Methodological Appendix

Like any other player of *World of Warcraft* (WoW), I went through a number of ongoing socialization processes, including learning about the game and participating in the construction of social structures on the server by becoming a member of role-play communities and by actively forming role-play communities. Next to thinking and writing about WoW, I spent a few hours almost every day playing, reading, and posting to forums, talking to players over e-mail and MSN, and keeping the Snap Sisters' website updated. My main focus was on role-play, however, I also participated in instrumental play both in-character (IC) and out of character (OOC).

WoW brought me many interesting role-play experiences, playing the game and writing about it changed my life, also literally, as it changed the rhythm of my days. Playing could easily last for 8 hours in a row and until deep in the night. Furthermore, I often found myself thinking about WoW even when I was not playing or working on my research. To the dismay of my partner and offline friends, I cancelled appointments at times because, for example, "there was an important role-play event for which the Snap Sisters were commissioned to take snaps." Zoe became a very good friend and some player-characters I met through the game also became part of my social network.

Table 1 shows the three phases I distinguished in the two years that I played WoW. During the first months of play, I made myself familiar with the game mechanics and role-played low-profile, in order words, I often let others take the initiative and I did not participate in forum discussions. I stayed in-character (IC) most of the time, except for some conversations with players I already knew out of the context of the game (such as Zoe). My reasoning for this was twofold. What I personally enjoy about online role-play is being able to play without being distracted by the out of character (OOC) personality of other players. This makes the role-play experience more exciting and puts the focus on creating shared fantasies. Furthermore I decided to keep my other role of being researcher covert for the time being, as I did not want others to change their perception of me as a player-character because of it.

From an ethical point of view, ethnographers disagree if they are morally bound to give full disclosure and get formal consent from every potential participant in the research, or if soliciting formal informed consent from every participant in the ethnography is disruptive, unnecessary, and impossible. In studying role-play in WoW, this is complicated by the fact that the "hardcore" role-players that I was interested in, in the beginning tend to avoid OOC conversations. I found that the ethical aspect of the role conflict between being a player and a researcher can only be negotiated over time.

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Position	Covert	Covert and overt	Covert and overt
IC/OOC	Mainly IC interaction	IC (++) and OOC (+)	IC (+) and OOC (++)
Methods	Role-play Forum lurking	Role-play Forum participation Online interviews	Role-play Forum participation Online interviews Online discussion

Table 1: Three phases of role-play research over two years, in chronological order.

Phase 2 started when I decided to talk OOC with Alabast (Jørgen), via my character Yara, and I gave Alabast information about myself as a researcher. This was because Alabast was a proactive role-player who led a variety of role-play guilds, organized events and plots, and attempted to bring the different role-play communities on the server closer together. I wanted to be able to discuss his motivations OOC. Whether or not to reveal more about myself to Alabast was a hard decision to make because at that time I felt I had to choose between my enjoyment as a role-player and my role of being a researcher. Even though we continued to role-play and we had many conversations that shaped me as a player, researcher, and person, I sometimes regretted that I had to let go of a powerful dramatic conflict. Simultaneously I decided to become more proactive in my own role-play, and created characters that were focused on socializing into certain role-play communities that I heard about in-game or read about on the forums. If asked, I would give OOC information about myself, including being a researcher. Also, Zoe and I started the Snap Sisters and thereby actively influenced role-play on the server. Chapter 2 is mainly a description of the first and second phases.

In the third phase, I set up overt collaborations with other players. I told the group of players who I presented in chapter 2 that I was not only a player but also a researcher. They read and commented on the chapter and gave their consent for publication. Furthermore, I invited this group to participate in an in-game discussion in which I would use the themes presented in chapter 2 as a starting point. Meanwhile I started to the discuss the concept of the Argent Archives webportal with Jørgen, and Zoe started an unofficial server forum, for a small but growing network of similar-minded role-players for discussing and organizing role-play, events, storytelling, instancing and general chat. On Zoe's forum I started a Role-Play Theory 101 subforum in order to theorize role-play together with other players.

With regard to online research, the economist and researcher of hacking practices and software development, Yu-Wei Lin, argued that researchers are obliged to commit to a profound responsibility of engaging mutuality with respondents in interpreting, managing, analyzing, and revisiting ethnographic data collected from virtual environments (Lin 2004). Not only is mutuality a way to gain more insight into the complexity of computer-mediated social interaction, it is also a way to be reflective and to receive informed consent. I asked players informed consent for using real names (of both

their characters and themselves) throughout the thesis. The reasons for this are twofold: character names express part of the role-played personality, changing them would thus change the meaning of the experience. In chapter 4 I elaborated on meaning of character names. Secondly, I consider those players who's first name is mentioned to be collaborators in my research. Although the overall construction of the thesis is mine, these players have all read and commented on (parts of) my work which I incorporated into the final text. Especially in chapter 4 I aimed to experiment with collaborative research by presenting an analysis of online role-play as a discussion between fellow players and me, seen from my perspective.

Theorizing together with other players is not only beneficial for researchers and designers, it also helps players to find others who share a similar interest in the game. As I have shown in chapter 3, since *Dungeons and Dragons* (Gygax and Arneson 1974), players have been theorizing in order to shape like-minded communities. On WoW forums, both official and unofficial, players are slowly developing a similar discussion. Most of the time this is still at the level of an argument between the different play styles, which was also the main discussion topic for pen and paper role-playing games during the 1980s. By discussing my work with players, in-game, over e-mail, MSN and on Zoe's forum I hope to have made a start of pulling the discussion on role-play in MMORPGs to a next level, thus shaping role-play communities and in-depth ethnographical research.