Collaborative Play in World of Warcraft

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Abstract

I will discuss play in World of Warcraft, a popular massively multiplayer online game. World of Warcraft enables self-organizing groups of strangers and friends to collaborate on short-term objectives. Such collaborations may reflect coming changes in globalized work in which we will increasingly work with remote others we know little about. In game play, the glue that keeps groups together is the shared objective of completing a “quest” or mission, as well as the shared culture of the game. The game is rich in meaning with a strong narrative, a material culture of weapons, armor, potions, recipes, jewelry, and many other goods, as well as a vibrant economy. Players’ backgrounds are diverse but discourse emphasizes understandings about the game rather than players’ personal lives.

Players learn to be at ease with strangers, to get things done with others they don't know and may never interact with again. The game diminishes some of the impact of things that divide us such as ethnicity, gender, and age, through sharing the game.

Biographical Sketch

Bonnie Nardi is a professor in the Department of Informatics at the University of California, Irvine. She is an anthropologist interested in expressive uses of the Internet such as instant messaging, blogging, and games. She is co-editor of an MIT Press Series, Acting with Technology. Her new book, Acting with Technology: Activity Theory and Interaction Design, co-authored with Victor Kaptelinin, is available from MIT Press.