channels on the Runescape website and found no complaint—it was either never filed or was considered invalid and discarded by Jagex.

The other instance of refusal occurred when I attempted to get permission from the leader of my previous Runescape clan to ask clan members about their willingness to complete

interviews. Initially the leader of that clan was willing to consider my request and asked to view the official script I would be sending to members of that clan. Within less than one minute after sending the script to the leader of that clan, I was removed from the clan and all communication was blocked without any explanation. Lastly, although it was not an instance of negative feedback, one clan member I interviewed asked me to delete the interview records without any explanation and I complied. After numerous conversations with other clan members after the fact, I have come to understand that this player decided to stop playing Runescape and most likely deleted his/her account. Given the difficulty of recruiting interviewees because of occasional hostility and, more frequently, players' disinterest in interviews, I completed eight interviews and was left with seven after honoring the deletion request. I return to the problem of player recruitment for interviews later in my analysis.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Self-Identity and Interaction in Runescape

The Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) Runescape was
created to be played with other people. Although players may engage in gameplay without
interacting with other players, Runescape's structure facilitates extensive online social
interaction. I discovered that social interaction in Runescape may cause players to develop
unique levels of attachment to the game and vary across all aspects of their online social
experience. I learned that some of the Runescape players I interviewed have been active for a
decade or more. Players' online game experience occurs through their avatar. Just as with players
in other online games and virtual worlds (Second Life, World of Warcraft, Neverwinter),
Runescape players invest real world time and money in their characters' visible features and
accomplishments. Through a variety of efforts to build and develop their Runescape character(s),
players appear to incorporate their avatar into their self-concept. Based on personal experience,
observational data collection, and interviewing Runescape players, I will discuss several ways
players grow attached to their avatar/character and develop an ongoing virtual self in Runescape.

I observed many instances of different forms of social stratification at play, including
players' awareness of formal and informal relationships in Runescape. The formal relationships
focused on players' understanding of Jagex and the moderators they use to regulate in-game
activity. The informal relationships focus on players' understanding of interpersonal
relationships with other players, particularly through the economic activity that permeates
Runescape. Analyzing the data I gathered from public observation in Runescape also uncovered
themes of situational awareness shared by players in public areas of Runescape and my clan's

devoted chat window. I also discovered in my analysis how physical (virtual) items are central to the development of Runescape players and their importance to individuals. Interviewees discussed their Runescape experience and virtual items using first person terminology. My analysis also focused on the prevalence of emotions and emotion management, revealing their importance to individual Runescape players.

Impression Management through Physical Character Development

When people create a Runescape account, they lay claim to an avatar and give it virtual physical substance with accessories and equipment. Physical items are the best place to start analyzing how players develop their character as a social object because avatars are the first focus of players' efforts. Runescape players convey important information about their character through the physical items they can wear, hold, or store, in contrast to social indicators that are strictly based on game progress. For newer players with less cumulative game time to acquire uncommon items, character development means obtaining newer sets of armor, weapons for combat, and tools for non-combat activity. I observed newer and more experienced players at both the Grand Exchange and on the Bonfires world. The armor and weapons aid with combat-related game skills, and many tools serve as labor-saving devices. Players begin with a basic hatchet to train the woodcutting skill. When their skill reaches certain markers of progress (called "levels"), players may either make or purchase a hatchet that allows them to train the skill more efficiently. Players follow a similar trajectory with pickaxes for the mining skill. Runescape's clearly defined requirements provide incentives for players to use newer and better tools. Tools thus mark the players' physical and social progress, much like the quality of vehicles or tools people acquire as their real-world income and skills improve.

Experienced Runescape players can easily detect other players' levels of achievement by looking at their gear. One player I interviewed mentioned satisfaction with finishing a game quest which gave him access to tools that help train a certain skill faster. A player's ultimate source of pride may be achieving the highest level in that skill, but having access to those tools gives the player another way to look superior in the eyes of other Runescape players. I observed several instances of players commenting on the value or rarity of item(s) other players possessed. Although real world social actors may assess someone's status by their words, actions, or possessions, the accuracy of such judgements varies in contrast to Runescape's fixed environment. The relative value and functionality of players' equipment and tools signals their ongoing effort to embellish their character throughout their Runescape experience.

As further evidence of Players' interest in (and identification with) their character's appearance, many players procure decorative items for their character. Some items cosmetically alter the appearance of functional equipment, but other objects function as fashion accessories. Several parasols exist in the game despite the fact that Runescape's environment lacks weather as a concept. When I asked an interviewee for his favorite thing about his Runescape character, he responded, "My outfit," as if *he*, not his avatar, were wearing it. Once they had agreed to an interview, I noticed myself asking other players to come to "my house" instead of my avatar's house without needing any explanation that I meant *my* virtual house in Runescape. When asked if she had ever envied another Runescape player, one interviewee said that she coveted a pair of sunglasses another player wore; sunglasses serve no purpose other than to enhance characters' appearance. Runescape players created the term "fashionscape" to capture their enthusiasm for characters' accessories.

Items that have no functional (skill-building) purpose existing in a virtually created and maintained world are important. An avatar does not need sunglasses or parasols in a virtual world with no weather. These items signal that players can, and do, treat their character as an extension of their self-concept. For example, the most experienced player I interviewed possessed some of the most valuable armor and weapons available in Runescape. Yet, when I asked him what he likes about his character, he replied that he adores his outfit: "I'm all about Fashionscape." This person played Runescape the most out of all the interviewed players and had the greatest number of active friends in game. Despite the value and utility of his tools and armor, his outfit meant more to him. Another interviewee brought up the word "cosmetics" and indicated that his character's appearance meant enough to him that he spent real world money to purchase a certain outfit. A third player also indicated that her Runescape character's outfit was her biggest like. While at least one interviewee expressed his lack of interest in "fashionscape," my field observations documented that many players chose appearance-enhancing accessories for their character. Players displayed a wide variety of fashionable items for their character in both public settings I observed. I also observed players whose characters sported skill-based equipment instead of fashionable items. Taken altogether, players' selection of "fashionscape" and tools or armor acquired from training skills indicates how players attach meanings to their Runescape character. When players' embellish their character's appearance, they transform their avatar into an extension of the self through which they participate in all of the social experiences Runescape has to offer.

Skill Accomplishment, Pride, Prestige

Regardless of their reasons for creating a Runescape account or playing for any amount of time, all players must meet standardized requirements to advance in each skill. Game skills are purpose driven and represent specific activities. One game skill is fishing, in which a player uses equipment that varies ranges in sophistication to catch various marine life in different locations. The crafting skill allows players to create bowls and pots, jewelry, and certain types of armor. The smithing skill lets players work with metal to create armor and weapons. Training skills and gaining levels offer players a means to compare themselves to others. As a consequence, skill levels serve as a source of pride and prestige. Because of their transparency and specificity, in-game skills appeal to players as markers of achievement and progress, and give them incentives to keep playing Runescape (Williams 2016). One interviewee said that a situation that gives her a sense of pride is "When she gets gainz!" In other words, she feels pride when her character makes progress. She referred to her Runescape character in third person and derived positive feelings from what she could get her character to achieve. On the Bonfires world, I frequently observed instances of players congratulating one another on advancement in the firemaking skill. The sentiments displayed by the players I interviewed are compelling evidence that their character generates self-feelings. Feelings of pride suggest that players develop a rewarding virtual self by playing Runescape.

Game skills also signal players' levels of achievement and give them status among peers. Most players consider achieving the highest level as a prestigious accomplishment. This shared understanding is another aspect of Runescape that allows players to develop a sense of self through their characters. I observed Runescape players on the bonfires world frequently asking other players about their firemaking level. They also asked what type of logs others were burning

(which carry social meaning because of differing cost), if others players present had completed game quests related to the firemaking skill, or anything else related to advancing the skill. Such interactions and questions give players with higher skill levels feelings of pride because other players acknowledge their accomplishments.

The most widespread, consistent, and normative way that players derived prestige and feelings of pride through their character was by advancing in any of the 27 game skills available in Runescape. Achieving the highest level in any of these skills draws admiration from other players. When one of the players I interviewed was close to achieving the highest level in the firemaking skill, several members of our mutual Runescape clan held a celebration. I observed a brief discussion in my clan chat window immediately after this announcement in which a dozen or more members of our mutual clan gathered in a small area of Runecape to witness him reaching the highest level. The event gained importance for every player present because they experienced it socially. As this event indicates, Runescape players did not just focus on their own achievements. Each of my interviewees said that they had celebrated other players' accomplishments, or did so in my presence. Celebrations centered on a player reaching the highest level in one of the game skills. Two of the players I interviewed talked about their clan organizing a large-scale celebration to honor a player "maxing a skill." One interviewee even mentioned using video recording software to document friends' achievements for the sake of posterity. By arranging to be present online when another player reaches a milestone, party attendees award some prestige to the player and show they value the achievement. Players want their avatar to by physically present for other's achievements despite the instantaneous communication through the chat window(s). These celebratory gatherings of players are also

compelling evidence that Runescape players develop significant concepts of self through playing the game.

As an example of how socially invested players could become with their characters, one interviewee described how he responded when his Runescape account that had maxed the magic skill was hacked and stolen. He spent a great deal of time getting the next character he created to the same level as his original character. Once he achieved the highest level in the magic skill on the new character, he said that it felt like "a major life goal was complete." One interviewee who took pride in maxing a skill pointed out that he felt more pride from his accomplishment when Runescape was a newer game and fewer players had such achievements. Thousands of Runescape players have now reached the same level of progress. These achievements may confer less prestige today because they are no longer rare or unique. Runescape players often measure themselves and their skills in relation to other players and the rarity/normality of an achievement can affect any comparison players make. I have noticed such patterns during my own experience in Runescape and this interviewee made a point of mentioning such patterns without being asked. In contrast to that, one interviewee, a 10-year veteran of Runescape, has chosen social interaction in the game over skill advancement. During her interview she mentioned having trouble imagining how players achieve the highest level in any skill, let alone several. Her Runescape experience shows us how social experiences and players' self-concepts develop differently for separate individuals, even in this fixed environment.

Economic Accomplishment

Social interaction in Runescape structures more than skill advancement to motivate players. Acquiring wealth and engaging in trade are also motivations for players that Runescape

actively facilitates. The game design emphasizes training game skills and completing certain tasks/goals, but wealth is also important to players. The concepts of trade and wealth are important to analyze because they are necessarily social in the context of an MMORPG like Runescape. There are certain NPCs (Non-Player Characters) that players can sell items to, but in my experience, they often pay far less than the current value of an item. Players can only fetch the full value of an item when they sell it to another player, and the only way to acquire great wealth is through trade with other players.

Players can accumulate wealth in the form of in-game money that's simply called "gold" in Runescape; players can also have wealth in the form of physical items. Runescape players may not always get a sense of prestige or pride directly from such items; they may derive those feelings from the wealth it took to acquire the item. For example, players may buy equipment they cannot yet use to prove to other players that they have the wealth to purchase the items, a direct example of conspicuous consumption. Anticipatory purchasing is also a strong example of players' goal-oriented behavior. Players who make such purchases are planning to reach a skill where they can use the items in the future. The most valuable armor and weapons can only be acquired by combating difficult "boss" monsters or by purchasing them from players who have beaten those monsters. A player who seeks to buy such equipment must have the wealth to buy these items from players who acquired them through combat. In my experience, the ability to complete difficult combat-related activities is respected by many players, but wealth is respected by all players because it allows those players with wealth to acquire anything they need. One interviewee was more experienced than the rest by a large margin, and he possessed a fair amount of monetary wealth along with some of the best equipment in the game. When I asked if

he had ever been jealous of a player he responded by mentioning a specific player who was wealthier than himself.

I encountered a player at the Grand Exchange several times who was involved in selling a variety of items at a personal profit. This player needed other players to purchase from his/her stock of items to generate wealth. This player was popular because many of the items they were selling could be used or resold to profit the buyer. I also witnessed a market panic over the price of magic rings while observing at the Grand Exchange; the area was more crowded than usual and nearly every player present was talking in the public chat window and trying to profit from the panic. It appeared that some players were generating large amounts of Runescape wealth from buying and selling these rings. The market panic is a direct example of how Runescape trade is inherently social. If there had not been several hundred players present who were all interested in trading these magic rings, there would not have been a social environment conducive to an economic panic.

Wealth is so salient and important in Runescape that some players attempted to acquire it through illegitimate means. The most obvious and frequent method I documented while observing public places in Runescape occurred when players engaged in begging. Most of the time they simply asked for money. Players near them (potential benefactors) mostly seemed to follow an unwritten rule of conduct similar to the real world: they ignored or shamed players who begged. The shaming took several forms including both insults and referral to Runescape rules regarding solicitation. Begging players rarely succeeded. Players also attempted a variety of scams to gain wealth. A scam I once experienced involved a deceptive player luring me into an area where they "killed" me and took my valuable items. Other scams involved a player tricking another player into revealing their Runescape account login ID and password. Players who

attempt either begging or scamming desire the same wealth or items that other players possess without the effort to acquire them through conventional means. Williams (2016) describes "griefing" in other games, in which players use the structure of a game to intentionally harass and prey upon other players. Begging and scamming in Runescape fit this description; by engaging in those acts, deceptive players may not set out to break Runescape's rules. The analytical point is that these players are "breaking implicit social rules that typically govern player behavior" (Williams 2016: 121). The social rules that exist in the virtual world of Runescape are consistent and widespread to the point that many players manipulate them for benefit.

Commitment to Runescape

How Runescape players feel about their characters/avatars most likely depends on their level of interest in and commitment to the game. Through my interviews, observations, and participation in clan chats, I investigated players' levels of commitment to playing the game. Commitment manifested itself in two major ways: the amount of time players invested in the game and how they tended to spend their time in the virtual world after logging in. Before I discuss those aspects of commitment, though, it helps to explain how players value time itself in the game.

The best way to start looking at time's value in Runescape is to discuss the aforementioned panic over the price of a specific ring. The players buying and selling these rings anticipated being able to generate a large profit from the experience. The abnormally visible panic was caused by a sort of shared knowledge that the price of this ring would eventually stabilize over time, a topic I observed many of the players present at the Grand Exchange

discussing. Time spent in Runescape is so valuable that players will expend effort to save

miniscule amounts of it. I observed players making occasional requests on the Bonfires world

(World 16) that the portable skilling station called a "brazier" be moved closer to the bank,

which would have created a net time savings of no more than a few seconds.

How Runescape players discussed time caught my attention. One player I interviewed

indicated that he tried to minimize wasted effort in-game, which reduced the amount of time he

spent socializing with other players. Another player I interviewed commented that he spent most

of his time in Runescape training skills and avoiding wasting experience points. The most

experienced player I interviewed said that he spent a large portion of his Runescape time

standing around in the primary trading area (Grand Exchange) "wasting xp" [experience points].

The amount of real-world time (over years and per week) that players invested in

Runescape varied widely. Runescape went live in 2001; although they are becoming less

common, some players have maintained an account since its inception. A 15-year commitment to

a game would indicate a significant attachment to the virtual world and the people in it, even if

the player had periods of inactivity. My interviewees reported investing varying levels of time in

the game. The least active Runescape player I interviewed created their account in 2005 and

considered themselves an active player for about 5 total years since that time. That player

estimated that he played the game around 5-10 hours per week. He had around 15 active friends

in Runescape. This is a relatively light level of commitment compared to some other Runescape

players.

Four of the Runescape players I interviewed indicated that they spent anywhere from 10-

30 hours per week playing Runescape. The upper end of that spectrum is important because it is

equivalent to how much time a person would put into part-time employment. This seems to be an

average level of commitment. I paid attention to how often people that I interacted with in Runescape would play the game long before I started interviewing other Runescape players. The most active player I interviewed appeared to be an exceptional case. He estimated that he spent at least 70 hours per week playing Runescape, 10 hours a day consistently, and stayed active on one of several accounts for around 14 years. He invested the level of time and energy into this game that other people put into real-world careers. These players' comments and my observations are significant because they consider their Runescape time valuable enough that it could be "wasted" despite the fact that Runescape is intended to be recreational. All of my interviewees had detailed answers to my questions about time spent in Runescape. For example, players' notions of time as valuable, or their description of wasting valuable game time, show us evidence of their nuanced attachments to Runescape.

Analyzing all of my sources of data revealed evidence that the way that Runescape players develop can mimic the development of social actors in the real world. Just as some Runescape players focus on completing certain activities, many people in the real world focus their time on instrumental tasks. Others focus on interacting with other players socially just as some people choose to spend their free time, or even their career, involved in social circles. On the surface Runescape is a meritocracy that encourages players to reach instrumental goals. Although the game overflows with instrumental goals to complete, it is filled with wide-ranging social interaction that is high quality and rewarding. Runescape players can share conversations and experiences with unacquainted players which I observed at the Grand Exchange and on the Bonfires world. They can also be part of a group that is stable enough for players to develop individual mannerisms and casual relationships, which I observed in my clan chat window. Just as most people in Runescape do not focus on one specific type of activity, social actors in the

real world do not typically spend all of their time devoted to one purpose. The variety presented by the whole Runescape experience presents many opportunities to make real-world comparisons.

Understanding commitment to Runescape overall also requires an understanding of how clans enable players to invest part of their in-game time in social activities. As a player, I often participate in the clan chat regardless of what activity I am doing in Runescape. My observation of my clan's chat window showed me that many other players in the clan do exactly the same thing; my previous clan was highly similar. Runescape players share a widespread understanding of time's value in the game and many of them choose to invest some of their time in participating in a clan. Despite the shared understanding of Runescape's structure and the time it takes to complete the massive number of goals, some players still see social interaction as a valuable investment of time.

The larger point to be taken from analyzing how time is a factor in Runescape is that players do not spend time in Runescape, they invest time in their Runescape experience. How they refer to any time spent in game can thus be a strong signifier of their commitment to it. The various investments of time may not tell us how important avatars are to each player, but these time investments nevertheless foster character development. In the real world the amount of time people invest in any activity may reflect how committed they are and how much they change through those experiences. Runescape players are likely to have social experiences and develop broader concepts of self through their avatar as they invest more time in the game.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Based on my different overlapping sources of data, Runescape indeed meets the definition of a virtual social world. Tens of thousands of social actors participate in Runescape, which offers a variety of interactive experiences. People can manage how much they interact with other players; even players who limit social interaction online may consider their character's achievements as an extension of themselves. Other people may become devoted players for a decade or more and build social relationships only possible through their character. For them, "the fun of gameplay is found in the social activities that comprise it, rather than only the gameplay itself" (Williams 2016: 116). Runescape may become central to their life.

Just as in real life, when a person enters a new social arena, it is likely they are uncertain how it will affect them. In some instances, they may be detached from the environment and the other people who occupy it. However, in many cases, engaging with others over time in a particular social setting means learning and adapting to situated norms. For example, the value and utility of time is, if anything, more important and salient than it is in the real world. The Runescape players I interviewed possessed a well-developed understanding of how long many game tasks would take, and had learned how to prioritize the time they spent in the game to get such tasks done as quickly as possible. Ironically, my main difficulty in finding players willing to participate in interviews was because of the fact that the interview took an hour of their game time away. An hour they could use to fight a dragon or rescue a princess, so to speak. I came to understand that Runescape players do not spend time in the game world, they *invest* it. Many of the players I interviewed logged the amount of time equivalent to a part time job or more into the game. The language used by some interviewees communicated that although they enjoy playing

Runescape, the game also has a dual nature that is work-like at times. These players also indicated that they felt obligations towards certain aspects of the game, particularly parts of the game that focus on social interaction like clan membership.

I discovered that players' concepts of wealth and ownership were also well-developed in the virtual world of Runescape. In my early experience as a player, I quickly realized that having access to monetary wealth (in game currency) would make the completion of many goals much faster and easier overall. The main concern expressed by the players who agreed to complete an interview was that the time spent in my virtual house would detract from time they could spend generating wealth. There were several instances during data collection where I observed that some players were generally aware of other players' wealth with more specific examples coming from interview data. Wealth is not only useful in Runescape, it also carries social significance. And, just as in the real world, people tend to make upward rather than downward comparisons.

When discussing avatars "physical" virtual items that exist only in the world of Runescape, more often than not, players referred to them using possessive terms. Analyzing these concepts shows us that many Runescape players adopt a very first-person perspective in the game, developing socially as if we truly existed in the game's virtual social world.

Final important considerations come from my membership in an established social group, a large Runescape clan. The clan I am part of has no strict requirements about players' level of participation or preferred activities in the game. It is an entirely informal group of players who associate purely by choice. Just as players seem to develop a "Runescape self," other players appear to pick up on those selves. Their verbal/textual comments and communication styles were recognizable to other clan members. In addition, social roles in clans—created and maintained entirely through in-game discourse—signal that players are interdependent with one

another. Although they often act out of self-interest, they are more than individual players controlling avatars. Ultimately, the different types of players I observed, interacted with, and interviewed in the virtual social world of Runescape have social experiences with other players and with the social self that they enact in the game.

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APPENDIX

Interview Materials

Recruitment Script

"Hello (username here) my name is Isaac Robe and I am a Sociology graduate student at East Tennessee State University. I am conducting interviews as part of the research for my Master's thesis. If you are at least 18 years old, would you be willing to participate in an in-depth interview that may take about 1 hour of your time? The interview will take place through the chat window. To be clear, I do not want any personally identifying information from you. I will answer any questions you have at any point. You are free to refuse to answer any questions, stop the interview and any further contact at any time, and any whole or partial interview records (screenshots) will be destroyed upon request. The following link will direct you to an informed consent page (https://tinyurl.com/lqhllzj).*"*

Interview Guide

Background Questions

1. What year were you born?

2. What is your gender?

3. What is your race?

4. What year did you create your Runescape account?

5. How did you find out about Runescape?

6. How many months or years have you been an active Runescape player?

7. About how many hours a week do you play Runescape?

8. How many active friends do you have in Runescape?

Runescape & You

9. What do you think of your Runescape character?

10. What are some ways you want your Runescape character to act?

11. What do you like about your character?

12. What do you dislike about your character?

13. When you first started to play Runescape, did anything surprise you?

14. Have you ever felt proud about a situation with your character? (what happened?)

15. Have you ever felt embarrassed about a situation with your character? (what happened?)

16. What do you like about Runescape?

17. What do you dislike about Runecape?

18. What do you spend the most time doing in Runescape?

19. Have you ever gotten angry or irritated because of how another Runescape player treated

    you? (what happened?)

20. Have you ever envied another player in Runescape (what about?)

21. Have you ever celebrated another player's accomplishments (what did you celebrate)?

22. To your knowledge, have you ever been excluded from an activity in Runescape?

23. When you interact with another player, do you ever consider that person's gender? What

    about their race?

24. How would it make you feel if your Runescape account were ever disabled by Jagex?

25. How would it make you feel if your Runescape account were ever stolen by another

    player?

Personal Commitment

26. Do you ever talk about Runescape with real world friends? What do you talk about?

27. Have you ever tried to meet a Runescape friend in the real world?

28. If you could change the way that players interact in Runescape, what would you change?

29. What do you think has kept you playing Runescape over the years?

30. Is there anything you would like to add that I have overlooked?

Upon completing these questions, or cessation of the interview, players will be given an opportunity to ask the interviewer any questions they would like. They will also be given an opportunity to remove any information they do not want included in the interviewer's records. Once the entire process is complete the player will be thanked for their time. Interview subjects will be notified of the completion of the project. Pending any further questions they may have, they will be removed from the friends list of the interviewer at that time.

VITA

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