

# World of Warcraft, the Aftermath

## How game elements transfer into real life perceptions and experiences

Karolien Poels, Wijnand IJsselsteijn, Yvonne de Kort, & Bart Van Iersel

Game Experience Lab

Human Technology Interaction Group

Eindhoven University of Technology

{k.poels, w.a.ijsselsteijn, y.a.w.d.kort, s040371@tue.nl}

### ABSTRACT

Most research on player experience has focused on in-game experiences. The question remains whether game-related player experiences do only occur while gaming, and, consequently stop when the player turns off the gaming device. Or, do they linger and transfer into real life? This paper proposes and tackles *long term post game experiences* or experiences that arise after repeatedly and intensively playing a particular game or game genre. Examples are association of real life objects with game elements, sounds or songs heard in real life that trigger lively memories of a game world, or slang typical to the game world that shows up in everyday vocabulary. These long term post game experiences presumably originate from the way people perceive and process their environment. To explain this, we rely on basic human perception theory (Boring, 1930). When processing their environment, people use prior knowledge to recognize objects, words, or sounds. The prior knowledge that is used as a reference point can be shaped by any perceptual stimulation that is repeated frequently and over long periods of time. Consequently, this prior knowledge biases human perception by creating a mental predisposition to perceive a stimulus in a certain way (Boring, 1930; Bruner & Potter, 1964). If we apply this reasoning to digital gaming as one particular kind of perceptual stimulation, we could assume that for habitual players of digital games, real world perceptions, cognitions, and actions will be partly structured by their repeated exposure to the game environment. We expect that long term post game experiences can be established through this process. These post game experiences can relate to all kinds of game stimuli, such as environments, actors and objects as well as sounds and words. We expect the concrete manifestation of these long term post game experiences to depend on the type of game or game genre one is repeatedly engaged in. This means, frequent players of First Person Shooter games will probably experience different things, make other associations, and use other game related slang,

compared to habitual players of MMORPGs. To the best of our knowledge, there is not yet any research available that investigates the existence and conditions of these specific kinds of post game experiences.

We present a focus groups study and a large scale survey (N>500) with habitual players of MMORPGs. The focus group study aimed at probing long term post game experiences, induced by repeated immersion into a particular game or game genre. We further wanted to gain insights in the extent to which habitual players experience the real world based on inferences that stem from the game world. The focus group discussion was clustered around four potential long term experiences, we hypothesized to occur for habitual players of MMORPGs. These topics were: (1) association of game elements with environmental stimuli in the real world, (2) sounds and music that triggers lively memories about game elements, (3) elements of the game showing up in daydreams, fantasy and dreams, and (4) the use of words and expressions from the game into real life conversations. The results found in the focus groups support the idea that intensive playing of MMORPGs shapes players' perceptions of reality. Within all four discussion topics, participants vividly described examples of how the game world gets intertwined with their real world perceptions and experiences. The use of game-related vocabulary and the (day)dreaming experience were most frequently mentioned. This effect seems to gradually build up over longer periods of game play, and is reinforced, and thus most salient, after each gaming session. We subsequently designed and conducted a large scale survey of which data will be available at the time of the conference. The survey aimed at consolidating the different types of post game experiences and determining the potential impact of a number of play style factors, such as play frequency and duration. The paper concludes with a discussion and recommendations for future research.

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**Author Keywords**

game experience, perception, MMORPGs, habitual play

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