The Hero and the Damsel

Gender representations in (MMO)RPGs

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Contents

Introduction

I am a female gamer who plays World of Warcraft (WoW). In this online game you play a character, your avatar, with which you can fight monsters or bad guys, gain armour and/or weaponry, explore the online world in which it is set, fight in dungeons, arenas and battlegrounds, learn to cook, fish, mine, sow and enjoy your play. WoW is a very social game: you can play with and get to know new people, and join a guild with your friends. With this guild you can consequently do certain group activities in-game, all the while chatting with each other in-game or through programs such as Skype and Mumble. Such games as WoW and others are called (MMO)RPGs. MMORPG is the abbreviations of Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game, or thus for RPG, Role Playing Game (Eklund 2011: 323)

After following a course on gender at my university I started noticing certain gender implications present in-game, which were not explicit, and I had not noticed before. For example, while playing WoW I noticed that many of the male players I interact with actually use a female main character. I found this odd, as this gender bending occurs so little, and is often stigmatized in the offline world, however occurs so often in the online world (Butler 1991: 140). After having asked why they played female characters they answered that they wanted to play a female character 'because they are prettier, and the men in-game are ugly.' Even in the newer expansion of the game, in which fat looking panda monks are introduced, the men I play with told me they would still rather play with a female pandaren, as these characters are called. This difference in gender representations through characters, and this difference between gender bending offline and online got me interested in gender representations in-game, and is one of the reasons for me to have decided on this research topic.

Another reason that made me decide to do this research was the surprised reaction I got from one of my fellow players when he heard my voice over Skype and asked: 'Either you are a very young boy, or you are a girl?!' When speaking to him later on this matter he stated: 'I was a bit surprised, it is very unusual to find girls in WoW'.

Is it really relevant?

Many arguments have been carried forward on how to look at technology and gender in relation to each other. Starting in the seventies feminist have said that technology could be considered a masculine space, and indeed now still, hegemonic masculinity is associated with technological capability (Wajcman 2000: 447, 454). Critics however soon argued that women were only put forward as victims, and that these feminist did not look at the way technology could change the existing 'sexual division of labour' (Wajcman 2000: 449). From the eighties onwards arguments pertaining to gender and technology stated that scholars did not look at gender in relation to technology as they were looking for groups that conflicted with each other in relation to technology, and thereby overlook excluded groups such as women (Wajcman 2000: 452). Feminist felt it important however

that women should be considered in relation to gender, as the exclusion from technology would perpetuate difference in influence and power in the technological sphere due to gender (Wajcman 2000: 452). However, again arguments also stated that men should not be considered as one homogenous group, a norm, wanting to marginalize women and with which women were compared (Wajcman 2000: 452). Currently the focus is shifting to technologies for the body, for example in vitro fertilisation, and information technologies, such as virtual realities (Wajcman 2000: 457).

These information technologies are where the focus in this thesis lies. I chose (MMO)RPGs as the topic to study because, within information technologies such as (MMO)RPGs 'people have the potential to express multiple and often unexplored aspects of the self, to play with their identity and to try out new ones' (Wajcman 2000: 458). In a similar manner developers of (MMO)RPGs have quite some possibilities to play with and subvert certain gender notions. For example, they have the possibility to create a third sex, or genderless characters, which for example the producers of magazines are unable to do (Taylor 2003: 31)? I wanted to find out how extensive this potential was in relation to gender within (MMO)RPGs. When I started to look into the topic for this thesis I soon found that much research had already been done on gender representations in videogames (Ivory 2006: 104; Dill & Thill 2007: 851,853; Williams &Martins & Consalvo &Ivory 2009: 824; Beasley & Standley 2002: 287-288; Scharrer 2004: 403-404; Miller & Summers 2007: 738-740; Ogletree & Drake 2007: 538; Tropes vs Women 2013; Dietz 1998). Much of this research pertained to gender stereotypes in game, as represented through avatars, their armour, their weapons, the degree of violence in-game, and how these representations influence gamers. I however put the focus of my research elsewhere, at the production side of (MMO)RPGs.

So I had realised I wanted to find out why the characters in WoW looked the way they look, how game-play, plot, colours etc. affect gender representations in-game. I would like to view in what way (MMO)RPGs are gendered and theorize on how this gendering is possibly produced and reproduced. In such a way you, the reader, may gain some insight into why games 'look' and 'play' the way they do as well as gain insight into what aspects contribute to shaping gender representations. Thus in this thesis I shall ask the question: *'In what ways are (MMO)RPGs gendered?'* In my thesis I shall attempt to give a clarification as to how gender relates to (MMO)RPGs, after which more extensive research may be done on how media and technology, in combination with gender, influences society and individuals in their daily lives.

The social relevance here can be discerned by looking at to which extent the inclusion and exclusion of women and men in the gamer demography, the game developer's demography influences the gendered nature of games. 'Videogames, comic books, TV shows and films reflect our society and possibly perpetuate negative stereotypes, the reason why it is relevant to observe and create awareness for these stereotypes' (Feminist Frenquency 2013). It is not always apparent to the producer, nor the players of an (MMO)RPG if a game is gendered, just as it was not noticed by me.. I feel this to be necessary because if one is made more aware of the gendered nature of games, one may influence the

in- and exclusion possibly perpetrated by this games. This in- and exclusion became apparent for example through the surprised reaction of my fellow player to my gender, as he was not expecting a women in-game. If one is aware of how gender influences game-play and vice versa and how production influences gender and vice versa, as well as how games are to a lesser or larger extent gendered, one can go about influencing or subverting gender in one's daily lives.

I will in this thesis mainly look at the manner in which gender is represented (in (MMO)RPGs) in western countries due to the fact that the most significant data found pertained to this area. I also use my own gaming experience for this thesis, which is similarly situated in this area. The representations of gender I am currently operating and familiar with are similarly representations present in dominantly western countries. I do not believe the notions of gender I use in this thesis are similarly applicable to other areas such as Africa or Asia as the development of technology and I believe the understanding of gender differs in these regions from the development and understand in Western countries, and I do not want to claim that this thesis is universally applicable.

'Why am I as an anthropologist best capable to do a literary research on this topic?' I am going to, at the hand of literature, attempt to present the way in which people see and understand themselves and the world around them consciously, but also subconsciously and without intention, as well as the manner in which they give meaning to their environment in their daily practices. I will do this by looking at how people engage with technology and technological production, and the fashion in which they reflect their gender identity upon technology and vice versa. In this manner society creates and reproduces certain meanings of gender accepted within their culture. Anthropology is here thus best suited as I want to look at how certain meanings are produced, here the creation of meaning to gender in the social space of an (MMO)RPG, and how individuals live by this created meaning.

What exactly will you be reading in this paper then?

My research question is formulated as follows: In what ways are (MMO)RPGs gendered? To answer this question I shall first have to explain what gender and technology entail and how these two subjects relate to one another. I will finish this chapter by explaining how gender may be represented within (MMO)RPGs, after which I shall explain in the following chapter what representations of gender exist in (MMO)RPGs. I shall in the final chapter attempt to elaborate on the (gendered) relation between the gendered nature of (MMO)RPGs and the domain of production of (MMO)RPGs.

In chapter one I will start by explaining in what way one may view gender, technology and gendered bodies outside and within context of (MMO)RPGs. In the first chapter I will attempt to answer the question 'How may (MMO)RPGs be considered gendered spaces?

In the second chapter I am going to show you in which way these (MMO)RPGs are gendered, and how gender is represented within these games. Here I want to then answer the question: 'How do gender biases get expressed within (MMO)RPGs? I am going to look for example at such aspects as the characters within the games, but also at plot use, colour use, gamer interaction etc. I will similarly

in this chapter look at videogames which may subvert certain gender stereotypes, so as to give a more nuanced argument.

In the third chapter I am going to look at the production and play of (MMO)RPGs, and to show how the spaces surrounding (MMO)RPGs may be gendered and how this reflects on the in-game gender biases. Here I will attempt answer the question: 'How do gender biases in-game get produced, reproduced or subverted?'

Chapter One: The hidden gender dynamics in society

To answer my main question, which is: "In what way are (MMO)RPGs gendered?", we have to first go back to the basic terms and theories behind this question to gain a better understanding of them. In this chapter I will first attempt to explain what gender entails. After this I will answer the question as to which hegemonic notions on gender exist. Hereafter I shall attempt to show how technology may be considered a gendered space. Finally I shall show how gender is expressed in society, and how this relates to the gendered nature of (MMO)RPGs. I call these gender dynamics hidden as they are not always actively experienced and expressed by individuals in society, but are often unconsciously lived as will be seen throughout this chapter. I will here make these gender dynamics apparent so as to make the reader conscious of how society is experienced and shapes the individual, so the reader may be more aware of how these gender dynamics are structured and continuously influence individuals' lives. I want to raise this awareness because if I want to explain how gender is constructed and reconstructed through (MMO)RPGs first these notions must be understood.

1.1 Gender as a social construct

The term gender refers to 'the culturally defined assumptions and practices that govern the social construction of men, women and their social relations' (Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies 2004). Indeed Raewyn Connell, a transgender woman and sociologist similarly finds gender to be the social and psychological difference which is attributed to men and women (Connell 2009: 9). This cultural divide dichotomy is put parallel to the biological difference between the sexes (Connell 2009: 9). Thus to be a women is to be feminine and to be a man is to be masculine and vice versa (Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies 2004).

The professor of psychologist Sandra Bem created an inventory that shows hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity as they exist in western society in which certain personality traits that were associated with masculinity and femininity were categorized and divided. This is called the BEM sex role inventory, which lends its name from its creator. Bem initially started out with 400 personality traits of which after a survey administered to 100 Stanford students twenty characteristic were selected for each category, masculine, feminine and neutral respectively (Bem 1974: 157). These characteristics were categorized to be either masculine or feminine if they were preferably attributed to either men or women respectively in American society (BEM 1974: 156). Some personality traits which may be associated with masculinity and thus men are: act as a leader, aggressive, ambitious, analytical, assertive, athletic, competitive, dominant, forceful, independent, individualistic, self-reliant, self-sufficient, strong, defends own beliefs, has leadership abilities, makes decisions easily, masculine, strong personality and willing to take a stand (Bem 1974: 156). Terms commonly associated with femininity and thus women are: Affectionate, cheerful, childlike, compassionate, does not use harsh

language, eager to soothe hurt feelings, feminine, flatterable, gentle, gullible, loves children, loyal, sensitive to the needs of others, sensitive, shy, soft-spoken, sympathetic, tender, understanding, warm and yielding (Bem 1974: 156). It should be noted that despite this inventory having been created in 1974 it is still applicable at this time. It is argued by feminist that despite the feminist revolution which occurred at that time, the current third wave feminist, or post feminism, is not to be compared, and even actively undermining the progress women made during the second wave (Love & Helmbrecht 2008: 47). Thus I could argue here that these traits are still applicable as we are currently reverting back to the previous held stereotypical roles.

1.2 Technology as sociotechnical systems

Within science and technology studies the argument is made that technology may be viewed within the context of culture in two ways. The first being that technology, such as the computer, should be considered as 'just a tool' without influence from or on the outside world (Turkle 2004: 3). Because it was neutral, anything imaginable could be done with technology. Similarly these technologies were considered to be gender neutral spaces, lacking the social connotations attached to gender in offline social life, as for example any indication of ones gender became undetectable through computing (Correll 1995: 275). This tool was invented by man because he needed it (Pfaffenberger 1992: 494).

The other perspective presents a different, pluralistic view of technology because it cannot be separated from human sociality, and is not simply a tool, separate from any social relations. In this view one should see technology as divided in technique and sociotechnical system. Techniques are the material resources, knowledge, tools, and skills etc. which are part of producing an artefact. During the production of said artefact those who produce the technology must also create the social, economic, legal, scientific and political context of said artefact (Pfaffenberger 1992: 498). Sociotechnical systems then refer to the 'technological activity which links techniques and material culture to the social coordination of labour' (Pfaffenberger 1992: 497). These sociotechnical systems reflect the social and cultural context in which they are produced, and it may thus be argued that technology may not be seen as separate but as embedded in its surrounding and carrying certain social connotations (Pfaffenberger 1992: 500). Sociotechnical systems also produce meanings of an often desired vision of social life (Pfaffenberger 1992: 502; 506).

In the standard view technological production and innovation is attributed to men. In the field of technology and technological production there is an inequality between men and women where it is socially accepted that technology is a field for men and masculinity is measured by technological competence (Oldenziel 1999: 9; Wajcman 2000: 447). Professor Ruth Oldenziel states in her book pertaining the masculine nature of technology that boys are raised and socialized to love technology, while women are steered away from technology, despite there not being an apparent difference in ability (Oldenziel 1999:9; New York Times 1998). Women entering the technological field are presented in media as the exotic other in a masculine domain (Oldenziel 1999: 10). The apparent

masculinity nature of technology is however not something natural or biological (Oldenziel 1999: 10). This notion of technology as masculine is something quite western (Oldenziel 1999: 10) Here then we come back to the notion already touched upon when discussing the standard view of technology, that technology as inventiveness, useful art and machine was claimed by and associated with (muscular) middle class men as manly, and excluded women (Oldenziel 1999: 182). Thus here we see that technology is socially constructed as a masculine space, and this is reflected on (MMO)RPGs, and can be considered to be one of the ways in which (MMO)RPGs may be considered gendered . In the following chapter I will look at how this gendered occurs, and at other times is subverted.

Chapter Two: Masculine Men and Feminine Women

In the previous chapter I have described that gender may be seen as socially constructed and that technology consists of sociotechnical systems. I have similarly illustrated what features of femininity and masculinity are considered hegemonic. In order to learn to what extent and how (MMO)RPGs are gendered, I will look mainly look at the avatars in-game. I will argue that avatars are the bodies that represent and enact gender stereotypes.

Let us now set out to illustrate to what extent these MMO(RPGs) are indeed gendered. To determine to what extent certain videogames are gendered I shall look at several texts as well as an on-going online project to sketch the current situation. This is relevant because it must be understood how gender is expressed in these games to understand how (MMO)RPGs are gendered, and how this may influence and gets influenced by players and production. I shall start by attempting to illustrating if and how (MMO)RPGs are gendered. At a later stage in this chapter I shall illustrate how (MMO)RPGs are to a lesser extent gendered, or how gender is subverted in games.

2.1 Bodies and the reproduction of heteronormativity

Several aspects of (MMO)RPGs may be considered gendered, one of these being bodies. Not only gender, but also sexuality has certain hegemonic normative connotations set out within society. This notion of hegemonic sexuality as well as the way in which the body incorporates and expresses hegemonic gender and sexuality is presented by gender theorist Judith Butler. To illustrate her point she refers to the shift from punishment to discipline in society explained by Foucault (Butler 1991: 134). According to Foucault, one should not attempt to enforce or repress a certain normativity but try to compel the populace to embody the prohibitive law (Butler 1991: 134). These bodies then do not simply represent these laws, but have incorporated them as their essence, and in turn produce and signify them (Butler 1991: 135). The acts, gestures and desires performed by an individual are reproductions of the desired fabricated normativity which are maintained through this corporality and discursive means, however this points to the fact that this norm does not always have a real basis except that of the enactment through bodies (Butler 1991: 136). Many examples may be found in our current society which illustrates this point, one such example being security cameras in stores. One does not steal, because there is a chance you will get caught and receive punishment. Not stealing is the incorporated law, as you might get punished, and you are thus disciplined to obey the law. Punishment is not always needed to enforce law, as simply the chance thereof will suffice. In a similar manner gender is a disciplinary production inscribed on and represented by the body, the individual, and is shown through its presence and absence on the surface of the body (Butler 1991: 135). For example, a woman enacts a certain gender role by acting warm and tender.

Another disciplinary inscription on the individual is the taboo against incest and homosexuality to produce the ideal of a heterosexual individual, the heteronormative ideal (Butler 1991: 135). In this heteronormative ideal gender, sexuality and sex are intrinsically tied together, by which is meant that a woman is supposed to feminine, and is sexually attracted to a man, and where a man is masculine, and is sexually attracted to a woman. This springs from the idea that sexuality is directly tied together with the need for children. This however gives a false view on sexuality, as it conceals other forms of sexuality, sex and gender which disrupt the regulatory fiction, such as homosexuality and transgenders (Butler 1991: 135-136). It may be presented that the hegemonic notions are created simply by the illusion of a normative gender maintained through bodily acts of the general populace (Butler 1991: 136). This is also what is meant by regulatory fiction. The notion of gender is a fiction, but is sustained reproduced and regulated among normative lines through bodies. The unwillingness to conform to this normativity is regularly punished (Butler 1991: 140). Take for example the football field, where, when someone is not acting masculine enough, he is called a sissy, or gay. Without these collective acts of gender, there could be no gender, thus the continued reproduction en enactment of norms in various forms such as through magazines, TV, film and (MMO)RPGs recreates and maintains these gender ideals (Butler 1991: 140). This then similarly explains why certain personality traits may be attributed to masculinity and femininity by the group questioned for the BEM sex role inventory, and why this reflects the ideas of the general populace.

Gender in (MMO)RPGs can be expressed through plot, interaction between players and colour use, among some of the aspect which may represent gender in-game . However due to the fact that bodies enact and reproduce gender I will in this mainly look at the manner in which avatars, the bodies in (MMO)RPGs represent gender and sexuality. An avatar is the character with which a player plays in (MMO)RPGs and is the 'tool with which a player interacts with the game and represents themselves towards other players (Eklund 2011: 327). Each respective avatar may have a different appearance (Eklund 2011: 327). Indeed, these 'bodies are not simply neutral objects that have no bearing on our experience but act as central artefacts through which our identities and social connections are shaped' (Taylor 2003: 38).

2.2 Male subject female object
Theories such as the ambivalent sexism theory state that women in society exist only in a submissive relation to their male counterpart, and are to be the eroticised male object, there for his pleasure (Glick et al. as described by Dill & Thill 2007: 854). The Hegemonic Masculinity theory similarly states that masculinity is only formed in relation to femininity and vice versa. In these theories the hegemonic male is the dominant counterpart of the submissive, woman, who is then he object of desire for the male, and only exist to satisfy his needs (Connell as described by Dill & Thill 2007: 854). The male is powerful, aggressive, materially successful and has heterosexual conquests, in comparison to women

who are there for men the sexual pleasure of men, to stroke their ego, to mother children, and be generally submissive to men (Dill & Thill 2007: 854).

The men and women in-game present the characteristics of femininity and masculinity found existent in the BEM sex role inventory, and stand in relation to each other as found in these theories, with the men being active and the female submissive and sexualized. I will now attempt to give a clearer picture of the way in which (MMO)RPGs are gendered, so we may understand how this gendering influences, and is influenced by social life.

2.3 What stereotypes?

In order to understand how the hegemonic characteristics attributed to masculinity and femininity may be expressed in-game it is relevant to understand which bodies exist in-game that may embody and express these notions. Based on an extensive amount of articles found representing these stereotypes I will present the most common stereotypical bodies which I am going to describe here (Ivory 2006: 104; Dill & Thill 2007: 851,853; Williams &Martins & Consalvo &Ivory 2009: 824; Beasley & Standley 2002: 287-288; Scharrer 2004: 403-404; Miller & Summers 2007: 738-740; Ogletree & Drake 2007: 538; Tropes vs Women 2013; Dietz 1998). The most common stereotypes found are the damsel in distress, the fighting fucktoy, the sexy sidekick, the sexy villainess and women as background decoration Other denominators for these tropes used in the literature are: the damsel in distress, visions of beauty, fighting fucktoy, the sexy villainess, women as evil, as obstacles to the games, women in non-significant roles, the sexy sidekick as object or prize of the male quest, as victims, as sex symbols, portrayed in traditional roles/appearance, as non-violent, as heroes or there is a complete lack of women in games or women as background decoration (Dill & Thill 2007: 853; Dietz 1998: 433-437; Feminist frequency 2013). Some of these stereotypes are similar or the same, under a different denominator, however I shall indicate throughout this chapter which of these terms may be garnered under the same stereotype. I will use these terms interchangeably. But what do these stereotypes entail exactly? I shall attempt to answer that question throughout this chapter. These are indeed the hegemonic stereotypes I am going to view in-game. I will view these stereotypes in light of the BEM sex role inventory as well as well as in light of the theory on the subject-object dichotomy. I shall now give some concrete examples of videogames which contain these as well as give some examples (from my personal experience) which do not fit these tropes so well.

2.4 Sexy pink women

So how are these aforementioned stereotypes in light of BEM sex role inventory and the object-subject theory gendered in-game? Similarly, how are their male counterparts stereotyped in-game?
The damsel in distress is also known as the object of male conquest. The damsel can be found for example in the famous Super Mario Bros. or in the Legend of Zelda games. The goal of both these games is for the protagonist male to save the helpless Princess from the evil antagonist who captures

this princess at the start of the game. In Super Mario Bros. the protagonistic male Mario must save the pink clad Princess Peach (Feminist Frequency 2013). This game is a platform game, which means that Mario must run and jump on platforms throughout the games, collecting coins and avoiding or killing obstacles to reach the castle in which Peach is kept. Similarly in the legend of Zelda games, the male protagonist Link must save Princess Zelda (Feminist Frequency 2013). He does this by exploring the world of Hyrule, where he gains bombs, keys, and clues which eventually lead him to Zelda. Other games with the same plot, of the protagonist male having to save the (often a princess) female are Teenage mutant Ninja Turtles, Tiny Toony, The Aventures of Bayou Billy and Double Dragon (Dietz 1998: 435). In the plot of all these games the women are often beautiful, feminine and helpless, unable to save themselves, and thus needing to rely on the protagonist to come and get them (Dietz 1998: 435; Feminist Frequency 2013).

The damsel in distress, often the antithesis of the powerful protagonistic male, I feel fits into the subject-object dichotomy in which the subject is often the main male character, and the object, the female is acted upon is determined to be an object to be won and saved, owned by the male protagonist (Feminist frequency 2013). When linking this to the sex role inventory we can determine, as Sarkeesian stated, that the objectification is not only about the woman, but about advancing the plot of the competitive, self-reliant, assertive, dominant, independent, self-sufficient protagonist males of which she becomes an object and goal (BEM 1947: 155; Feminist frequency 2013). Thus the role the damsel in-game represents exists also to benefit the hegemonic masculine stereotype of the male protagonist.

Female characters in-game are often underrepresented as well as more sexualized than male characters (Ivory 2006: 104). Character which fit this description may be garnered under the stereotype 'visions of beauty or fighting fucktoy'. When represented they are often (but not always) wearing provocative and revealing clothing and are portrayed as sexualized and as having large breasts (Ivory 2006: 104; Dill & Thill 2007: 851,853; Dietz 1998: 433-438).

I believe visions of beauty may also be garnered under the aforementioned subject-object theories as they are sexualized for the pleasure of the male protagonist, as women only exist in relation to men, to provide them with sexual pleasure. An example which I believe to be a female protagonist fighting fucktoy is Lara Croft. When playing the Lara Croft games, the audience is considered to be the male protagonist, and Lara Croft is the objectified female, there for the male pleasure (Mulvey 1975: 481). It is said of the Lara Croft games that she is indeed hyper-sexualized, after the designer of the first Lara Croft game 'accidentally' made her breasts 150% too large (NRC Next 2013). Other games discerned from articles containing women who are portrayed in a stereotypical way as having large breast and wearing provocative clothing, are such games as Tecmo Super Bowl, Madden 95, King of the Ring or Paper Boy 2 (Dietz 1998: 435). Other protagonists women are made to dress in female colours and/or clothing (Dietz 1998: 433).

Women are also at times presented in-game as evil, as the (sexy) villainess, or as 'obstacles to the goal of the game' (Dietz 1998: 435). In these games they attempt to hinder the progress of the protagonist in some manner, such as in Tiny Toons in which the protagonist is sent back to the beginning of the game by the female character. In Mighty Morphing Power Rangers there are also two unattractive female villainesses (Dietz 1998: 436). These women are also used as plot devices, in which it is their goal in the plot be an obstacle for the male protagonist to overcome, most likely to reach the goal of the female who has been captured.

Finally women are also portrayed as (sexy) side-kicks, as insignificant, or as background decoration, were they are simply there to support the male character and are mocked or unable to play an active role (Feminist Frequency 2013; Dietz 1998: 436). An example of this I believe may be found once again in the Legend of Zelda games. In some point during one of the games Link, the protagonist male, gains a companion whose identity remains unknown throughout most the game. However, at a certain stage during the game it is revealed that his companion had been Princess Zelda all along, in disguise. At the moment she reveals herself her gender is once more confirmed, and the antagonist of the games swoops in and captures Princess Zelda once more, so she once again must be saved. This also re-establishes the plot of the game in which the ultimate goal of the game is to save the damsel in distress (Feminist Frequency 2013).

2.5 Violent aggressive men

Not only women in videogames are stereotyped, but male characters are also portrayed stereotypically as they are often, if not always shown to be aggressive and powerful (Dill & Thill 2007: 851, 854). Men in videogames are more often represented than women, and when represented, are depicted as overly muscular, whereby violence and danger is depicted as thrilling and manly (Dill & Thill 2007: 853). One example given in the literature in which this aggressiveness is shown is in Grand Theft Auto (GTA) in which men are extremely violent, and violence towards women is normalized (Dill & Thill 2007: 853). For example, women in GTA are often prostitutes and men are 'violent thugs' who may have sex with these women, abuse these women, then kill them and steal their money back (Dill & Thill 2007: 853). This violence is condoned by making these women in-game state they 'like it rough' (Dill & Thill 2007: 853). Other forms of violence against women may be found when the male villain of a game kidnaps the woman in light of the plot of the damsel in distress (Dietz 1998: 437). Princess Zelda, Princess Peach, April from Super Teenage Ninja Turtles, Babs the Bunny from Tiny Toons, as well as both the female object in Bayou Billy and Double dragon are all violently kidnapped, some even at knifepoint by the male villain for the advancement of the plot of the male protagonist, who can from that point onwards become the heroic saviour (Dietz 1998: 437). This aggression is not always targeted at women, but games also include violence towards other characters, such as types of fighting, kicking, shooting etc. These other characters are created as obstacles in the game who only respond to violence (Dietz 1998: 437). Once again I believe we may refer to Super Mario Brothers in which he

must punch and kick himself through obstacles and other characters to reach the princess (Dietz 1998: 437).

I would finally like to note the reproduction of heteronormativity as one of the aspects in which games are also gendered. I would like to point to the fact that I have found to be the case that in the videogames I have discussed so far, the male must always save the female, and it is never the male who must save the male or female who must save the female. Thus, these games present and reproduce act of heteronormative behaviour in which heterosexual relations are the norm, such as in Super Mario Bros, The Legend of Zelda, Tiny Toons, the Adventures of Bayou Billy, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, GTA (Dietz 1998: 435; Dill & Thill2007: 853; Feminist Frequency 2013).

2.6 Is it always so black and white?

It is relevant to note that the gender representations which I have found are not applicable to all videogames, thus not all videogames are gendered to such an extent. I would here like to present an example from my own gaming experience of which I feel the male and female characters do not fit into the stereotypical roles discerned as well as other examples found. In the newest expansion of WoW, which was released on September 25th 2012, a new race was introduced by the name of Pandaren (WoWwiki 2012). These Pandaren are, in a nutshell, humanoid looking, big, fat, fluffy pandas who fight by means of the art of Kung Fu. This new race I feel is an example of characters in-game which do not fit into the tropes discerned above (Eklund 2011: 330). The female Pandaren do not fit into the BEM sex role inventory, as the abilities which these women, as all women in-game, have are indeed exactly the same as those the men have. Their abilities are not dependent on their gender, but on their race, and class. By race and class I do not mean their social status, nor ethnicity, but for example if they are an elf or human, or a druid or priest. There is no higher or lower status differentiated from any of these classes or races, as this is simply differentiated by your ability. A player is respected more or less depending on how well he or she plays the game. The female Pandaren, as well as the men, are also not represented stereotypically, as the women are not underdressed and overly sexualized, nor underrepresented. They also have an active role, are not subject to the male Pandaren, and are not explicitly the target of aggressive behaviour by men. Similarly the men are not overly aggressive or muscular. The male Pandaren are indeed quite fat and may even be called jolly. Another study performed on WoW similarly points to the fact that WoW allows some leeway when considering gender stereotypical gameplay. There are more female characters in WoW than there are female players, which suggest that when given the choice, men actively choose to play a woman instead of a man, thus choosing to genderbend (Eklund 2011: 328). I can concur this as many of the men I play with play as female characters.

The heteronormativity found in popular videogames also occurs less in such games such as WoW, as many examples can be given of gays and transgenders in the current gaming landscape, as well as gay relations and marriages in-game (IGN 2012). An example of this is the ability to sleep

with and marry any character you want to in the popular game Skyrim (IGN 2012). Other examples in which gay and bisexual relationships are condoned are The Sims, Dragon Age, Fall Out II, several games by the company BioWare such as Star Wars: The Old Republic or Mass Effect (IGN 2012).

In other cases games are also either to a lesser extent gendered, or attempts are made to actively subvert gender roles. For example, the companies Purple moon, as well as the Silicon Sisters started companies which produced videogames that subverted the stereotypes found before, and made games that were specifically targeted at women (Feminist Frequency 2013; TedTalks 1998). I shall elaborate more extensively on Purple Moon. The research company which was the forerunner to Purple moon wondered: 'Why hasn't anybody made any computer games for girls?' This forerunner to Purple moon attempted to research how to create a game which girls from the age of 7 to 12 would enjoy (TedTalks 1998). They researched the relevant literature, interviewed 'adult experts', by which they meant adult who interacted with children extensively, or had researched children extensively themselves. They also interviewed 1100 children and did survey's with 1000 children. After the research had been completed the company Purple Moon was founded, and this company launched several games as a result of the research, one of these being Rockett's Tricky Decision, which specifically targeted young girls (TedTalks 1998). The game presents Rockett in a school setting in which she is presented with having to make the decision of how to react to not being invited to a party (TedTalks 1998). According to Brenda Laurel through these games 'Girls can experience greater emotional flexibility in decision making, and play more with the complexity of their Lives. Now they may have a sense of being seen'(TedTalks 1998).

We have seen in this chapter to what extent (MMO)RPGs are to a lesser or greater extent gendered. Bodies, and men and women in relation to each other are gendered, and this is reflected within and throughout (MMO)RPGs. At times (MMO)RPGs may be gendered with harmful stereotypical bodies, while at other times, gender stereotypes are actively subverted in the (MMO)RPGs through the enactment of the said body. However it cannot be denied gender is intrinsically interwoven into (MMO)RPGs, and these two sites cannot be separated. Thus (MMO)RPGs may be considered gendered here through the continued reproduction of gender through such sites as the body.

Chapter Three: The making of gendered games

In the first chapter it was discussed that those who produce the technology must also create the social, economic, legal, scientific and political context of said artefact and that sociotechnical systems reflect the social and cultural context in which they are produced (Pfaffenberger 1992: 498). Indeed software developers and designers when creating (MMO)RPGs may also create and shape the game environment and it is indeed very relevant to look at the manner in which these developers and designers influence the connotation certain technologies, here (MMO)RPGs, carry (Taylor 2003: 25).

Thus, in order to understand how the environment of production may influence the gendered nature of (MMO)RPGs I will here elaborate more extensively on how the environment of production is gendered. I do not want to imply a direct casual relation between what will be described in this chapter and the gendered nature of videogames, but I merely want to elaborate on certain gendered aspects of the production environment which may to some extent contribute to the gendered nature of games. I call these gendered games as I here explain how gender and games are continuously interwoven.

3.1 From child to the workforce: gender and play

In order to understand how gender is produced and reproduced in the spheres surrounding (MMO)RPGs I am going to start by explaining how gender roles are learned. First off, socialization, as described in the Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology, can be understood as 'the process through which people and especially children are made to take on ideas and behaviour appropriate to life in a particular society' (Barnard & Spencer 1996: 512). This is considered to be a passive process in which the individual takes on the norms of the preceding society (Barnard & Spencer 1996: 512). The child learns a culture, but not in a sense that he adapts it, but more in a sense that he learns the categories and behaviours of adults unchanged (Barnard & Spencer 1996: 512). As noted however in Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, socially learned behaviour is not a code or a set of rules which children simply learn, but they incorporate it through their interaction, observation and imitation of their habitus (Barnard & Spencer 1996: 513). Through Bourdieu's and Giddens' contributions socialisation may also be seen as the way in which people understand themselves and the world they live in in light of the history of social relations (Barnard & Spencer 1996: 514).

The expectations attached to one's gender role are affected, encouraged and taught by various agents of socialization such as family, teachers and peers (Dietz 1998: 428). Gender roles are taught to children at a very young age as they play these roles according to the norms society has attached to them. These agreed upon notions of femininity and masculinity shape interactions between people, and these are then the basis for action and interaction for an adult who maintains the roles learned as a child as the norm (Dietz 1998: 426). Indeed children 'manipulate and learn these gender roles through

childhood play', thus play is an important way to socialize gender roles (Dietz 1998: 426). Examples of the appropriation of gender roles through childhood play is when children play 'at' something such as mother, father, doctor, or nurse (Dietz 1998: 427). Toys, such as Barbie dolls may also be associated with a gender identity (Dietz 1998: 427). Similarly, girls' rooms are often pink, they wear frilly clothes, get soft, cuddly toys and dolls and must do feminine chores such as setting the table and washing dishes while boys' rooms are blue, they wear sturdy clothes for rough behaviour, they get trucks and baseball bats as toys and must perform masculine chores like carrying out the garbage and helping with lawn work (Dietz 1998: 427-428).

There is an on-going discussion pertaining to the effect of videogames on behaviour off-game (Prot et al. 2012: 647). Some for example state that videogames increase aggressive behaviour among their players (Dietz 1998: 440). While others argue that there is not direct 'cause and effect relation with the media we consume' (Feminist Frequency 2013). Others state that games may have a beneficial effect on off-game behaviour (Prot et al. 652; Greitemeyer & Osswald 2010: 215). To what extent a game influences a gamer may be depend on such factors as amount of time the gamer spends playing the game, the content of the game, or the context in which the game is played (Prot et al. 2012: 648). When looking at research which investigates, for example, if video games affect violent behaviour in gamers I felt that due to the fact that many of these investigations are based on staged experimental settings, and may not reflect reality correctly as, as I stated before, to what extent the gamer is influenced depends on several situational factor which possibly cannot be reproduced in a staged setting.

3.2 The production environment

In order to understand to what extent the work environment influences the gendered nature of (MMO)RPGs, I must investigate how these work environments are gendered, to know which gendered notions may be reflected on (MMO)RPGs. These work environments must be understood to reflect or subverts the gendered or non-gendered nature of videogames and vice versa. In chapter one I discussed that technology should be considered a sociotechnical system. In a sociotechnical system those who produce technology must also create the social, economic, legal, scientific and political context of said artefact. A game may reflect the gendered nature of the production environment, as the developers of a game may reproduce the notions present in the sociality of production.

Production companies either recruit the players of their own games as employees, who are familiar with games, technology and game design by playing and interacting through and with these games or they recruit game designers fresh out of school (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 77). The game companies often target a male audience, and the gamers who are recruited are often boys, despite it no longer being the case that only men play these games, as almost half of gamers are women (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 77; ESA 2012; Tracy Fullerton, Fron, Pearce, Morie 2007: 139). As mentioned above, this discrepancy in the ratio of men versus women working in game development still exists.

This may be due to the circular pattern in which men create games for boys, and those boys go on to become the men to create games for boys, called a feedback loop (Dyer-witheford 1999: 77; Dyer-witheford & Sharman 2005). Dyer-witheford argues that this focus on men by the industry may be creating a barrier for women to participate in this industry as men are specifically targeted and socialized for technological work so they may go on to make games (Dyer-witheford 1999: 77).

In some cases for these men turning what they love, playing video games, into something to get paid for sounds ideal (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 78). The environment of game production is presented in several articles by professor Nick Dyer-Witheford et al. as 'work as play' in which 'key terms are 'team work' 'open space 'process not product' and 'flattened hierarchies' (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 76). These developers have much leniency to develop what they want and have great influence of what is developed (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 77). The production environment is often experienced as 'satisfying, challenging and fun' (Dyer-Witheford & Sharman 2005).

However, in some cases this ideal is romanticized. For example, a game is advertised to be released on a certain date some time before its actual completion, making the game developers have a strict deadline to deliver a game on the aforementioned date, and thus putting him under a lot of stress (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 75). The games which are invented by developers are scrutinized thoroughly and months' worth of work may be discarded in an instant if someone higher in rank dislikes the game (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 77). These developers have frantic schedules to work with, putting in twelve hours a day, seven days a week, for eighty hours a week and staying up to meet the aforementioned strict deadlines. They have chronic job insecurity because they are easily replaceable. There is a substantial rate of burn out and depression, with employees at times not lasting longer than five year on the job due to the worked hours (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 78; The Penny Arcade 2013; Dyer-Witheford & Sharman 2005; Tracy Fullerton, Fron, Pearce, Morie 2007: 139; De Peuter & Dyer-witheford 2005). Certain employees may almost never leave the office, being forced workaholics, and this overtime is unpaid (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 79; De Peuter & Dyer-Witheford 2005).

3.3 The gendered workforce

So how does the workforce described, and production environments which do not fit the previous description, relate to gender. I here try to argue that (MMO)RPGs may gendered in the manner they are due to the fact that they are developed in a certain production environment, of which both in turn are influenced by the gender dynamics present in society and vice versa. I have in previous chapter discerned which gender dynamics are existent in society. These gender dynamics may be reflected here on work environment. For example, I believe that the notion of technology as a masculine space is reflected in the above mention work environment. This idea of technology as a masculine space I believe may is also reflected in responses by women who participate in these work environments. For example, if women work in these environments, they at times leave game development when they feel they do not fit into these environments, however, which may also be due to the fact that they do not

want to work the long hours as they would rather have a more balanced lifestyle (Tracy Fullerton, Fron, Pearce, Morie 2007: 139). Female game developers such as Marleigh Norton similarly experienced this masculine environment within game production, describing it as a Frat Boy culture (The Boston Globe 2013).

Another example may be given as recently on twitter stories of women in the gaming industry appeared as they answered the question '#1 reason why there are so few women in game development' (MotherJones 2012). Reasons which most often came up pertained sexism and the frat boy culture in which women were not taken seriously and passed over for their lesser competent male colleagues, considered to be trouble, and only remembered for their sexual merit (MotherJones 2012; Tracy Fullerton, Fron, Pearce, Morie 2007:140).

Such as Dyer-Witheford that a feedback loop exist which maintains the masculine nature of technology production, it could be argued if there were more games produced for women, there would be more women gamers, and thus more women producers and so on (Tracy Fullerton, Fron, Pearce, Morie 2007: 139). It is however argued in the book *'Beyond Barbie & Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Computer Games'* that this is a 'chicken and egg situation' (Fullerton, Fron, Pearce, Morie 2007:140). Due to it being a feedback loop, or, as it is called in the book, a virtuous cycle, there is no clear point from where to set out to accomplish this.

However, not all production environments were experienced in such a manner, and it could be argued that this is reflected in the games produced. There are indeed examples of games, and the production companies to go with them, which attempted through their games to actively subvert certain gender stereotypes. These games were produced with the specific intent to engage girls with video-games, and thus possible break the feedback loop (Fullerton, Fron, Pearce, Morie 2007:146). Thus company actively attempted to subvert the masculine nature of game development. An example of such games are once again, the Rockett series by Purple Moon, but also 'The adventure of Josie True' developed by Mary Flanegan (Fullerton, Fron, Pearce, Morie 2007:146). 'Flanagan's newest project, RAPUNSEL, is a game that teaches tween girls how to program by developing dance steps for their game characters' (Fullerton, Fron, Pearce, Morie 2007:147). Thus these games are developed by women to actively engage young girls in the production of (MMO)RPGs.

The company 'Silicon Sister' also does not fit into this idea of game development as masculine. Brenda Bailey Gershkovitch, game developer and found of Silicon decided to found a company which developed game 'by women and girls, for women and girls' (Feminist Frequency 2013; TedTalks 1998; Silicon Sisters 2013). I thus have argued that production environments of (MMO)RPGs may be gendered spaces, and this gendered nature of the production environment may be reflected upon the (MMO)RPGs which are produced by these gendered spaces.

Conclusion

The main question which this thesis sets out to answer is: 'In what ways are (MMO)RPGs gendered?' In this thesis I have started out by illustrating what gender is and how technology may be seen in a social context, after which I have illustrated in which way gender and technology are intrinsically tied together. Herafter I have analysed the way gender is expressed in (MMO)RPGs through such aspects as avatars or plot. I have attempted to see to what extent gender in the domain of production influences the gendered nature of (MMO)RPGs.

I first set out to show how (MMO)RPGs could be considered gendered spaces due to the fact that they are technological spaces, and gender and technology are intrinsically tied together. To answer this question first gender and technology had to be understood to gain a better understanding of then, and to make the reader aware of how gender dynamics influence individuals' lives. Gender may be understood as 'the culturally defined assumptions and practices that govern the social constructions of men, women and their social relations'. Certain personality traits may be attributed to hegemonic femininity and hegemonic masculinity respectively. For example, some aspects which may be attributed to feminine women are affectionate, cheerful, compassionate and gentle and some of the traits which may be attributed to masculine men are aggressive, assertive, athletic, dominant and forceful. Sexuality also has hegemonic notions attached to it under the denominator heteronormativity. This means that heterosexuality, stemming from the need to rear children, is the norm in Western societies. Technology, which is not simply a tool, may be divided into techniques and sociotechnical systems. Techniques are material resources, knowledge tools, etc. Those who produce an artefact must also produce the economic, social, political etc. context of said artefact. Sociotechnical systems are then the 'technological activity which links techniques and material culture to the social coordination of labour'. (MMO)RPGs may be considered gendered spaces as indicated due to the fact that technology cannot be seen as separate from the social context such as gender in which it exist. Thus (MMO)RPGs are gendered due to the fact that they are a technological space.

Now that the basic premise had been laid out, a closer look could be taken at the actual gender representations in-game. These gender representations must be made apparent and understood if the manner in which (MMO)RPGs are gendered are to be fully understood. Here I wanted to show how (MMO)RPGs are gendered due to the fact that they are spaces in which bodies, the sites of production and reproduction of gender, are developed. Bodies within society actively express and reproduce the socially constructed forms of heteronormative hegemonic masculinity and femininity. The bodies within (MMO)RPGs, the avatars, also express these gender norms. However, gender is not simple expressed through avatars, but also through such aspects as plot, colour schemes and player interaction. Men and women in society stand in a hierarchal relation to each other, wherein the man is dominant subject over the passive woman. The woman becomes the object of desire for the

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man, there for his voyeuristic pleasure. In the case of video games the woman may be presented for the voyeuristic pleasure of the male protagonist, but may also be presented for the voyeuristic pleasure of the (male) viewer off-screen. These relations may also be found in-game, in the plot of several of these games. For example, the female stereotype of the damsel in distress is also a plot device in the plot where the male active dominant male protagonist must save the helpless, passive female damsel. Examples of such games are the Mario Bros. series, or the Legend of Zelda games. In other games the stereotypical woman is turned into an object of sexual pleasure for the male in-game, or the gamer, thus she is fetishized. An example of this may be found in the Lara Croft games. At other times within the game women are used as a plot device to hinder the progress of the protagonist male. Here they are represented as sexy villainesses. Men are also gendered in relation to the subject-object dichotomy described, as they are indeed often represented as being assertive, independent, self-reliant, self-sufficient, strong, all personality traits which may be attributed to the active protagonist male in-game. They are also stereotypically represented as violent, and aggressive in such as in the game Grand Theft Auto However at other times men and women were not represented in such a stereotypical manner, such as the Pandaren in the MMORPG World of Warcraft. Similarly, the heteronormativity which occurred in the games mentioned above did not occur in such games as the populair game Skyrim. Other companies such as Silicon Sisters and Purple moon even actively subverted these gendered stereotypes. Gender and (MMO)RPGs appear to be intrinsically interwoven with one another. Thus (MMO)RPGs should be considered gendered as the bodies within (MMO)RPGs are considered gendered, and bodies are created within(MMO)RPGs.

Finally, I tried to argue that (MMO)RPGs may gendered in the manner they are due to the fact that they are developed in a certain production environment, of which both in turn are influenced by the gender dynamics present in society and vice versa. Indeed, to fully understand how (MMO)RPGs are gendered it must be understood how the environment of production is gendered and how this reflects upon (MMO)RPGs. Gendered stereotypes are sometimes internalized and socialize by children through play from a young age onward, and may be later reflected by them in their adult lives. By socialized I mean that 'they take on ideas and behaviour appropriate to life in a particular society'. Socializing may occur through several institutions, one of them being (MMO)RPGs. It is heavily debated if gamers socialize the gendered notions in-game thus possibly reproducing the gender dynamics they engage with in-game, however this is still an active and on-going discussion. The production environment could also be investigated to argue that it is a gendered space, and may possibly play a role in the gendered nature of games. The production environment could be described as a masculine space in which the producers of (MMO)RPGs engage with the production of games through the concept of 'work as play'. In such work environments there are lesser hierarchies, and more extensive team work. However this 'work as play' is often idealized as this work environment sets high demands, is very stressful, has long work hours, has a high burn-out rate etc. Women often feel excluded from this dominantly male workplace. However there are companies which produce

games which attempt to actively subvert this male dominated workplace. Thus the gender dynamics in these production environments reflect these dynamics on their games. An example of a company which similarly actively sets out to reflect its gender dynamics on their games is 'Silicon Sisters' which produces games by women for women. Thus here it may be argued that the production site of (MMO)RPGs may also be considered gendered, as it is also part of the society in which gender dynamics were discerned in chapter one, and at times these gender dynamics are actively reflected on (MMO)RPGs to subvert the masculine nature of game development.

(MMO)RPGs are discernably gendered in several ways, three of which I engage here in this thesis. First, (MMO)RPGs are gendered due to the fact that they are technological spaces which carry the meaning of the social context in which they exist and are produced. Secondly they are gendered due to the fact that bodies are created within (MMO)RPGs, and these bodies produce and reproduce the gender dynamics of the society in which the (MMO)RPG is produced. Finally, (MMO)RPGs are gendered due to the fact that they, despite this still having not been proven, may or may not socialize certain behaviour, of which some may be gendered behaviour, as well as due to the fact that they are produced and reproduced in a certain society, as well as due to the fact that they are produced in a specific environment of production, which may carry and reflect the gender dynamics of said society, and possibly reflect these onwards onto the games.

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