Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games: The Glocal Context of Local Universalism

Abstract

The Internet (Net) has irrevocably altered the context of social behavior in large parts of the world and in selected parts of societies. The Net makes it possible for “niche” groups of all sorts to engage in complex global social interactions outside the local context. Massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) are one of the most distinctive forms of this new behavior, with tens of millions of players around the world. In this paper, Global Civil Society and Cyborg Society theories are used to analyze and explain the social structure and social interactions within and surrounding MMOs, the effects of MMOs, and the local to global (glocal) nature of MMOs. Data was obtained through research interviews with a small, purposive sample of veteran and committed players. Described are the physical and social organization of several major games, the operation of norms and values, and the experience of engaging non-local players. It was found that: (1) MMOs are very much a part of the Global Civil Society, which provides the broader context in which these games can occur; (2) MMOs are glocal because the games link the individual player in his/her local place to the global game system; (3) MMOs are a Cyborg Society with a new, international division of labor, social human-machine interactions, and a new collective consciousness that does not recognize the absolute distinction between humans and machines; (4) the combat basis of most MMOs led to the proposal of a new theory, the War Society: a restricted division of labor and a distinctive collective consciousness dominated by an intense “compete to survive” perspective, yet which also emphasizes the group over the individual.

Keywords: MMOs, Global Civil Society, Glocal, Cyborg Society, War Society
If societal organisms are designed and organized as codes and networks, this will change the ways that humans experience social life. (Anne Hornsby, 2005).

Introduction

The Internet (Net) has irrevocably altered the context of social behavior in large parts of the world and in selected parts of societies. The Net makes it possible for “niche” groups of all sorts to engage in complicated global social interactions outside the local context. This collective phenomenon includes examples as varied as family blogs; advocacy or support groups related to political, personal, or occupational interests; entertainment or recreational activities such as sports or music; sexual behaviors following various predilections; or terrorism.

Text messaging with e-mail is the most common online experience of the Net for most users. There are other popular text-based uses. For instance, one group of researchers found that the popular college online social network service Facebook, examined over a 26-month period, carried 362 million messages exchanged by 4.2 million users at 496 North American colleges and universities (Golder, Wilkinson & Huberman, 2007). Similar social network websites include Windows Live Spaces, Friendster, LinkedIn, Orkut, and MySpace. The main vehicle of communication here is the text message. Fewer social cues are involved in text messaging, unless the participants agree to exchange personal profiles and other data.

Many forms of multiple player games take place via the Net. The card game of bridge, for instance, can be played by people with a variety of skill levels, each of whom text messages other partners in the game. Players are evaluated and interacted with based solely on their bridge skills, and can be from anywhere around the world (personal observation).

Massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) have also emerged as one of the products of the Net, and include a variety of types. These are immensely popular and profitable games that engage literally millions of players with many different variations (see Wikipedia for a complete listing). Two main types of MMOs are First Person Shooter (FPS) games such as Call of Duty or Team Fortress, and Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) such as World of Warcraft or Everquest. In both cases, a player views the game through a screen, interacts simultaneously with multiple other players, communicates by voice through a headset as well as text messaging, and projects his or her self in the form of a character or avatar. Many thousands of players may be playing the same game simultaneously, although any given player interacts with a much smaller number (Steinkuhler and Williams, 2006; Kolo and Baur, 2004).

The principle difference between FPS games and MMORPGs is that FPS games are typically focused solely on rapid-action combat between static characters or teams of characters of equal power. The interactions take place on provided “maps,” such as a landing beach during D-Day of World War II or a city in the 22nd century being invaded by aliens. The perspective is first-person (you “see” as from the eyes of your character). You can choose to play the same “set” over and over, becoming increasingly familiar with its particular layout and threats, and thus becoming more skillful at combat on that set. When playing MMORPGs, in contrast, players create their own character(s), may choose not to take part in combat (one popular MMORPG, Second Life, does not allow physical combat), and increase their character’s power through successful missions. They can leave the game and later return to the same character, retaining the power they have achieved. Kolo and Baur describe MMORPGs thus:

“MMORPGs provide a graphic environment that resembles the real world in functionality (in the sense of possible actions) and appearance. The players control their
online personae, which we will call characters, via a variety of modes of the human-computer-interface, confined by technical restrictions and more, or less, formalized and sanctioned rules. This thereby creates a parallel space of social interactions among the characters in the gameworld” (Ibid, p. 1).

These characteristics of MMOs allow the players to immerse themselves in a social experience that includes real-time, simultaneous interactions with multiple characters, enhanced by rich communication and a common culture. As Kolo and Baur put it, “…we can also expect qualitative differences compared to text-based games, as the graphical user interface and the variety of possible actions brings these games much closer to what we are familiar with from our offline experience (2004, p. 2.)”. It is exactly this quality of MMOs that makes them attractive for practice for real-life situations in the military, the police, sports, etc., and which has lead to the development of entirely new “virtual world” communities such as Second Life and Home.

The technology for taking part in an MMO typically involves: (1) an electronic connection between a computer and a television; (2) a headset allowing direct communication with the other players (it may be wireless); (3) a console such as a PlayStation[PS]2, PS3, or Xbox, or a graphics card in the computer; and (4) a CD of the game purchased commercially. Therefore, the overall structure of the game has the following components:

1. …the offline (“real”) world of players as well as the developers and administrators of the game;
2. …the online world of characters with its imagery of the game, its topology and dynamics;
3. The world of data. In this layer, the data representing interface commands and the information for the representation of the gameworld is mediated, transferred, and sometimes also distorted, for example, due to software bugs or connection problems. (Kolo and Baur, 2004, p. 4).

The macro structure of these multiple player games includes a real-world economic aspect tied to the computers, consoles, game developers, and entrepreneurs who run the companies that market the games, the online world of the games themselves, and the ongoing interactions of the game world itself. The macro structure, with its several components, is what connects local individuals to the global society.

MMOs raise some sociological questions. What sociological theories can explain the social structure and interactions within and surrounding MMOs? What theories can explain the effects of MMOs? What theories help us to explain the local to global (glocal) nature of MMOs (Robertson, 1995; Wellman & Hampton, 1999; Wellman, 2002)? We will begin by introducing two theories we found particularly helpful: the Global Civil Society (GCS) and the Cyborg Society.

The Global Civil Society (GCS)

The first order of the day is to define the GCS. Mostly known by reference to its many components, it can be constructed, following Max Weber, as an ideal type (Keane, 2003; Weber 1997)). Following Keane, the GCS can be defined as comprising five principal elements: (1) it is made up of non-governmental structures and activities; (2) organized into a form of society; (3)
Massively Multiplayer that emphasizes civility; (4) is both pluralistic and at the same time has a strong conflict potential; and (5) is unquestioningly global in its scope (2003, pp. 8-17).

The first element includes a plethora of non-governmental organizations beyond those labeled International Non-governmental Organizations or INGOs. Examples are families, businesses, advocacy organizations, and social movement groups numbering in the hundreds of thousands (Martinelli, 2003). All of these different groups and individuals are increasingly bound together by satellites and computer cables (soon to include the East Coast of Africa). Forty years ago a telephone call from Asia to the continental U.S. could involve an appointment and a long wait for a noisy telephone connection. Today it is just a matter of stopping off at an e-café for coffee and a session on the computer.

The second element is that the GCS is a form of society, “…a dynamic ensemble of more or less tightly interlinked social processes” (Keane, 2003, p. 8). This complex web of structured social action is not well understood. It has both a formal and a highly informal aspect. Terrorists, for instance, who do not know of each other’s existence, share their knowledge of the design and production of improvised electronic devices (IEDs) through the Net (e.g. Charette, 2007). Books are written, edited, and published for the world without words touching a paper page. Lovers are found and lost. Deforestation is monitored. Genocide is recorded.

Social interaction within the GCS is characterized by civility, the third element. “…[B]ecause our world is comprised of intermingling civilizations that are not in any sense self-contained or ‘pure,’ global civil society is a space inhabited by various overlapping norms of non-violent politeness covering matters of indirection, self-restraint, and face-saving” (2003, p. 12). Even Osama Bin Laden, in his videotaped discussion of the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City, is largely civil in his presentation despite his obvious delight that thousands were killed. Apart from such exceptions, the third principle generally includes both an expressed desire for peace and an extended practice of civil dialogue stretching across nations and civilizations.

Following the fourth element, the GCS “…contains both strong traces of pluralism and strong conflict potential” (Keane, 2003, p. 14). The GCS is pluralistic because the many different organizations involved reflect myriad cultures, yet have to learn to trust and give way to each other. Pluralism is also a characteristic because the GCS is home to all sorts of businesses spread across space. The GCS has the non-economic function of undergirding this complex economic behavior in a normative fashion, thereby holding it together socially (Ibid). For the same reasons, the GCS holds much potential for conflict. All of the different “…scuffles and skirmishes over the distribution of socio-economic power also regularly take place within global civil society itself” (Ibid, p. 15).

The fifth element is that the GCS is, in fact, global (Keane, 2003, p. 17). It stretches around the world, across political borders, under the oceans, from the Arctic to the Antarctic. “Certainly, this global society is both integrated and de-centered. It draws upon and is sustained by many different actually existing societies, whose members regularly interact and/or feel the effects of others’ actions across political boundaries. Its effects are “…usually [felt] by social actors who have no direct contact with one another, and who are otherwise fated to remain ‘strangers’ to one another” (Keane, 2003, p. 19). He emphasizes that while this encompasses most of the terrestrial biosphere, it is itself socially produced.

The question of whether the Net is part of this Global Civil Society can be answered with a yes. Yet to be answered is whether MMOs are as well, and if so, what is the local-global
connection? What form does this connection take? To answer these questions, we introduce additional theory concerning the nature of multiple player games.

**The Cyborg Society**

Using Durkheim’s theories of societies to analyze electronic gatherings on the Net, Hornsby (2005) raises the question of whether they fit within Durkheim’s typology of societies, or constitute a new form of society. Her first goal is to explain the Net. Her second goal is to explain Durkheim’s theories of societies, particularly his notions of social solidarity, collective consciousness, regulation, and integration, and to show how electronic gatherings are similar to Durkheimian societies. Her third goal is to use Durkheim’s theories to explore how computer-mediated communications are affecting societies. She concludes that electronic gatherings may indicate the emergence of a new, third type of society she calls a Cyborg Society (pp. 61-62).

First, Hornsby explains that the Net is thousands of computer networks linked by dedicated computers called routers, which can distribute information between incompatible technologies such as IBM and UNIX (2005). As a result, the Net appears to be one large network. Hornsby then focuses on what she states is the core social activity on the Net: “…conversation about shared interests for the sheer pleasure of it” (Ibid, p. 63). Calling these electronic gatherings, Hornsby organizes them into three main types: discussion groups, fantasy worlds, and civic networks. Discussion groups include email list servers, bulletin boards such as Usenet, and weblogs, or blogs. Fantasy worlds include multi-user-domains (MUDs) including MMOs, and chat rooms. Civic networks are “electronic gatherings for organizing civic and political activities” (Ibid, p. 66).

Second, Hornsby introduces Durkheim’s theories of societies. Durkheim defined society broadly as ongoing and patterned interactions in groups: “every aggregate of individuals who are in continuous contact form a society” (Hornsby, 2005, p. 68). Durkheim felt that individuals naturally have selfish interests, yet what distinguishes society is collective interest, and these two are always in conflict. Thus, for a society to persist over time it must have social solidarity, or a shared, unifying bond among the individuals and groups in that society. Durkheim argued that continuous contact with others is necessary to create and sustain social solidarity and thus a society. Further, a code of rules for individual behavior is likewise an antecedent to social solidarity. Hornsby quotes Durkheim as follows: [Societal] ways of acting, thinking, and feeling… are not only external to the individual, but are, moreover, endowed with coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his [or her] individual will” (pp. 69-70). Socialization, with its regulations and social integration, teaches us how to act, think, and feel according to the shared beliefs, values, norms, and emotions of a particular society (such shared elements of a society are its collective consciousness). Regulation consists of the myriad understood rules, whether stated or not, that govern societies. Integration is the pleasurable interaction experienced by the individual members of a group, and social rituals are particularly important to integration. Both regulation and integration help to build and maintain the collective consciousness, and are vital for social solidarity (Ibid; Durkheim, 1933).

Each particular group on the Net, including the MMOs, defines its own rules or norms (Hornsby, 2005). Common offensive behaviors include failing to include a signature, flaming, mistakenly broadcasting a private message to a group, or posting excessively long messages. There are also group rituals for interaction and communication such as using emoticons or shaking hands electronically. Rituals for interaction now also include many acronyms invented
and added by users of the Net, such as G2G (got to go), LOL (laughing out loud), IMHO (in my humble opinion), and OMG (oh my god). Many of the groups post answers to Frequently Asked Questions on the Net to socialize newcomers. Some groups also engage in prolonged debate about the balance of the right of individual freedom of expression and other behavior in the group, versus the overall goals of the group (Ibid).

Third, Hornsby describes the two main types of society from Durkheim and proposes a new, third type of society. Durkheim proposed two basic types of society: the mechanical and the organic. The former is an undifferentiated society in which everyone shares the same collective consciousness. The latter is one in which an extensive division of labor creates a more complex collective consciousness, while at the same time exhibiting an overarching integration. Hornsby then proposes that a new, third type of society is necessary to account for electronic gatherings:

My hypothesis is that: (a) technological advances (such as computer science and telecommunications systems, including the creation of the Net) are contributing to the consolidation of a new international division of labor; and (b) technological advances are also contributing to changes in the collective consciousness [because] brand new ways of thinking and feeling about the relationship between humans and machines is appearing. Together, these changes suggest the emergence of a new type of society—a Cyborg Society. (2005, p. 86)

According to Hornsby, because people have more frequent and more intensive contact across greater physical and cultural distances, they have created a new, more flexible, and more complex international division of labor, including new global social entities. She provides, as an example, a company selling a line of women’s dresses. The company may purchase the pattern from Italy, the cloth and thread from China, assemble the dress in Mexico, and market and distribute the dress to a number of nations, directing this operation from a corporate office in the U.S. The same company may use a different international arrangement for another line of clothing or even a different dress (Ibid, pp. 86-87).

By Cyborg Society, Hornsby (2005) does not mean a society of hybrid machine-human individuals (cyborgs), but rather a society of social human-machine interactions and a new collective consciousness. Members of a Cyborg Society no longer see an absolute distinction between human and machine, because increasingly, computers (and machines containing computers) can act like humans and humans interact with them as “intimate machines” with intentions, ideas, and personalities (Ibid; Turkle, 1995). Thus, a Cyborg Society includes human-machine interactions in which, “…machines are inanimate organisms—with consciousness but not alive” (Hornsby, 2005, p. 88).

We set out to test Hornsby’s theory of the Cyborg Society by answering the following questions. Is there a new or different division of labor associated with MMOs? Is there a new or different collective consciousness associated with MMOs? Do the division of labor and collective consciousness support Hornsby’s theory of a Cyborg Society?

**Research questions**

To summarize our questions:

1. Are MMOs part of the GCS? If so, in what way?
2. How can we characterize the glocalizing effects of these games, or the connection between local and global?
3. Are MMOs an example of an emerging Cyborg Society?
a. Is there a different new or different division of labor associated with MMOs?
b. Is there a new or different collective consciousness associated with MMOs?
c. Do the division of labor and collective consciousness support Hornsby’s theory of a Cyborg Society?

Methods

The approach used in this study was to use a small, purposive sample of knowledgeable players to construct a qualitative, composite “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of MMOs. This approach was chosen because both the cultural activity and its context are necessary for others to understand it. One of the informants, a female in her 20s, is a veteran player who started by playing on a LAN system of computers physically linked together. Another, a male who is also in his 20s, is a veteran who has been playing since the innovation of these games and continues to play with members of his graduate school cohort. A third informant, a male in his teens, has been playing on the PS2/PS3 consoles for four years. Extensive interviews with these players were carried out, a thick description was formed, and this description was then checked against the theories described above (GCS and Cyborg Society).

Findings

Description of MMOs

Technology of Games

The headsets used in MMOs change the nature of the social interaction between the players. The use of a microphone and earphones means that you can hear your partners on your team. A player can discriminate among players based on voice characteristics such as accents or language. The technology permits players to discuss a wide variety of subjects both inside and outside the game. There are even rules to prohibit discussion of certain “adult” subjects until younger players have retired for the night. These textual and verbal cues, which have been extensively researched, make it possible to develop relationships (Walther, 1992). These relationships are the basis of various kinds of structured social interactions including, but not limited to, maintenance of long-term relationships such as graduate school friends, meetings outside the game format, and the glocal construction of social meanings.

Basic Features of MMOs

Both FPS games and MMORPGs have their own economy, polity, etc. Servers can connect anywhere in the world, e.g., England, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, although spoken language and time zones are generally determining factors. Similarly, while thousands of players may be taking part in a game simultaneously, any game’s “world” is divided into servers and servers are limited to 64 players. FPS games typically involve fewer players at a time than do MMORPGs, because firefights between more than about 25 or 30 characters are seldom more than chaotic bloodbaths.

MMOs are called “persistent world” games because the players take on characters or avatars to play in the same world as other players around the world. Similarly, initial players from a neighborhood or locale can continue to play as part of the same team, clan, or other grouping, even if some of the members move to different parts of the world. For instance, one of the informants reported that some members of her team went off to war in Iraq and continued to
Massively Multiplayer play from there. Another reported that he continued to play one of the MMORPGs with acquaintances from his graduate school days.

MMOs can appeal to players with different motivations. A common motivation for players is to test and demonstrate their skills in the game, often through competition. The rules need to be learned, which is a long process in and of itself. Many additional skills are required to achieve the objectives of each of the games: knowledge of the setting(s), the various characters, the coordination between the physical controls and the movements on the screen, and more. Social interaction is another common motivation, and includes chatting with others, helping and being helped, forming long-term relationships, and teamwork. Finally, players can be motivated by the opportunity to be immersed in a world in which they can project themselves as one or more characters, explore that world, and in some cases create and customize characters and settings (Yee, 2005).

Norms and Values
One informant described the normative structure of these games in detail.

WoW [World of Warcraft] has many different servers, or if you will, societies. Each of these macro societies have identical rules….These are the rules created by the institution to set [up] to regulate an individual by controlling “animal appetites” by: (a) defining moral rules; (b) communicating and clarifying them; and (c) enforcing them. In WoW, there are: (a) a “terms of use” agreement that must be “signed”; (b) these rules change over time and users are expected to understand them; and (c) if these terms are broken, a temporary or permanent ban may be placed on your account.

However, each server has separate integration levels, or norms. These can be as simple as names of guilds [a guild is a group of players who join voluntarily]. For example, a normal server can have guilds named “Leet Crew” and “Rollin’ With My Gnomies,” while the role-play server…had names like “Crusaders of the Realm” and “Order of the Edge.” They can also be complex as in the way members of the server are expected to act. In normal servers, players are allowed to act as they do in real life, using normal speech and are allowed to talk about personal experiences and weekend plans. However, on role-play servers, players are urged to keep real life out of game, and they interact with other players in the way that the characters they have created would behave. Real life can be discussed, but it must be clearly stated that it is being said out of character. Guilds even include a system of government. For example, Evolution has a number of council members who vote on issues in the guild. These council members discuss the issues and receive input from officers, who in turn receive input from regular members. Other guilds often have [a] system similar to constitutional monarchy, where a single member makes the decisions based on input from selected officials.

There are also micro societies within each server, or as WoW labels them, guilds. The name of my guild is Evolution. In Evolution, there are regulations and rules that must be followed. Members of this society must follow these rules: respect and tolerate other players, they may not be a member of another guild, and must follow raiding rules. The punishment for breaking a rule is a single warning, followed by removal from the guild if the action continues. There are many ways the guild becomes integrated aside from the game’s chat channels. We have a webpage with a forum so that we can keep in contact with each other even when we are not playing the game. There is a program called Ventrillo that allows us to speak to other members via a microphone and speakers
available for use. Through these means, we have formed norms and values unique to our group (Kittelson, 2007).

These are virtual societies, created by players from around the globe, with norms, values, and a division of labor.

**Conversation**

Conversation among players is mostly game talk, including in-game jokes about different characters in the game. There is also considerable discussion, informants report, on all sorts of social questions, current events such as national elections, the war in Iraq, etc. When the Dungeons and Dragons creator died recently, there was a ceremonial on World of Warcraft (WoW). As mentioned previously, there is also a late night rule that allows for discussion of more adult topics after, presumably, the younger players have logged off and gone to bed. One of the consistent reports from these informants is the peaceful or low-conflict orientation of the players in their conversations. This is surprising in FPS games or MMPORGs such as WoW, where skills in conflict are highly rewarded and scores are often kept in terms of body counts.

**Local-Global Players**

Although these games and others like them state that they can be played with anyone anywhere in the world who has the requisite technology, in actual fact most players stay within their region and/or their language group. Although a player from Mexico may wish to play with a Russian, for example, the difference in language and time zones may prevent the formation of a clan or guild. Earlier games gave additional information on the various players, and this could be used to evaluate whether or not they would be allowed to join a clan or guild. However, more recent protections against virtual invasion of privacy have generated more protection for individual players and less knowledge about who the players are (in the real world) and where they are from. This information may be obtained through other channels or in conversation, but it is not generally available to players. Despite these obstacles to global play, players routinely overcome them. The games are fully global.

**Analysis**

**Globalization?**

MMOs fit the ideal type of Global Civil Society outlined by Keane (2003) with its five elements of: (1) non-governmental structures and activities; (2) organized into a form of society; (3) that emphasizes civility; (4) is pluralistic; and (5) is global in scope. These games are not a part of any government, are socially organized for interaction and exchange, emphasize peace and positive relations, welcome a wide range of individuals into the activity, and can be accessed or played at the global level. They link the individual in his/her local place to the global, universal.

What, sociologically, is the nature of this glocal (local to global) society? It is important to note that these players do not have to play outside their region to be part of the glocal because the system of play is itself global. They may play regionally for the most part, but they are part of a global structure. They may also be visited by players from other parts of the world without their knowledge, because there is no immediate way to determine where the players are located when they participate in a game.
The Cyborg Society?
Following Hornsby’s (2005) theory of the Cyborg Society, MMOs should create a new international division of labor, be composed of social human-machine interactions, and include a new collective consciousness that sees machines as inanimate organisms, conscious but not alive.

Recall that as an example of the new international division of labor, Hornsby (2005) provided the example of a company creating a woman’s dress by orchestrating the design, materials, manufacture, marketing, distribution, and sale across multiple nations. The same is true of MMOs; they are the product of collaboration and competition among players, developers, administrators, and manufacturers who take part from locations across the globe. No matter the hour, each MMO world exists, populated by an ever-changing cast of players and in many cases, characters and groups, who may also be consciously modifying the very virtual they are inhabiting. Such a specialized, flexible, global society fits the first element of Hornsby’s Cyborg Society: a new, international division of labor.

MMOs are also a particularly strong example of the second element of the Cyborg Society: social human-machine interactions. In MMOs, all social interactions take place through a machine system (keyboard/mouse or console, headset, screen, computer, network). The players inhabit characters that exist only on this machine system, and in a world that exists only on this machine system.1

Recall the last element of Hornsby’s Cyborg Society: a new collective consciousness that no longer recognizes the absolute distinction between humans and machines, but instead sees machines as inanimate organisms, conscious but not alive. MMOs nicely illustrate this idea. Whether the player inhabits a provided-for character in an FPS game, or a character she or he created, within the world of the game the human player becomes that character. Further, the player/character then interacts with other players/characters. Each player communicates by human voice through the headset or by typed text, and manipulates their character through physical movements on the keyboard/mouse, or console. While in these worlds, the distinction between human and machine often dissolves. The social interactions are not solely between humans, or machines, but between humans and machines or a combination of both.

In sum, MMOs do support Hornsby’s (2005) theory of a Cyborg Society.

War Society
Most MMOs are based on conflict and war, and this leads to a distinctive collective consciousness and division of labor, which we will term the War Society.

To play such games is to feel alive, up, your adrenaline flowing, with conflict and the threat of (virtual) defeat or defeat around every corner (Hedges, 2003). Conflict, war, and, death are lived (and relived) over and over. Such emotions can be very pleasurable and attractive, as attested to by the worldwide popularity of MMOs.

Conflict and war also lead to greater integration. Because the society is more or less on a continuous war footing, players join groups for safety and for offensive success, and such a group depends upon unity. The emphasis is upon including all members of the group and making certain that each member has what they need to go to war as part of the group. If two players are in competition for a resource, the group typically awards it to the player who needs it more rather than the player who is more powerful.

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1 There is an exception to this rule: there are off-line gatherings of players from a specific game, in which the players attend as physical characters from the online game, and attempt to stay “in character.”
In short, most MMOs have a restricted division of labor because of the combat basis; a clear hierarchy or limited set of roles is essential to successful play. In WoW, for example, there are five main characters in every “group” or “party and then several variable roles. Many FPS games have static characters or teams of characters of equal power; the player can choose a different setting, but each setting’s characters remain the same. This restricted division of labor is distinct from the complex division of labor in industrializing societies, which Durkheim considered organic. Indeed, it is closer to the weak division of labor found in thinly populated, homogeneous societies, which Durkheim considered mechanical.

Such a collective consciousness and restricted division of labor is what Gamson (1975) found in his analysis of American society over time; when the society was in conflict, internally or externally, the emphasis was upon healing the riffs among the groups in the society. Any group that chose to rebel or make claims during the conflict was unsuccessful. Therefore, war footing emphasizes the group rather than the individual and roles are standardized rather than emergent.

**Conclusion**

MMOs are very much a part of the Global Civil Society. They fit Keane’s (2003) ideal type of non-governmental structures and activities, organized into a form of society, with an emphasis on civility, pluralism, and the global. The Global Civil Society provides the broader context in which these games can occur. MMOs are also glocal because the local is tied to the global; local players, game developers, game administrators, and game and game equipment companies around the globe function within the Global Civil Society.

MMOs also fit Hornsby’s (2005) theory of a Cyborg Society, which is can be viewed as a subculture within the Global Civil Society. MMOs are specialized, flexible, global societies, requiring a new, international division of labor. These societies are composed of social human-machine interactions. They also include a new collective consciousness that does not recognize the absolute distinction between humans and machines; this distinction may dissolve when the social interactions are between humans, machines, or a combination of both. As noted by Hornsby, “If societal organisms are designed and organized as codes and networks, this will change the ways that humans experience social life” (Ibid, p. 88).

Finally, the combat basis of most MMOs led us to propose the War Society: a restricted division of labor and a distinctive collective consciousness dominated by an intense “compete to survive” perspective, yet which also emphasizes the group over the individual.

The relatively small amount of research of MMOs, especially within sociology, suggests the need for additional theoretical and empirical research if we are to better understand the sociological nature of this phenomenon and its effects. Needed in particular are empirical investigations that will further test and refine the Cyborg Society and War Society theories.
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