

The Player-Character Position: Understanding how Computer Game Players Relate to Predefined Characters

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Preface

A DVD should be included with this report. It contains a a digital copy of the report as well as data material such as transcriptions and interview notes, the products developed for the project, and referenced articles. Audio files from the interview can be obtained by contacting the author of the report.

I would like to thank all participants in the study for participating in the interviews.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Many studies revolve around the player's connection to his MMO-world avatar in games such as World of Warcraft (e.g. Bessi re et al. [2007], Van Looy et al. [2012], Li et al. [2013], Courtois et al. [2011]), but an important aspect of the MMO is that players create representations of themselves in a world where they create their online identity together with a big community. Their creation is affected by the wishes of the player, of personality and views of an ideal self. But what happens when a designer has created a character for the player to use?

The adventure game genre has produced and used many well-known characters, such as Lara Croft from the Tomb Raider series (Square Enix), Link from the Legend of Zelda series (Nintendo), Nathan Drake from the Uncharted series (Naughty Dog) and even Batman (Time Warner) and Wolverine (Activision) have starred in their own games.

1.1 Player-Character Relations

In my previous investigations into the relation to the single-player character, many different approaches were found: Newman [2002] makes the point that the idea of the character as a person can only exist when the game is *Off-line*, or when the player has been cut off from the interaction with the game in e.g. cutscenes. Here the player can follow the character and learn about it, but as soon as the game goes *On-line* and allowing the player to interact with the system anew, the character can no longer be thought of as a 'he' or 'she', for it has become a vehicle or a simple tool for the player to navigate and interact with the virtual space.

In contrast to this theory, some game researchers attest to the possibility of identification and using the character as a way of obtaining a role. Burn and Schott [2004] use the idea of the On-line/Off-line stages, but explain them in regards to the character; a game character can be seen as a *Heavy Hero*, or the hero which we see represented in cutscenes or other non-interactive instances of the game, and a *Digital Dummy* on which the player can project themselves onto and control. This creates a hybrid which the player can use to roleplay a character.

Bayliss [2007] explains the player-character relation through the difference between a character and an avatar; a *character* is who the figure in the game is, where Lara Croft for example is a British explorer following in her father's footsteps. An *avatar*, on the other hand, is understood in accordance to what the game affords in capabilities and gameplay and is therefore more understood as a tool with which the player can interact with the system. Bayliss' argument is that the figure's definition depends on how the player views it, leaving the player to see it as a character with which to roleplay or an avatar with which to control the system, as well as a position between character and avatar where the player evaluates

the game as a system that can be exploited or rules that can be played with. However, the viewpoint between character and avatar is not an exclusive relationship, as the character will due to the medium always have an avatar-esque meaning and the relation to the character should be understood as on a line between avatar and character where the player's position is determined by their attitudes, intentions and motivations at the time of playing. Linderoth [2005] investigated childrens' relation to video game characters, finding that the children shifted between frames where the character could be a role for the child to pretend to be, a tool to extent the agency into the game, and a prop functioning as the child's self-representation in the game.

Hefner et al. [2007] conducted a study finding that players of a First-Person-Shooter (FPS) identified with the character and that a "wishful identification" (the desire to be like or act like a character, Hoffner and Buchanan 2005) heightened the identification. However, the results are put into question by the theory that without a character displayed on the screen, the player will not be experiencing a character identification due to perceiving himself as the character [Ziemke, 2005, Taylor, 2003]. As Hefner et al. argues for the interactivity leading to identification, so does Murphy [2004] argue for the medium "suturing" the player and game together in an interactive experience *"where my character controls me more than I control him"*.

The notion that computer games due to being an interactive media should automatically produce a sense of identification in players has although been contested by Shaw [2011] after having interviewed what she calls '*marginalized groups*' of players, or player groups not fitting into the category of the heterosexual, white male player. Here it was stated that, for set characters, there was a general problem that *"[...] interviewees did not feel they were able to "get into the heads of the characters" due to the game characters being too underdeveloped.* Shaw explains that narrative is a means to let players identify in what she calls the *intellectual/emotional sense* as opposed to identifying *as* the character, where one simply takes on the role in the world. The notion that an underdeveloped character should be easier to identify with stems from McCloud's argument for the use of iconic characters in comics to let the audience put themselves in the place of the character (in [Shaw, 2011]).

Again, some also explain the player-character relation as being parasocial; Jin and Park [2009] conducted a study on Wii players' parasocial interaction with their Mii-characters, where parasocial interaction in this study was defined as *"[...] the extent of game players' interpersonal involvement with their avatar and the extent to which game players perceive themselves as interacting with their avatar"*. A factor however is that in the third-person medium, players are encountering a *"para-authentic self"* in the form of their avatar. Kavli [2012] speaks against parasocial interactions with the character, as a truly parasocial interaction must be onesided between actor and audience according to its original terminology - in this case the player-avatar interaction cannot be parasocial as the avatar responds to the player's actions and if the actor *is* the avatar the world is missing an audience. According to Kavli what could be perceived as a parasocial interaction would be that between the player and the AI (artificial intelligence) GLaDOS in the game Portal, as it constantly speaks to the player, but the player can never communicate with GLaDOS.

As I studied the different theories on identification and relations in games, I found myself missing an overview of the theories in what seemed like an ocean of loose ideas - as Shaw also argues in her paper, the identification process of the game player is not well understood and most work on the subject is to be found as theories and textual analyses, where I also found a lack of audience research, though most prominent for the single-player genre and especially the third-person view.

1.2 Methodology

In order to obtain a better understanding of the player-character relation in single-player games, it was chosen to use a grounded theory approach due to lack of empirical data and to investigate if the viewpoints of game players differ from that of the theorists. This approach was chosen over using secondary data to form a hypothesis as theorists disagree and due to the lack of data from the players themselves.

1.2.1 Grounded Theory

The grounded theory approach is a method first used in social sciences to investigate new areas by gathering data to form hypotheses on instead of using already formulated hypotheses and investigations. While usually being used for investigations into subjects where research is lacking, Salkind [2010] states that the method can also be used in studies *"[...] where the previous research is lacking in breadth and/or depth, or where a new point of view on familiar topics appears promising"*. As prior theories seem to have contradicting ideas and that a model for the development of player-character relations could not be found, this method was chosen to unveil new inside into how computer game players view the characters which they control.

Salkind [2010] explains the grounded theory approach as an iterative process where literature and theoretical work in the field is saved for after investigating the target group in order to keep as unbiased an investigation as possible. The tester must firstly interview the target group through use of broad open-ended questions to ensure that the data is not forced in a certain direction, leaving the findings unspoiled. The data gathered is then analyzed through an iterative process where the data is reduced and formulated into codes and categories. As these codes emerges, one can structure later interviews to answer more specific questions and get more insight into different concepts. Data gathering can be concluded when one has reached theoretical saturation, or when no new categories emerges in the data. The participants used are found through purposive sampling, where the participants are chosen based on common criteria, as there is a need for the understanding of a specific group rather than an entire population [Guest et al., 2006].

Charmaz [2006] explains her process of moving through data in a grounded theory study where she explains the procedure to have two main phases: an initial coding phase where each word, line, or segment of the data is named, where one sticks closely to the data and should code with words that reflect action, followed by a phase where the most frequent and/or significant codes are sorted, synthesized, integrated, and organized.

Throughout the process the researcher should write memos - the memos are according to Charmaz *"[...] the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers [...] it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research project"*.

Both Salkind and Charmaz suggest using diagrams to show the connections among the categories in the data, and where Charmaz suggests using axial coding to sort categories and subcategories into 'when, where, why, who, how, and with what' Salkind suggests using the 'six C's: Causes, Contexts, Contingencies, Consequences, Covariances, and Conditions'. Charmaz however also explains that in her view, there is no strict guideline for how grounded theory should be conducted, but there are methods that can be used.

One tool suggested by Charmaz that can be used is freewriting; the idea is to quickly write one's thoughts and ideas down without attending to correct e.g. grammar, evidence or audience in order to stimulate creativity. Another is clustering, where one takes the codes and categories and link them together, working out from a main code.

1.2.2 Data Gathering

Theory will be grounded on the gathered data collected through an iterative process where codes and categories will be investigated and affirmed by contacting computer game players. According to the Interactive Software Federation of Europe's consumer study from 2012, 45% of game players are female and 40% are between the age of 20 and 34 with only 12% being below the age of 20, wherefore the target group for this study will include both men and women in this age group. Freewriting is used in the process as well as clustering to connect the codes. Data gathering is first done through an online game forum to get in contact with people who have sought out a channel for discussing games. Codes that can be found from the forum is then used to create additional questions for interviews to broaden the understanding of the subject. The data will be used to create a preliminary model and is thereafter compared to secondary research on player-character relationships and recorded codes from the participants. Weak codes emerging may be further investigated through interviews with members of the target group through the use of a specially created game and new data will be compared to the model.

Chapter 2

Data Gathering and Coding

2.1 Initial Investigation

To first get an understanding on how players relate to characters in single-player games, a thread was posted on the GameSpot¹ online forum to get some initial data from which an understanding could be gathered. As the focus in the study is on the adventure genre more than the RP (roleplaying) genre, the users were asked to only consider games without customization and were given the examples of Batman: Arkham City, Alan Wake, Tomb Raider and Gears of War. Participants were asked to only regard third-person games to avoid participants to include the single-player missions of games such as Battlefield and focus on games with developed characters. In order to keep the data gathering as open as possible, the following question was asked:

Which 3rd person games have you played and how would you, in your own words, describe your relation to the character in these games? How do you view the character and how do you view yourself while playing?

(a print-out of the forum thread can be found on the CD, and the link to the thread is provided here as a footnote²)

Eight forum users answered in the thread and the answers were coded line by line for *where* participants explained themselves compared to the character and *how* the relationship was explained as well as explanations as to why. It was not possible to find specified age, gender, or demographic for the forum members. They submitted posts of various lengths, some going into great detail and explaining different relations between games and others submitted answers of only two or three sentences. The games used as examples were both games containing customization of the character and in-game choices affecting the game as well as linear games and third-person shooters.

For games without choices and customization, some explain that the characters are viewed like characters in books or movies and several mention a distanced connection to the character, such as explaining themselves as a god or helping force, helpers, or being the boss. Others explain a closer relationship, attesting to identifying with characters or to live the life of the character, where a player puts oneself in the world and puts him- or herself in the character's shoes. It is mentioned that cutscenes are used to establish a connection between player and character. One also states that more round characters (characters with more personality) are harder to project oneself onto and that he/she can't relate to a

¹www.gamespot.com

²<http://www.gamespot.com/forums/games-discussion-1000000/how-do-you-view-game-characters-31074780/>

character if it is unlikeable. Lastly, one user attests to seeing the characters in third-person shooters as action figures that he uses to live out his childhood.

For games containing customization and choices there were interesting comments as well: The player Ish_basic explains that when creating a character, he comes up with a personality by which the character is played in accordance with, but the personality is always in accordance with his own ideals. The ability to customize makes him more invested in the character, while the lack of customization makes him more distanced to the character and thereby letting him make choices that he would not normally make. t1striker and El.Zo1212 both agree that choices in a game lets them assume the role of the character. When having choices in-game, El.Zo1212 states that he chooses what he as a person would and t1striker tells of a gameplay situation where he wanted to be the good guy, but ended up killing civilians out of hatred for the antagonist.

The answers from the forum users tells of differentiating relations ranging from identification as explained by Terralux, turtlethetaffer and gamergath to a form of helper or controller as explained by t1striker and El.Zo1212. El.Zo1212 also explains the idea of the characters as dolls.

Lulu.Lulu writes that it's all about cutscenes, as there is no character development in the actual gameplay. Terralux also adds that the cutscenes made him identify, though he goes over to say that in the Batman and especially the Assassin's Creed games he identifies due to being able to experience how the characters act during gameplay. Terralux also mentions tactile feedback and audio and visual feedback as helpers for identification.

The relations the users take were coded into two categories: **Becoming the character** containing both instances of identification or the feeling of 'being in the characters shoes' as well as projecting oneself onto the character, and **controlling/helping the character**. However, the aspect of becoming a character seems dual-sided; on one side Terralux and Lulu.Lulu assigns cutscenes to show character development, and as Lulu.Lulu states "*There nothing to relate to in gameplay*" and turtlethetaffer and gamergath both attest to living into the character. Others talk about being the character through projecting themselves into the character, where t1striker states that while playing The Witcher (an RPG with a set character while letting the player make choices) he makes the decisions that are closest to what *he* would do. loafofgame also explains that he had an easier time projecting himself into the Assassin's Creed-character Altaïr than Max Payne due to lack of character depth. Both mark that they need to like or be able to relate to the character in order to be able to project onto it.

Due to a lower than expected response-rate, a second round of investigation was planned out as a focus group interview to get more people in less time, while also using the group to discuss and expand on each others' thoughts and viewpoints. The findings from the forum posts were used to construct open-ended questions for the focus group participants to discuss. Since there were only eight forum members responding it was considered best to allow for the focus group participants to first explain how they perceived themselves in relation to the character and the relationship they obtained in case the data was not well enough saturated.

2.2 Focus Group Interviews

Based on the answers from the GameSpot forum, a focus group interview was planned using the codes of **becoming the character** and **controlling/helping the character**. The focus group was arranged to still be very open in order to affirm the previous answers but with more questions to ensure that the previous categories were discussed. Students from all educations at the Copenhagen campus of Aalborg

University were invited to participate and recruiting was done through the university's mail-listing system. The students were informed that the interview would be about player-character relations and that they could choose between one of four dates to participate. The second iteration of data gathering was arranged as focus groups in order to get the participants to discuss and comment on each others' viewpoints as is one of the benefits from having multiple participants together. To make the group work Kitzinger [1995] notes the importance of creating a relaxed setting by setting participants in a circle so they can see each other and provide refreshments.

Four interviews were arranged with 4-5 participants in each group. Due to a technical malfunction with the camera recording, one interview was lost and therefore replaced by another group. The interviews were conducted at the university and took between 45 and 75 minutes. Two groups consisted of four participants and two consisted of five. In total four participants were female divided into one female in a group together with four males and one group with three females and one male. The age was noted on 16 out of 18 participants, ranging 21-27 with a mean age of 24.5. A video camera was used to better keep track of who was speaking and the interviews were transcribed in semi-verbatim and coded in the order the interviews were conducted. The audio as well as the transcriptions can be found on the enclosed CD.

In order to first let the participants get to know each other, the participants were encouraged to sit and talk while getting refreshments and the interviewer would conduct small talk with the participants to make the setting more relaxed. When the participants had settled, they were told that they were asked to come to talk about how they related to characters. They were first asked to talk about third-person games without customization and options and were given examples of such games (same as in the GameSpot forum thread) and told that they would be asked some questions pertaining to these games and later to games that allowed for customization and choice-making. They were encouraged to talk to each other about the questions and discuss amongst each other. Due to the data having to be transcribed, the interviews were conducted in English to ease the process, which however resulted in the introduction for some being in Danish, as the introduction was incorporated into the preliminary 'settling-in time'.

2.2.1 Questions

Based on the forum thread, open questions had been constructed. It was decided to directly ask into the categories of **becoming** and **helping/controlling** the character, but it was decided to not ask directly into if cutscenes were what made them relate, as this had not been marked by the two forum members saying they became the character. It was also decided to include questions relating to RPGs as some of the forum members explained that the distance varied between a pre-made character without choice-making and a character created for player influence, and it was believed that a better understanding into how the participants regarded the different character modes could shed light on why the relations were established.

The participants were first asked to mention which games they had played that matched the genre in order to see which games participants played and to give them a context when talking. It was also decided to ask what they liked and disliked about the genre in order to see if the character relation was regarded as a factor for playing, as well as give some guidelines for the design and implementation process of a test-game for later in the investigation process.

The participants were hereafter all asked:

- Where do you see yourself while playing?
- Do you ever feel you become the character or feel like you are 'in the character's shoes'?
- Do you ever feel like you are helping or controlling the character?

Asking where the participants saw themselves were done to let the participants talk about **being** and **helping/controlling** without being prompted to regard the character-relation in this manner in order to affirm that these were proper codes without forcing them onto the participants and to see if others arose. The two category-questions could then let the participants expand on their view or explain if they disagreed with the idea of taking any of the two viewpoints. Many of the participants included their views on customizable characters and games with choices while answering the first three questions, but for those that did not, the two following questions were added:

- Why do you customize as you do?
- Why do you choose the options that you choose?

As the interviews went, participants were asked to elaborate when the interviewee deemed it interesting for the discussion.

2.2.2 Answers and Coding

The participants mentioned having played many of the same games, such as the Grand Theft Auto games, the Batman games, the Uncharted series, The Tomb Raider games, and Max Payne among others. Mainly 3D adventure games were mentioned, though one group started talking about story-branching games (Heavy Rain, Beyond Two Souls) and another group mentioned games with non-human protagonists such as Transformers and Ōkami. World of Warcraft was also mentioned as well as the RPGs Mass Effect and Dragon Age.

What do participants like/not like about 3rd person games?

The discussion on what the participants liked about the genre varied between groups. The first group mainly focused on the gameplay of the genre, talking about it giving the player a better overview of the surroundings and enemies due to being able to see your character's position in relation to enemies and objects, but it was mentioned that some of them disliked the third-person shooter, as they saw no need for observing one's surroundings while using a long-ranged weapon. One quickly mentioned that he doesn't feel like the character by just seeing the hands.

The second group focused their discussion on liking that these games are story-driven and how one builds a different relationship with pre-made characters than with customizable characters. They talked about being able to relate to the characters by following them and observing their movements and following the character makes some participants connect. A problem mentioned with the genre is where the character's equipment is inconsistent with logic, for example the character in Kingdom Hearts having a very big swordblade that vanishes when it is not equipped. It is also mentioned that the movement of the character is essential to the genre and one therefore becomes aware if the movement is out-of-character. The third group was more diverse in the participants' answers, as some talked about having the overview so he can see enemies. One stated that he relaxes more in these games as he is less engaged and another liked that the camera allows him to be 'cinematic', where he can move the camera around to make a good 'shot' when eg. shooting an NPC. The participants also talked about that the character movement adds to the experience and seeing the character movement of other players make multiplayer games more realistic. When asked what they did not like, the participants talked about when mechanics and controls are a problem and that the overview of enemies is like cheating. One mentioned that he feels more distanced from the character due to not normally seeing himself in third-person.

The last group talked about having a story in focus and being able to see the emotions of the character through its movement, and the game can feel like a movie one follows. They also mentioned that the

genre gives overview of the environment. One of the participants noted that the third-person view is just glitter and that the core in the genre is story and gameplay. Some of the participants also agreed that the camera view is not the reason for buying a game. When asked what they did not like, the talk fell on faulty cameras getting stuck. They also discussed characters and said that if a character is enjoyable there is no need for customization. A thing noticed with this group is that two of the female participants focused very much on the fact that they prefer a female character.

The comparison to movies

Participants often mentioned that their relation to the games and the characters could be compared to movies and books. Some groups commented on the game's view and camera movement as what made them perceive the game as more cinematic and being *"like watching a movie"* and some also described that their relation to the character while playing could be described as the relationship obtained when watching movies. The comparison to movies did not negate the feeling of being the character for all, though some explained that when they lost control of the character in e.g. cutscenes or when the character acted in a way that the player found to be wrong or illogical, the participants changed from feeling they were the character to feeling like they were watching an interactive movie.

Watching, helping and controlling

In the preliminary investigation, the forum members on Gamespot had many ways of explaining their relationship to the character, such as them being a helper or a god. In the first and fourth group some participants explained themselves as gods and one in the first group said he felt he controlled the character in games like Tomb Raider and one said that predetermined characters made him feel like a viewer. Helping force was also used by a participant in the second group and other participants talked about the position when not being the character as watching or helping the character. The third group mentioned being puppeteers and controlling the character, and one said he was not sure how he feels as he's not conscious about the camera, but may feel a bit like a god. In the fourth group the positions are beside being a god also explained as being a viewer in the form of a ghost or omnipresent entity. A participant in the first group explained that he always saw himself as sitting in his room and not as anything inside the game.

The story in the games were mentioned as being important for the game and the relation to the character. In the second group the participants jokingly remarked that a good game doesn't skip the story, while in the fourth group the participants discussed the story's impact on becoming the character, one explaining that lack of story resulted in a weaker bond between the player and character and another explained the lack of story as becoming the reason for changing to being a viewer. Bad gameplay was also mentioned by one in the second group as a factor for feeling like a viewer or helper and one in the third group explained that repetitive gameplay makes one not care about the character.

Cutscenes were mentioned by several participants as breaking the feeling of being the character, either due to the character taking on a personality and thereby breaking the player's projection onto the character, or taking away the agency that the player had:

G9: *"Because, for example, there can be times where I feel like it's me playing, but in the cutscene... that's not me, because, yeah, it's a cutscene and suddenly the character takes personality and that breaks my identification with the character, sort of."*

G2: *"If, if the cutscene starts very early and it does a lot of stuff in the cutscene, and does more stuff in the cutscene, I lose that sense of, that's me actually doing it, then I go back to*

it's more like reading a story and then imagining 'what if I did this'."

G18: *"[...] but if it's sort of a cinematic where she does something badass, like jumps from a motorcycle and shoot somebody and I'm just doing a quicktime event, I'm like 'it's not me doing that, that's her doing that and she is awesome, she is badass'."*

In the second and fourth group, the participants mentioned that controlling more characters at once is a different experience from only controlling one:

G6: *"When I'm thinking about a game such as Kingdom Hearts, it seems like, I become more the helping force because they are more characters, they are a whole team, and you have to drive them through the story. Whereas a game such as Assassin's Creed as we've been talking about a lot of times, you are that person, because he is there alone. He has a few people he interacts with, but it's not like you feel they are a team, they have to accomplish something together, it's just that one person whose story you're following. I think there's some sort of gap in between if you have to guide a lot of people or just have to guide that one person."*

G18: *"So I would say, for example, yeah, in Dragon Age you are immersed in different areas at different times in the game, so when you're in the cinematic and you're making choices with your main character and 'I decide that we defend this city' or whatever, then you become that character, but when you're in a combat situation you're like 'I have this team'."*

Lastly, some participants talk about the characters in a manner not displaying it as a being, but rather as a tool. A participant in the second group explains that in the game Journey, he perceived the character as a tool for him to experience the story and he mentioned that he didn't relate to the character at all and one mentioned he has the same experience in 2D games like Limbo (though when asked if the boy in Limbo was more a tool than a boy, he said that it switches). Two participants in the third group equated controlling to puppeteering, but one of them stated that the character still has a meaning and is not just to be considered 'a piece of meat'. In multiplayer games the character however can just be considered a puppet.

If a character is too unrelatable, it was by one participant stated that one is pushed into the role of the helper due to e.g. Kratos in the game God of War being too unrelatable:

G6: *"I see a game such as that about, more about helping the person rather than being him, because, once again, none of us are brutal big tall guys who are just running around beating up shit... so I see that, because he is so hard to relate to, you just, you get pushed into this role of trying to support him on his quest for revenge [...]"*

The statements from the participants here resonate with the ones from the Gamespot forum where the relation to the character is distanced thereby not making the player feel as if he is the character, but rather like he is controlling, viewing, or helping the character. Both the character itself and the game system contributes to giving participants this viewpoint.

Relating to the character

Many participants in the different groups talked about relating to the character and many said that the game's story was a factor for relating. Some also stated that seeing how the character moved and interacted with other characters made them relate to the character and it would have to have depth and a personality one would want to explore.

It could also be found for some that the character had to be directly relatable to the player in order to form a connection:

In the second group, a male player told that he has trouble relating to Lara Croft in Tomb Raider due to the fact that the character is a woman. Two of the female participants in the fourth group explained that gender was something that affected their relation to the character - for them it was better to play a woman than a man as it was considered easier to relate to. This does however not mean that a player can never feel they become a character of the opposite gender or that a character of the same gender is always preferred. It was mentioned by one female participant in the fourth group that the female character is not always interesting enough (explained by the participant as the character being "eh"), while another participant argued that she cannot relate to the female if the character is not acting according to gender. The two female participants do in some instances recall having related strongly to male characters, for example in the game Assassin's Creed. One participant stated that for him the gender does not matter due to easily being able to become the character both in games and films. In the second group, the participants also talked about the game Beyond Two Souls where a male player said that he felt he blended with the female character.

The ability to relate can also be dependent on the character's behavior compared to the player's usual behavior. In the third group, a participant stated that he felt he related to the GTA-character Mike due to seeing a lot of himself in that character, which he could not see in the others. One also tells that he can relate to the NPCs in the game Dragon Age: Origins due to seeing some of himself in the characters. The second group talked about that relating to a character is about either finding some of yourself in the character that you can relate to, or to take some of yourself and put into the character. It was also noted that personality gives purpose to the character and the player may relate to the feelings and the situation the character is in due to the player having experienced similar emotions themselves before:

G8: *"Yeah but then again, I also feel like if the character has a purpose, if they want revenge or are in love with someone, just as in stories, then it's easier to relate to that anger or love because it's something you've experienced yourself"*

Being the character

The answers from the participant indicates that part of feeling like being the character lies in the ability to be able to relate to the character. Some participants also described a fleeting position in relation to the character, mostly when going from feeling as the character to feeling as a viewer, which happened when being aware that a cutscene started, if they lost agency or if the character did not act in accordance with what was expected. In the first group, a participant tells that he played GTA when his character's actions interrupted the relation:

G2: *"[...] I thought about the situations where I'm in a firefight with someone, and then, that guy, who I'm playing, who usually is me, suddenly he says something, very... obscene or what's it called, like, "Fuck you I'm gonna kill you" or something. He just shout that out in the middle of a battle, and that wasn't me, and at that point I feel 'oh, I wouldn't have said that; that's not me' [...]"*

In order to relate to a character, the player must also understand why a character chooses to do something. In the fourth group the participants discussed that a character doing something that is perceived illogical breaks the relation where one explains her reaction in an Uncharted game:

G16: (When talking about the game Uncharted) *"I've only played the first one and he's this, sometimes the choice he's made is just 'uuhg really, you're going down the dark corridor now,*

okay, let's just, yeah, okay, we're going down there', and it's kinda like, if it doesn't make sense to the player it's just gonna break the immersion of it."

A participant in the second group also mentions that he and the character can disagree, which a participant in the fourth group also marks as something that changes her position to that of a viewer.

Player performance was also reported to play a role into feeling like the character. The participants in the third group discussed when they did something wrong in the games Assassin's Creed, Batman and Hitman where the game encourages the player to play the game a certain way, e.g. not being spotted when doing a mission in Hitman. Their discussion circles around being close to being the character, but while knowing that how the action/mission was performed was wrong:

G10: *"It's funny I have the same experience when I play Hitman. Because you can do it the right way and don't fuck anything up, or you can kill a couple of guys and still get the job done, but then I'm not Hitman, I'm not."*

The fourth group also discussed how doing something they perceived as being well done tied them to the character:

G18: *[...] So there's this distinction between me as a gamer where I succeed in the game or do something badass in the game where it's me controlling it and I pull it off, where I feel 'yes!', this is, there's this synchronization or this relation that, to me and the character, that is strong, and then there's other times where it's the character doing stuff. I still relate to it, but then it's the character being awesome, so there's this difference."*

Some of the participants also speak about the agency as what makes them feel they become the character. In the first group, some participants say that being able to decide what to do in the game makes them feel more like the character, where a pre-set line the player must follow in the game makes it seem more like a movie. Some participants in the second group also talk about that it creates a relation when being able to choose options for the character and a participant in the third group explains that the only way he relates to characters is by deciding what they do:

G14: *"I don't have the same feeling, I'd say the thing that makes me connect to a character is that I control the character, that I am the character, that I decide whether he goes left or right, I decide what is happening to him. If he's then a gangster or a silly little homeboy, it doesn't matter because I chose his fate. That's what makes me connect to a character."*

Cutscenes were mentioned by some of the groups and their function seems to be two-sided; a participant in the second group explains that learning about the character makes him relate to it, just as Lulu Lulu described in the forum thread. However, the use of cutscenes can also function to distance the player into the feeling of viewer (as mentioned earlier), especially when the character performs an action that it perceived as cool:

G2: *"If, if the cutscene starts very early and it does a lot of stuff in the cutscene, and does more stuff in the cutscene, I lose that sense of, that's me actually doing it, then I go back to it's more like reading a story and then imagining 'what if I did this'."*

Immersion

A term that was put into connection with becoming the character and appeared in three out of the four focus groups was immersion. In the first group, one participant explained that his lack of becoming the

character as not reaching 'total immersion' and another participant told about an RPG he had played where he felt he became the character, stating that:

G1: *"[...] that was actually quite cool, to try a new game where you got so immersed that you thought the person you can already see is you."*

In the third group another participant also tells that he never becomes so immersed that he perceives himself to completely be the character. The fourth group discussed immersion in relation to the character, where one participant tells that when playing he gets very immersed and usually becomes the character. Another participant explain that the relation is a matter of immersing oneself *into* the character. One of the participants explained that she gets immersed in the characters, but never feels she becomes the characters. In the first focus group, a participant stated that being able to project daydreams and wishes is part of the immersion, and another says that though he is not the character, he can immerse himself to think he's in the game. Immersion is by these three groups also mentioned in relation to e.g. game mechanics and gameplay.

Projection

It was stated by three of the groups that a reason for playing computer games is to be someone else or to live out a fantasy. The first group talked about seeing third-person games as daydreams where something could be 'cool' to do, like being the hero or to kill people if you have a bad day - it is a matter of projecting dreams and wishes onto the character and one participant calls it for a '*wishful projection*'. The second group also stated that playing games is about being someone that we are not in real life, and the third group said they play to live out a fantasy. Two of the participants explained that in GTA they like the character Franklin because that is who they would like to be or act like in the situation:

G11: *"I think it's more like if he's like the character I wanna be in that game, cause I love Franklin the most, I wanna be that gangster guy, and that's no way near who I am, but... I think, so, I want to live, like, I want to get into the story and atmosphere, so yeah okay so, it's... maybe, of course I need to be able to reflect a little bit, but, it's the character I wanna be."*

As stated earlier, participants in the second group talked about having two ways of relating to a character, where one was to take aspects of oneself and put into the character. In regards to this, some of the participants spoke about that a character with much personality was harder to project oneself upon and that flatter characters were therefore easier to relate to. Two of the participants stated that a character that has "empty space" in his personality allows for the player to be able to project into these spaces and thereby become the character. One participant explained how the emptiness in Ico and Shadow of the Colossus affected him:

G9: *"[...] but also, what I like about those two games is that they don't really put any personality into the character. So I... so the character, I become closer and closer to the character because they don't make predefined choices for me, or, they don't really have a personality."*

The participant cited above also stated that he found it annoying that characters in the Final Fantasy series started having voices:

G9: *"I just wanted text, because I wanted to imagine how they talked, and, I had a, I could identify much more with them, because I could imagine how they, they spoke. It's like taking a book and then filmatizing, for example... maybe people don't like the way Dumbledore looks*

*from Harry Potter, I think they were very nice, doing the characters for Harry Potter movie, but in other occasions, some people get, gets their own fictive character ruined by some-, somebody else interpreting how, how the character acts, *inaudible* ”*

The fact that characters talk in many of the mentioned games were commented by three out of four groups; in the first group a participant talked about how he feels he controls the character in Tomb Raider and puts emphasis on the fact that the character talks during cutscenes. In the second group a participant mentioned the character not talking much while explaining it as being flat, while a participant in the third group stated that hearing the character talk would remind him that he is not the character and that a background story disconnects him.

A participant in the first group also marked that in games with a pre-defined story he loses sense of being the character if the character does something the player himself would not have done.

Character customization and choices’ effect on player relations

The idea of projecting oneself versus becoming the character is discussed avidly by the fourth group by distinguishing between character relations as *‘you becoming the character’* against *‘the character becoming you’* in RPGs. The participants talked about how one relates to the multiple characters that one controls in Dragon Age:

G18: *”[...] But then that’s you becoming that character, you live into their story, you become them, right? You understand who they are, you understand what they feel, what they choose, but it’s that character, it’s their mind, it’s their dreams, it’s their life. So you get sort of absorbed into them and live that role. But it’s not that character become you.”*

In opposition to the player becoming the character is where the player puts some or all of his/her personality into the character, thereby making the character become the player:

G18: *”So for example when I play Mass Effect I can sometimes choose to play a character where I make up a person and live into that or I can make a character that is so much like me, that I am that character, that I, that it’s my personality in the game, it’s definitely me. So there’s a difference because when I play a character where I made it up and I just made it up, I can be a little more free about it as well, because I just made it up, I can do whatever the fuck I want, and it will still make sense, whereas if it was me personally, if I take my personality and put it into the game and say ‘I am now in-, this is me in the game’ then I am limited by the same choices that I would make in real life.”*

The participants in the second focus group spoke about how they believe that when having the options to customize or make choices that players will put their own personality into the character, thereby making choices that resonate with what they would do. The same was mentioned by Ish_Basic in the preliminary round, where he tells that characters he creates are always in line with his own morals. Two of the participants in the fourth group talk about what happened when they were forced to kill innocent villagers in the RPG Fable:

G15: *”Did you, in Fable, where you had to either kill the people or kill *inaudible*.”*

G18: *”No no no, I saved everyone because I spent like 5 hours playing the banjolin, earning enough money to pay for the war. Seriously, I found out that was the only option I could do, so I just stalled for as long as possible in continuing the game so I could just keep earning money in a justifiable way-*

G15: *"You know what I did?"*

G18: *"-instead of murdering people or starving people-"*

G15: *"I just quit the game because it was too hard-"*

G18: *"Exactly!"*

The third group however agreed that when making characters they did not put themselves into the character, but would rather create distinct personalities and customize them in accordance with the personality they wished to play - the idea that one **creates** a personality and character that is different from who they are could be seen in most groups:

G9: *"First of all, I like to look like no one else, I want to be as characteristic as possible, for example in World of Warcraft I played the dwarf, ehm, and in Skyrim I played a... Khajiit, the cat species. And Oblivion I think I played, what was it... ah, I can't remember. Ehm, but the thing is, I think I like to roleplay another character. And uh... that's how I relate, because if I look, if I make a character that looks like me it's not... it's just a bit boring, I think. Again, we play computer games to be someone else, so..."*

G12: (When talking about why he customizes characters as he does) *"That depends on character class. I mean for Skyrim, if I do warrior I always think Viking: Big hair, big beard. Saying, and with wizard, it's always big beard, hair in ponytail, or long hair back. Or if it's warrior in any other game it's just, as long as he has a scar on his face and beard, I don't care."*

G17: (When talking about her character in the RPG Dragon Age) *"You know, it's just one character, you have made the personality, but it doesn't have to be more you than maybe Alistair, maybe I just love Alistair so much more, whatever I do, you know, I could make another character similar to Alistair [...]."*

The fourth group entered the topic on what happened when leaving their own characters in battles in Dragon Age, where the player in combat situations control up to four characters which they can switch between as they like:

G18: *"You still, you give them orders but then for example if you switch main point-of-view, for example sometimes when I played Dragon Age I played a mage, but mages aren't very good tanks, and sometimes it makes more sense to control the tank because they sort of keep threat and they keep aggro on all the mobs, so I would leave my main character that I made myself, that I customized, that I identified with, to go play this random NPC that was the tank-"*

[...]

G15: *"What my point was with the Dragon Age was that you, when I played it, I played as the main character, right, and identified with that, and that person was me. But in the combat, where I tried not to switch to different things, different characters, I died. So at that point, they switched me to another character, that broke it for me, because suddenly I had to be someone else. Not that I couldn't, but I just didn't want to be several persons in one game."*

First-person view's effect on player relations

It was mentioned by some participants in the second, third and fourth group that the third-person view affected how close they were to the character and that they were more distanced than in first-person. The

participants in the second group talked about how it becomes you instead of the character in first-person, and in the third group a participant says that he only feels like the character in first-person view where the third-person view makes him feel like he's controlling the character. In the fourth group a participant also mentioned that the view makes her become more distanced from the character than in first-person. While not being a question for the focus groups, some participants started talking about their relations to the character in first-person view, showing what appears to be a lack of character identity:

In the second group, one participant explains how he had spent time on customizing his character in the RPG Elder Scrolls: Skyrim, but due to the first-person view while playing he forgot who his character was and was only reminded of it due to the game changing the view. He explained that while playing, it was not the character running in the world but himself. Another participant in the group explains that this happens due to being dragged into the story in a different way, and he says the character becomes more identifiable due to the player feeling that it is him in the game, but equates it to the same experiences when playing a customized character.

The third group talked about their reaction when playing the first-person game Duke Nukem 3D and suddenly seeing the character in a mirror. It made the participants aware of the character they were playing, and one adds with the phrase *"Yeah, right, I'm **not** a camera with a face"*. One from that group also stated that there are first-person games he would like to have in third-person view, such as Half-Life because he likes the characters. The fourth group talks about Minecraft, where one says that his connection is weaker to the character due to the lack of a story and another says that it is her in the game.

Summary of answers

The way that participants in the focus groups related to game character have similarities with what was explained by the Gamespot forum members, but also added information as to how the characters were viewed and reasons for why they obtained these relations. For the pre-defined character participants reporting the following relations:

- Controlling the character
- Viewing the character
- Helping the character
- Being the character
- Projecting personal wishes or traits onto the character

Furthermore when being able to affect the character by choices in the game or customizing it participants reported:

- Identifying with the character
- Creating characters that are in compliance with how that character should be
- Creating characters that have traits of the player

Finally is the view of the first-person character, which seemed to only give two very different relations:

- The character not being there due to not existing (the camera is the character)
- The character not being there because the player has taken its place

2.2.3 Clustering of answers

The answers from the participants were coded and put into a cluster to determine their relations in regards to the view of the player, what affected it, and why. In figure 2.1 the observed codes have been clustered together using the states that the participants reported being in relation to the character while playing. Participants explained their relation as being dependent on being able to relate to-, wanting to be-, or controlling what the character does, while losing control of the system, repetitive gameplay, their own performance and their level of immersion affected as well, though not being a result of the character but rather of the game.

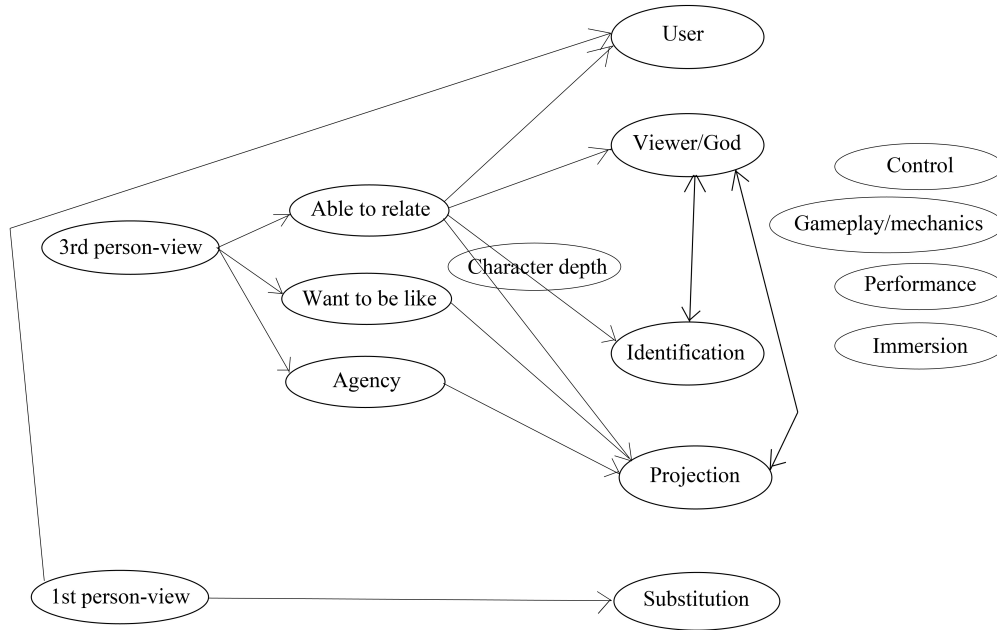


Figure 2.1: The clustering of found codes

The cluster above should be read from left to right, where one first must check which point-of-view the game is in. If the game is using a third-person view, the player must look at the character and evaluate if they can relate to it, would want to be it/do what it does, and how much agency the game has or how much control the player has over the character. How the player relates to the character is a matter of the depth of the character and whether the character is round or flat and has room for putting in own wishes for playing or personal traits. The factors for the character can influence if the player finds that he is controlling the character, helping/viewing the character, if he identifies with it or if he projects onto it. The first-person view forces the player to either see himself as a user of the character or taking over the character's place. The game system is represented by the circles in the right side and affects how the player may change his at-the-moment relation.

After having clustered the codes they were analyzed and put into categories. The first category will here be termed the **Player-Character Position**: Two sub-categories could be found where a player can either feel he/she becomes the character (here termed **Internal Position**) or does not feel as the character (here termed **External Position**). The **Internal Position** contains the codes *Identification*, *Projection*, and *Substitution*. The **External Position** contains the codes *Helper/Viewer* and

User. Identification is where the player takes on the character’s personality in opposition to Projection where the player puts his own personality into the character. Substitution is where the character no longer exists and the player only perceives him- or herself, which could be seen as an effect of the *View* Game Trigger (explained below). The Helper/Viewer is where a player is affected by either or both Character Triggers and Game Triggers to suppress an Internal Relation, while not perceiving the character to be a Tool, which is how the User should see it due to a high lack of relation.

A second category established was **Character Triggers**: The Character Triggers contains the subcategories *Character Depth*, *Understanding*, *Wishing* and *Agency*. Participants talked about relating to characters where some focused on understanding who the character was and what they did whereas others talked about wanting to play an empty character, thereby projecting themselves or part of themselves onto it; it is therefore considered that Character Depth will affect to what extent the system lets the player identify versus project themselves onto the character. Understanding entails the codes Liking the character and Relating/Understanding. Wishing contains the codes Wanting to be- and Wanting to do what the character does and Agency is about being able to decide what the character does. Lastly is a category termed **Game Triggers**. The Game Triggers category contains the codes that were registered to affect shifts in the Position while not being an effect of the character: Gameplay, Control, Performance, View, and Immersion.

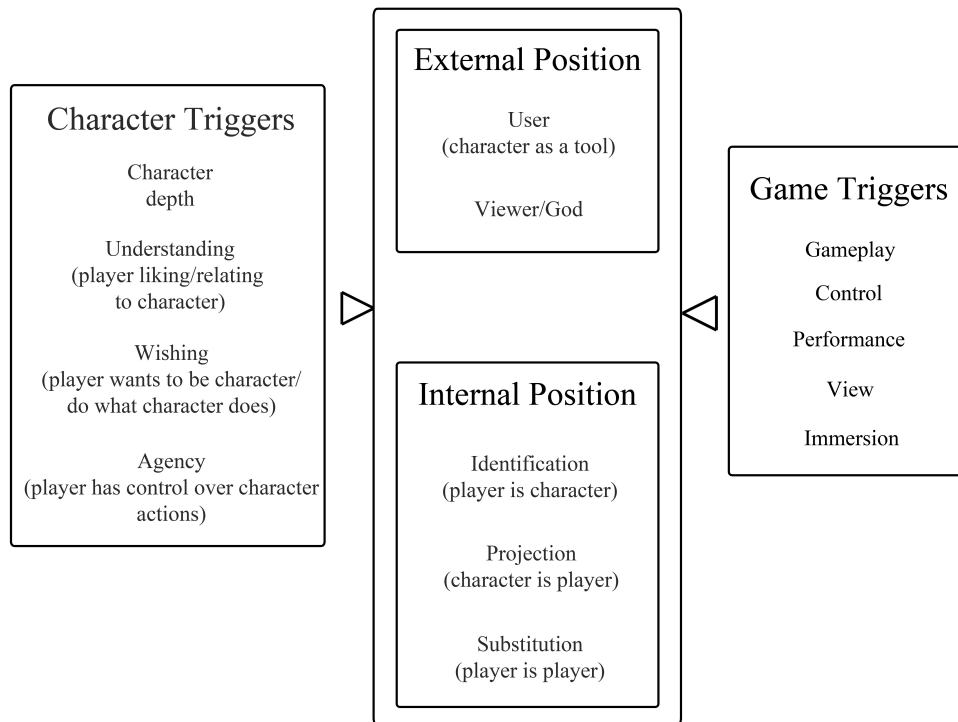


Figure 2.2: The relation between the four categories and their codes

The model above shows the relation between the four categories; The External- and Internal Position is affected by the Character- and Game Triggers and can for the player shift between the two positions as they become affected, especially by the Game Triggers as these can change quickly while playing (e.g. gameplay changing when a battle ensues or the game removes player control). It was noted that participants registered a loss of character identity in first-person view, indicating that the first-person view may enforce either an External Position of User, as indicated by the participant explaining the

character as "*a camera with a face*", or an Internal Position of Substitution as noted by the participant telling that he forgot his character in Skyrim and perceived it as himself being in the world. A position between Identification and Projection was also explained by some participants, where some said they could put some of themselves into the character and others explaining that customized characters could have traits of the player built into them.

2.3 Relations between Codes and Current Research

The findings and the current model for how players relate to characters is here compared to prior research. The categories will be investigated one by one and from there lead to a discussion on the current model.

2.3.1 Character Triggers

The Character Triggers-category in the preliminary model regards what the character affords to the player.

Schneider et al. [2004] conducted a study investigating the difference in physiological and psychological responses between first-person games with and without story in the game. They found that identification, presence and physiological arousal were greater in games with story versus those with little to no story, explaining that the story in a game gives reason for the actions and helps the player involve themselves in the experience.

Relating, Understanding, and Character Depth

The two subcategories of Understanding and Depth are much intertwined as it is depth of the character that leads the player to understand part of who the character is. Shaw [2013] interviewed two women playing games while looking into their identification; as in her study in 2011 it was stated by participants that characters in computer games don't often give away what they are thinking. It could be seen in Shaw's study from the citations that characters that shared traits, feelings, and experiences with the participants heightened identification; one mentions that she identified with a character in a game where the narrative was strong and the character was short like herself, while the other expressed a stronger need for identification with characters as well as a desire for strong female characters. When talking about the game *Katamari Damacy* where the player controls a prince in order to roll a ball into a minimum size to complete a level, the participant tells that in order to identify with something she needs to have an idea of what they are thinking or feeling.

As could be seen in the second and fourth group, same-gender between participant and character was perceived as making the relation stronger. In the study by Schrier [2012] on ethical choices based on character-gender in Fable 3 it was noted that directional results indicated that the male participants were more connected and identified more with the male character than the female, where some indicated that playing a female was more equivalent to playing a role rather than being oneself, and one noted that he felt he took care of the female character.

A study conducted by Trepte and Reinecke [2010] shows an interesting tendency between similarity and wishful identification; it was found that players prefer avatars that resemble their own personality, especially for non-competitive games, and when they were satisfied with their own lives. Dissimilar avatars, however, were preferred for competitive games and when players were less satisfied with their lives. Player-avatar similarity showed positive correlations with identification for both types of games as well as predicted enjoyment. It should be noted, however, that this study was conducted by giving participants game descriptions and letting them create the avatar they wanted to play in the game. For online games,

Van Looy et al. [2012] explain avatar identification as being a factor consisting of perceived similarity between player and avatar, wishful identification with the avatar, as well as the feeling of being the avatar while playing.

Shaw [2011] mentions in her study of marginalized players that the flat characters made it harder for some of the participants to identify with the character, while it was also observed that participants could infer personalities onto the characters, even in a game such as *Space Invaders* that only displays a spaceship and has no character development.

From a game design perspective, Freeman [2004] explains a difference in making characters to identify with and characters to project onto; by creating a character without traits and without voice, the designer makes a character which the player can make his/her own.

Cohen [2006] acknowledges that psychological similarity is a factor for identification, but states that wishful identification is stronger.

Wishing

Cohen defines *wishful identification* as "*wanting to be like the character*" 2006. The concept of wishful identification was used by Konijn et al. [2007], where they found that young Dutch boys playing aggressive games and who showed a wish to be the character in the game displayed higher aggressiveness after exposure. Wishful identification was also found to be positively correlated with game realism and immersion.

The approach to comparing game characters to players' ideal selves is discussed by several theorists who argue that the game characters which players both create and identify with due to being closer to their ideal selves are used as a means to lower the discrepancy between actual-self and ideal-self, thereby leveraging low well-being and negative affect (e.g. Bessière et al., 2007, Courtois et al., 2011, Hefner et al., 2007).

McDonald and Kim [2001] found that childrens' favorite game characters were close to their ideal selves, and it was found that children identify quite closely with game characters, which could be seen in the children mimicking the characters. Przybylski et al. [2012] explains three constructs in the gaming context: The actual-self, the game-self, and the ideal-self. The actual-self is how the player is in their everyday life, the game-self is how the player experiences him-/herself while playing, and ideal-self is how players would like to experience themselves. It was found that convergence between the game-self and the ideal-self affected enjoyment of play and intrinsic motivation, especially for players who felt a large distance between their ideal-self and actual-self. The authors also link immersion to identification, self-exploration, and goal adoption.

Several studies regard games where players can create their own avatars as environments for which the player can create avatars that better resemble their 'ideal self' in order to lighten their well-being by lowering the actual-ideal self discrepancy [Bessière et al., 2007, Courtois et al., 2011].

Agency

Agency has been found to mostly regard systems where players can choose between solutions and actions (e.g. Thue et al., 2010) rather than how free the player is to do what he wants to do as was noted by participants as something that affected their position. In fact, Wardrip-Fruin et al. [2009] state that agency is not a matter of "free will" - instead of agency being the player's ability to do what they want, it is partly something that "*entice[s] players to desires the game can satisfy*".

A study conducted by Thue et al. [2011] showed that the **perceived** agency a player felt was lightened by using a system that computed which scenarios would be most desirable for players versus set scenarios.

The computational model used the theory that players have preferred playing styles which the system could afford (e.g. a person with a Fighter style would enjoy a frontal assault scenario more than a sneaking scenario).

Freeman [2004] uses the term *Agency Techniques*, or Self-Created Story Techniques. To give the player agency is according to Freeman to make the player feel that they impact the story, which can be done in different ways. However, Freeman notes that a player's "real" impact complicates the idea of games with set paths - he states that *"[t]he more the game contains a narrative story, the more your impact in the game resides in the smaller details, but not the overall direction and shape of the outcome"*. However, agency is in his book understood as more than being able to change the course of the story, as offering different ways of playing the game is also considered a way to have a small impact on the game, e.g. if you travel by car or foot in Grand Theft Auto. Using side-missions that the player can do in between the set story or offering mini-games is also an Agency Technique as well as giving players the ability to explore the environment and/or change the environment setting and soundtrack.

Though not directly linked to the relationship with the character, Przybylski et al. [2010] regard Autonomy as a factor for game engagement, as it is part of a psychological need satisfaction. The theory on need satisfaction as moderated by play is based on self-determination theory, and Przybylski et al. state in their study that together with autonomy, competence and relatedness affect the appeal and well-being effect of games.

2.3.2 Game Triggers

Gameplay, Control, and Performance

In the study by Shaw [2013] a participant playing *Ōkami* (where one plays a wolf) explains how she can feel ready to bite someone, but she can't feel like she's *"ready to paint someone"* - the action of painting is a big part of the game *Ōkami*, but the action has not resonated with the participant. Shaw writes that about the woman's experience that *"the embodied connection she felt was interrupted when what the character's body was doing was illogical"*.

Newman's [2002] conception of the On-Line/Off-Line instances of games can be related to the shift in position experienced due to loss of control over the character, especially in cutscenes. Research into how the loss of agency affects the player's view on identification or player-character position was not found when researching for this study. Klimmt et al. [2010] tested the difference in perceived performance and identification, but found little evidence for their correlation.

Immersion

Brown and Cairns [2004] explain immersion as an involvement with the game where barriers set by both player and system can hinder one of reaching total immersion. The process is explained as the player first having to reach *engagement*; the first barrier is termed access, relating both to the player wanting to play the game as well as game controls corresponding as intended and makes it possible for the player to master the main controls. The second barrier is that the player must be willing to invest in the game by putting time, effort, and concentration into playing. The level of engagement lacks the emotional attachment and is where the player becomes interested in the game and wants to continue playing. When engagement has been reached, the player may become more involved in the game moving towards becoming *engrossed*, where the game's construction is a barrier. Construction was by participants mentioned as being when one can see that the designers had put effort into building up the game, and in the level of engrossment the player starts to become emotionally affected by the game. Brown and Cairns report that players become less aware of their surroundings and self when experiencing engrossment. The last level of involvement is

termed *total immersion* and is a fleeting experience of feeling to actually "be there", a state of presence, and it is affected by the barriers of empathy and atmosphere. Empathy is described as "[...] *distinct from attachment in that you feel attached to a main character or team but do not necessarily empathise with their situation*" and involves a transfer of consciousness. Atmosphere relates to game construction, but is where the construction is relevant to the game character and is affected by the player's attention. McMahan [2003] explains that presence and immersion are often used interchangeably. In her explication of presence, McMahan points to the role of the avatar where the person's interaction with the avatar and how one relates to it is seen as part of social realism, which is defined as "*the extent to which the social interactions in the VRE matched interactions in the real world*" and regards how 'true to life' the portrayal is considered to be.

First-Person View and the Player

As mentioned in the Introduction, Hefner et al. [2007] conducted a test where one group of participants played the game *Battlefield 2* and another group watched the gameplay as a video. It was proposed that the computer game interactivity was important for facilitating a strong sense of identification, where identification is explained as the player's altered self-perception during play, thereby making a player identifying with a soldier feel more courageous and powerful. The relationship between player and game character is described as being monadic (player and character as one) as opposed to the dyadic relation that a viewer will have with a television character (viewer and character as separate), regulated by the interactivity of the medium. A similar study was conducted using the games *Call of Duty 2* and *Need for Speed: Carbon* by Klimmt et al. [2010] where the focus was on role identification. A shift in self-perception was proven as players of the FPS identified with the soldier role and players of the racing game identified with the racedriver role.

The two studies show the possibility of inducing a role identification, but the first study uses identification theory from Cohen which focuses on the identification with a character. According to several theorists, a player cannot obtain an actual character identification due to the first-person view:

Bayliss [2007] argues that the first-person shooter eliminates many of the visual cues used for characterisation, meaning that the genre will tend towards making the player obtain a more avatarsial relation to the character. The lack of a visual representation is also mentioned by Ziemke [2005] as being problematic, but seen from the perspective of neurobiology; when players can see their character, mirror neurons are triggered, where the first-person view establishes a link between the person and the object, even in virtual reality, where objects are seen in the form of 'I can'. McMahan [2003] mentions when talking of a person's point-of-view as either being one where the person can see his avatar in the same way as the ones of others or what she calls an *egocentric viewpoint* where the user sees his or her avatar in the same way as one would through one's own eyes. An argument by Klevjer [2012] is that first-person games make the screen a prosthetic for our eyes and due to the loss of the body mediator our the player is 'transported' into the screen. Taylor [2003] actually points out what was discussed by the third group; the player, while looking through the eyes of the character, forgets the character due to him not being in the space and is suddenly confronted by the character's reflection in a mirror. Taylor explains that to show the reflection in a mirror presupposes that the player has internalized the character, while in truth the player could not have done so due to the first-person view.

2.3.3 Position

The participants in both the online forum thread and the focus group interviews spoke about relating to the character as well as identifying and 'being in the character's shoes'. Some talked about projecting oneself onto the character and others talked about being with the character in the game world while not

actually being the character. Firstly the theoretical differences between these states will be explicated followed by theoretical and empirical studies' view.

Cohen [2006] argues that though the interest in identification with media characters is not a new field, it has only yielded a limited understanding of the concept. Cohen gives his explanation as to what happens when an audience identifies with a media character:

"Identifying with a character means feeling an affinity toward the character that is so strong that we become absorbed in the text and come to an empathic understanding for the feelings the character experiences, and for his or her motives and goals. We experience what happens to the characters as if it happens to us while, momentarily at least, forgetting ourselves as audience members [...] Thus, identification has both affective (empathy) and cognitive (understanding goals and motives, perspective-taking) components."

[Cohen, 2006]

In his article from 2001, Cohen explain that the discussion on what identification is has suffered from too wide and sometimes erroneous definitions where liking the character and the concept of parasocial interaction has been tested as identification. When identifying with a character, the audience must assume the identity, goals, and perspective of the character while forgetting themselves in the experience. Cohen states that narrative genres are better at promoting identification than e.g. TV shows, as these remind the audience of their position. Though not much is known about why people identify more with some characters than others, Cohen finds it plausible that similarity and attitude homophily should predict identification, but that people often identify with characters representing what they would like to be or are attracted to rather than what they are 2006.

Parasocial relations, on the other hand, is where an audience does not identify with the character as explained above, but rather obtains a form of one-sided relation to the character. The concept was first explained by Horton and Wohl as being where *"a bond of intimacy is developed with media personalities through shared experiences existing only through viewing of the personality or persona over time"* (in Rubin and McHugh, 1987).

Current Research on Player-Character Relations

There are different theories as to how people see themselves compared to the character while playing, some which have already been mentioned in the introduction.

Fuller and Jenkins [1995] state that *"The character is little more than a cursor that mediates the player's relationship to the story world"*; it lacks personality and its traits are only for actions in the game world. The plot works as a way to create a setting for the game, such as Mario's quest to save the princess in a fantasy land inhabited by the minions of King Koopa. While Fuller and Jenkins's argument is from 1995 and games have changed since then, the view on the game character as a simple means for interaction has not disappeared. Newman [2002] states that the character is a vehicle for the player to navigate the virtual space and that players experience games as a whole, and the idea of feeling empathy for a single character is too simplified a view of the experience - rather, the player becomes *"[...] both the goal and the act of attaining it"*.

While Newman proclaims the player-character position to be set during gameplay, there are several propositions of the tool as being a possibility among others; Bayliss [2007]' version of the User or the character as a tool is by him explained as playing with an avatar, as it is only understood in relation to what it allows the user to do. The character while understood as a tool is what Bayliss refers to as

the *avatar* or for the player to *play through* the character; the figure is to be understood as a vehicle which the player uses to accomplish ludic activities. *Playing as* entails an experience in which the player engages the narrative element of the game with the possibility of roleplay with the understanding of the character as a being in a world (as also explained in the Introduction). Finally, the player can *play with* the character, where one can play with the system and its rules (e.g. when selecting perks or traits in RPGs) - the figure becomes both avatar and player. While a character will always have avatar-esque relations due to the interactive medium, but how it is perceived is a matter of personal stance dependent on the player's preferences for gameplay.

Burn and Schott [2004], in their analysis of the protagonist Cloud in Final Fantasy 7, explains the tool-part as a Digital Dummy which exists together with the Heavy Hero, or the part of the character having a personality and background. The player can move the character as a puppeteer, and Burn and Schott tell of a teenage girl making the comparison between the character of the game and a pet which the player trains and nurtures. The distanced camera movements while moving around in the game enforces the puppeteer-role due to the distance and creates a God-like position for the player to take. The Hero and the DUmmy create a hybrid player-relation where the character (as the classic folktale hero) is formed through the game narrative as well as visuals, audio, animation, text, and music, while the Dummy functions as a blank canvas with a set of economies in the form of what it affords the player and onto which the player can project himself as well as a puppet to control. The hybrid therefore makes the player the character **and** the puppeteer in one. As also mentioned in the Introduction, Linderoth [2005] investigated children's relation to game characters, finding that the children constantly shifted in their expression of "I" and the character, where the character could be seen as a fictional character or a role for the player to pretend to be, a piece of equipment or a tool for the player to use as a means to extend one's agency, and as a prop to be used as a representation of self. The concept of the player shifting between frames comes from Salen [2004] who explain that a game is first and foremost grounded in the real world and the player must therefore first consider himself in the larger societal setting. Hereafter one can put on a *player identity* where we must work in accordance with the game rules, and finally work in accordance with the game's world in the form of a *character identity*, where we *are* the character. The frames are based on Gary Alan Fine's model of player-character relations in RPG tabletop games. The player's shifts between the various frames lets the player obtain a double-consciousness where the character works both as a persona with which the player can have a relationship with while also being a puppet for the player to manipulate the world.

A more philosophical look at how players are connected to their characters is proposed by Klevjer [2012] who uses the philosophical views of Merleau-Ponty to explain how learning to control a game controller will connect the controller to the player in a form of cognitive prosthetic. Using the cursor analogy set up by Fuller and Jenkins, he explains that the mouse cursor and the avatar have different places in the world, as the avatar exists *within* the world and must act according to its surroundings. Klevjer explains the character as the object and the player as the subject, where the subject is left behind and becomes irrelevant once it has been transferred to the avatar as a *proxy embodiment* and thereby letting the player inhabit the world through the avatar. The ability to go through the screen is according to Klevjer not a matter of narrative, but of the system's ability to make the player understand it as an extension of the player.

The Projective Identity

In relation to participants noting the possibility of projection and adding own personality to the character is the theory of *projective identification*. The theory was first proposed by Gee [2003] and is one of three identities present during play. Firstly, the player has his own identity or the *Real Identity*; who he is

can affect why he chooses to play a certain class or gender, but this does not change his identity. The character, once created, will have her own identity (even though someone is playing her) - this is the *Virtual Identity*, all that entails her race, abilities, and looks, and though a player may develop her skills and more, she is still her own person. Lastly there is the projective identity, an identity between player and character and entails what kind of person the player wants the character to be and what kind of story he wishes her to have. Gee writes that projective is a play on **project** as *"to project one's values and desires onto the virtual character"* and *"seeing the virtual character as one's own project in the making, a creature whom I imbue with a certain trajectory through time defined by my aspirations for what I want that character to be and become (within the limitations of her capabilities, of course)"*. The real- and the virtual identities can fail and succeed, like the virtual identity failing due to not being strong enough to kill an opponent or the real identity failing due to not mastering the game controls. While these identities fail compared to the rules of the game system, the projective identity can fail due to doing something that the player finds wrong. As an example, Gee tells of a play session with his character Bead Bead in the game *Arcanum*, where he makes her sell a ring earlier acquired from a dying man - however, Gee found that this was an action Bead Bead would not have done, as she would have kept the ring in honor of the man, forcing Gee to feel the need to reload the game to maintain the projective identity. The player can through the projective identity identify with a character having both his own hopes and fears as well as those of the character as well as the character's world, story and perspective.

Waggoner [2009] expanded on Gee's theory, as he studied the relation between the three identities in the RPGs *Elder Scrolls: Morrowind*, *Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*, and *Fallout 3* (all created by Bethesda). Through game forums and interviews with four people playing 10 hours of one of the mentioned games, he concluded that the real-world identities of the players influenced character creation and their choices, though also being influenced by learned behavior of the genre, where e.g. looting corpses was not something the player would normally find ethically correct, but acknowledged it as an important action for game progression.

The projective identity is not reserved for custom-made characters. Gee explains that for pre-set characters, such as Master Chief from *Halo*, the projective identity expresses itself by e.g. the player feeling that his performance did not fit the character and therefore may chose to replay a fight in order to perform satisfactorily with the character.

Parasocial Relations

Rubin and McHugh [1987] explain the parasocial relation as one-sided, but the term has been used for the relation with game characters when studying computer games. In their study on player's relation to Nintendo Wii avatars, Jin and Park [2009] defined parasocial interaction as *"[...] the extent of game players' interpersonal involvement with their avatar and the extent to which game players perceive themselves as interacting with the avatar"*. Parasocial interaction was found to be influenced by self-presence (*"a psychological state in which virtual self/selves are experienced as the actual self"*) and a high level of interdependent self-construal. Jin [2010] reported similar results for players in the virtual environment Second Life. Though Kavli [2012] argues that true parasocial interaction cannot be between a player and his character due to the character responding to the player's commands, the term has been used for explaining the relations that can be obtained with robots and even websites due to the feeling of interacting with a stable entity [Jin and Park, 2009].

2.4 Player-Character Model and Hypothesis

The findings on player-character relations have, as also argued by Shaw [2013], often relied on textual analyses and have not regarded the game system except for the theory that interactivity should affect the identification process, as attested by Hefner et al. [2007].

Many of the positions have been discussed by other theorists except for the Substitution. The idea of the character as a thing to use is explained in terms of cursors or vehicles [Fuller and Jenkins, 1995, Newman, 2002]. A view on the more dyadic relation is offered in the form of parasocial relationships, but where Jin and Park [2009] regarded it to be facilitated by self-presence. For the participants in the study here, the dyadic relation to the character was explained as being due to a lack of immersion or ability to relate as well as lack of control or agency, and participants had different ways of explaining the relation such as being puppeteer, god, boss, helper, or viewer.

Identification and projection are mentioned in many theories, but in different contexts; Cohen [2001] explains that while identifying with a character, the self must be put aside. The closest instances pertaining to identification is explained by Bayliss [2007] as *"a character based playing **as** relationship"*, where the focus is on the character and narrative. Linderoth [2005] explain pretending to be a character and play a role as the same, and while Hefner et al. [2007] and Klimmt et al. [2010] use identification theory from Cohen, both studies use first-person views that theoretically should make the player feel as if he himself is in the game [Ziemke, 2005, Taylor, 2003, Bayliss, 2007]. Projection is also sometimes explained as a form of identification, and projective identification [?] is also about identifying with a character, but where the character is build by or based on the player.

Except for Immersion, the Triggers category seem less considered in the relation to the character - in general current research has tended to regard the player-character relation as being independent from the game system except for the theory that interactivity should automatically mediate identification with the character, as presented by Hefner et al. [2007]. Based on previous research, the model has been edited to fit with existing terminology as can be seen in figure 2.3.

The Character Triggers-category now contains the codes Character Depth, Similarity Identification, Wishful Identification, and Agency. Similarity- and Wishful Identification replace relating and wishing to match existing terminology. These two factors have already received some attention and are by Cohen [2006] explained to also be used in other media theories such as movies. The Game Triggers still contain the same codes. The Positions have been renamed Monadic and Dyadic positions based on the terms as explained by Hefner et al. [2007] as being a relationship as either one or separate between player and character. In the model the two positions have been separated by color. The perceived proximity between player and character should theoretically be affected by the player's perception of both the system and the character, and the proximity arrow is not to indicate a line through which the player moves on, but rather as an indication of how closely the player perceives the character to be to himself. This means that a player can go from e.g. Substitution to Viewer without crossing over the other positions.

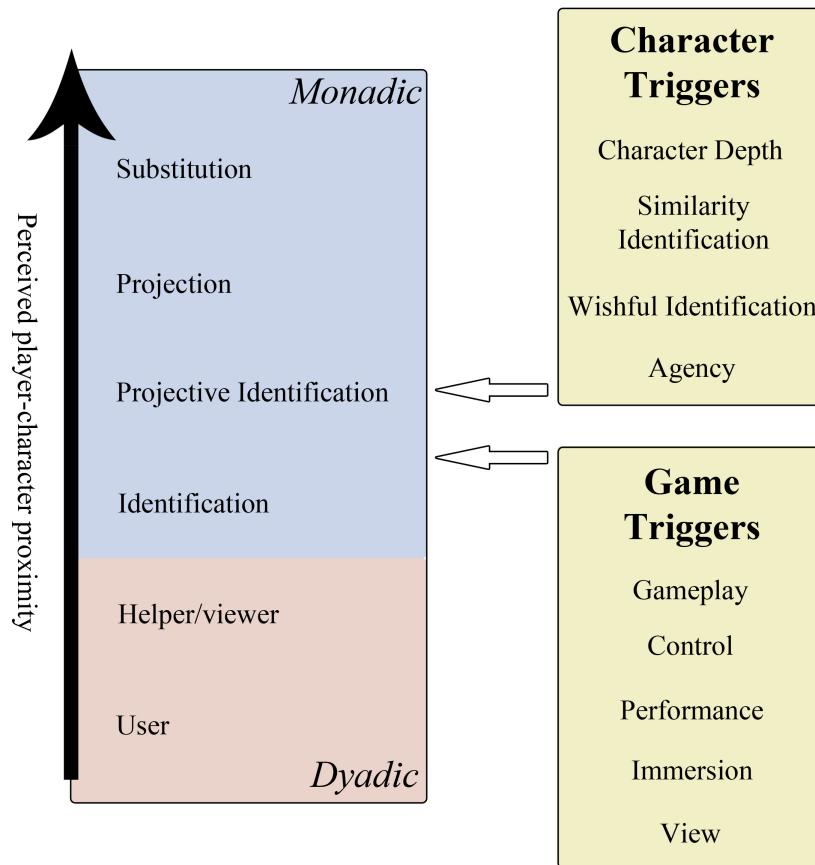


Figure 2.3: The current Player-Character Position model depicting how the character and the game system affects the perceived proximity between player and character

The model has been based on data from participants having experience with computer games and some codes and subcategories have been affirmed by prior research and analyses. However, some codes could use more verification: Substitution in games have so far only been discussed as an effect of the first-person view, though tests looking at identification with characters do not distinguish between third-person and first-person view. Generally the codes in the Triggers category have not been well explored for the player-character relation even though the interactivity of the game medium is by some believed to create a stronger identification (and as attested by Hefner et al. [2007]). While some other Triggers have not been investigated, there are two opposing sides when it comes to point-of-view, the theorists claiming that Identification does not happen without representation and the researchers not distinguishing their work on identification in first-person games from other identification forms. Since current research do not distinguish between the two views and since it was indicated by some participants to affect their position, this study will focus its final iteration of the model on the Game Trigger of View in order to determine if the concept of a Substitution-position is valid:

Research question: Is the player-character position dependent on point-of-view, so a first-person view will result in the loss of character awareness and thereby lead to a position of Substitution?

Chapter 3

Designing for Identification

In order to investigate the research question a test must be conducted looking into how players relate to pre-defined characters in first-person games. The game must facilitate the possibility to identify with a character in order not to force the results by using a character that the player can only regard as a tool or an empty body for projection or substitution. Therefore a game should employ a character that theoretically can be identified with and which can be tested in most importantly first-person, but preferably also third-person to be able to use the same game to compare the two views against each other to better assert how the substitution may differ from projection. This chapter will therefore focus on how to make a character to relate to and a game to test the character in.

Cohen [2001] regards narratives to have a mediating effect on identification, and participants talked about needing to be able to relate to a character by understanding their actions and learn about them. In order to create an interactive experience in which to measure the player-character position, it is regarded as being beneficial to construct a narrative game.

3.1 Types of Narratives

Ryan [2008] describes three types of plot suited for active user participation: The epic, the dramatic, and the epistemic plot.

The epistemic plot is a mystery narrative where the audience is invited into solving a cognitive puzzle, where the pleasure lies in figuring out the solution from the clues gathered before the solution is given in the end of the narrative. An example would be the classic murder mystery where the detective must solve who the killer is. The dramatic plot revolves around human interaction and interpersonal relations and contains much verbal communication. Actions are there to reveal something about a character or his/her relation with other characters. The epic plot, in contrast to the dramatic plot, is the narrative of a solitary hero on a quest and involves much physical action. An example is the fairytale story of the prince setting out to save the princess and must defeat a dragon before returning victoriously home to marry the princess.

All plots could be usable for creating a game with which to investigate players' relation to characters; the dramatic plot can show much of who a character is, thereby giving the audience an opportunity to evaluate the character. A downside to this plot is, as Ryan also states, that much of the plot is driven by verbal communication. The verbal interaction is often used in RPGs where the player can choose what the character responds thereby creating control for the players but also letting the character shape who the character is by imposing own characteristics onto the character and thereby automatically create

a projective identity. The epic and epistemic plots both lend the ability to create a role for wishful identification while giving the player a good opportunity for interacting with the world. However, Ryan's argument is that the epistemic plot works well in written form *due to* the reader being able to go through it at their own pace. This may create too big a difference in exposure time, which may be less if the task lies in defeating an enemy, which is a matter of control mastery versus cognitive abilities. It is also considered easier to control for players' game abilities through asking for prior gaming experience than it is to control for cognitive abilities and their effect on the player-character position. Therefore the epic plot is considered the most viable solution for a testing scenario.

3.2 The Hero's Journey

A structure that fits well with the epic plot is the Hero's Journey. The Hero's Journey is a motif in stories across cultures first identified by Joseph Campbell, which explains a hero who must set out on a quest which brings him through hardships in order to return triumphantly back to his home in the end. Though the Hero's Journey as explained by Campbell has 12 stages (Vogler, Chris, N.D), Reinhart [N.D.] finds that only six stages are crucial for the narrative to fall into the structure (see figure 3.1). The physical journey is also a representation of the hero's inner journey and transformation.

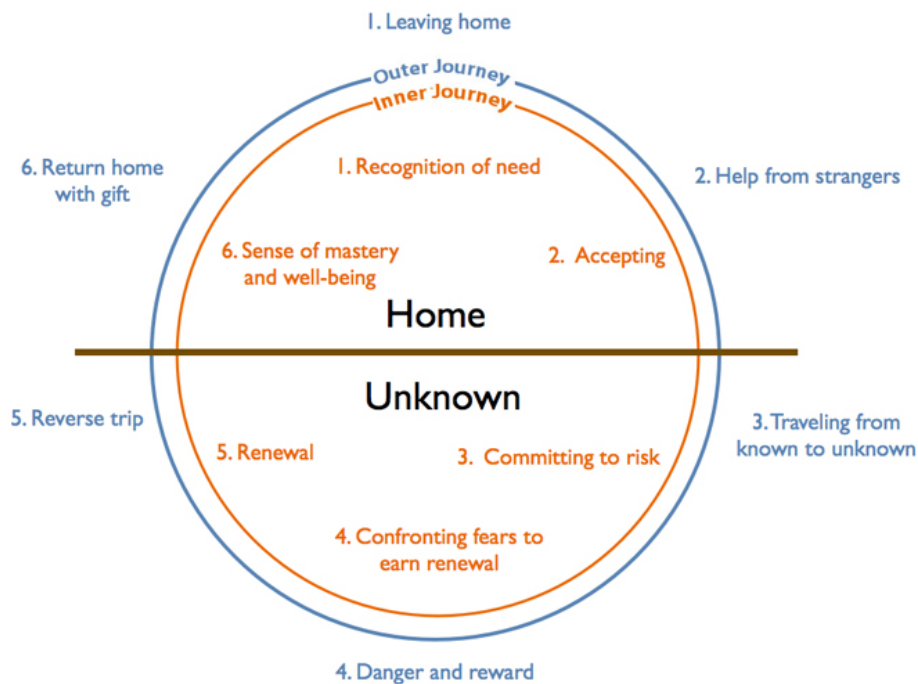


Figure 3.1: The Hero's Journey as illustrated by Reinhart, N.D.

The hero must in the beginning leave his home or the familiar to venture out to fulfill a need only he can fulfill. On his travel, he will meet one or more helpers as he travels from the known to the unknown, and with the higher risk the story intensifies. The hero must prove himself through tests and hardship, thereby completing his quest. In the reverse trip where the hero is on his way home, a final obstacle is often present and must be overcome before he returns home victoriously with a joyous celebration [Reinhart, N.D.].

3.3 Creating a Hero

The epic plot is by Ryan [2008] considered to be a simple plot as characters do not change side and human relations are simple as they are only there for motivation for the hero to set out.

Freeman [2004] states in his book *Creating Emotion in Games: The Craft and Art of Emotioneering* the problem that just because a game offers a role for the player to take on, it doesn't mean that the player will willingly take it. His theory on *role induction techniques* relate strongly to the concept of wishful identification as the role must appeal to the player. Freeman explains different ways of making a role appealing, such as giving the player the skillset to feel like the role (as a player performing a heart transplant will feel like a surgeon). The player can also receive rewards for playing the role, such as admiration (or fear) from other characters in the game or receiving in-game rewards such as access to restricted areas or weapons. A character who exhibits leadership or is accomplished at something will also make appealing roles.

Freeman also advises using what he calls *character diamonds*; the diamond is a number of traits that the character has and which define it, for example being cynical or courageous. The character can have as many traits as one wants, but it can be hard showing all of them. For the character that the player controls, the diamond should contain traits that the player will wish to have.

3.4 The Merging of Games and Stories

So far it has been established that the game should contain a hero set out on a quest as structured by the Hero's Journey - how to construct a hero and what he should go through has been discussed, but how it should function as a game is another matter. Aarseth [2005] states that a quest game can be defined as: *"a game with a concrete and attainable goal, which supercedes performance or the accumulation of points. Such goals can be nested (hierarchical), concurrent, or serial, or a combination of the above"* or put very simply, *"a game which depends on mere movement from position A to position B"*.

The game objective can then be categorized into three basic quest types which can be combined as one pleases; a *place-oriented* quest is the objective of moving the character from one place to another where obstacles in the form of puzzles or enemies may attempt to hinder reaching the goal like in *Left 4 Dead* (by Valve, 2008). A *time-oriented* quest is one where the player must e.g. stay alive for a fixed period of time, e.g. in *Starcraft 2: Wings of Liberty* (by Blizzard, 2010) where the player must defend their base for a set time while being attacked by zergs. Finally there is the *objective-oriented* quest, where one must obtain an item in order to win; a good example is *Capture-the-Flag*, where two opposing teams attempt to capture the other team's flag. The game landscape that the player operates in can be categorized as either a linear corridor, where the player is led on a path which the player can go through and (sometimes) back, like it is done in *Half-Life* (by Valve) where the player leads Freeman through a designed path. The semi-open hub allows for the player to go multiple ways while still having a form of restriction. In *Dragon Age: Origins* (by Bioware) this is done by creating multiple spaces which the player can travel between, but without the free control of the open landscape used in games such as *Fallout* (by Bethesda), where the player can walk freely on the map. The quests are tied together with the landscape, where the linear corridor contains a series of quests placed along the path in opposition to the hub and the open landscape where places can be visited again with new quests and areas may be unlocked as the player grows stronger. The open world lets the player roam free and find new quests, but in a world that is less like a labyrinth than the hub and where navigating the space is about doing it safely rather than solving a maze.

Bleszinski [2000] explains some game techniques that can be used by the level designer to keep the player interested in the game, as it is their job to keep the flow of the game running by offering conflicts

for the player to resolve. One method is what Bleszinski calls *controlled freedom*, where the player is made to believe that one has freedom in where to go but is actually pushed in a direction by the designer - this can keep the level design linear while making the player think he made the correct choice in where to go. He also talks about using a good *pacing*; having the players constantly attacked by monsters they will stop being scared, but by giving the players quiet moments to forget the perils they are in, the next attack becomes more effective. The designer can also use a technique of *revisiting*, where the players encounter an inaccessible area and starts to wonder how it can be accessed. The players can then perform a series of tasks before being able to get into the now unlocked area. Making sure that the player needs to manage their resources and is in danger of running out of ammunition or health results in a more pleasurable experience as long as the players do not feel they are constantly dying but are instead happy to find the new resources.

Chapter 4

Production

4.1 Initial Design

4.1.1 The Hero

According to Freeman [2004], the first-person character cannot have negative traits that the player doesn't have and according to Sanders (in Cohen, 2006) people's identification is stronger with heroes than with villains. Strength is also considered to be a trait that makes the audience like a character. Cohen [2001] furthermore notes that stereotypes positively affects identification and it was therefore decided to create a hero with primary positive traits. Making the character admired by his peers and being a leader were noted as role induction techniques by Freeman [2004]. In order to account for limited resources in regard to voiceactors, it was chosen to incorporate a lack of voice into the character diamond.

The character is named Cameron and is a direct descendent of the village leaders and revered by the village people in order to create a positive role. As the descendent of the leaders, it is his responsibility to help the village and he is trained as a warrior making him proficient in sword fighting. The inner journey that Cameron must undergo in the story structure should reflect his growth from simply being the leader's son to growing into the leader that the village needs to prosper. The player should perceive Cameron as strong, competent, and revered by the village.

4.1.2 Game Objective

The game should use the Hero's Journey as a structure, creating a game where the player undergoes both an outer and an inner journey. The theory states that he must accept the help from a stranger in order to travel from the known to the unknown and confront danger in order to earn renewal and travel home with his gift earned from the journey. The voiceless trait was used as an objective for the game, sending the player out to restore the voices of both him and his peers.

Story

The original story was written to first get an introduction about how the evil demon Avalan had stolen the voices of the village people, rendering them unable to speak and commune with the spirits of the world, thereby turning the world hostile and hard to live in. Legend tells that only the blood of the first village leader can recover the voices and as the descendent of the previous village leaders, Cameron was destined to travel into the Spirit World in an attempt to slay the demon as his forefathers had tried without luck before him. As the portal to the Spirit World is not always open, Cameron needs the help from an old sage who lives in the wild and who has retained her voice and the sage helps Cameron get to

the portal and travel to the other side, representing the shift from the known to the unknown. Inside the player confronts Avalan, but is turned down because he is nothing different from Cameron's father who failed in his task and died in the Spirit World. The sage then explains that in order to become more than his father, Cameron must prove his worth as a leader. In the spirit world, Cameron must therefore prove that he has courage by fighting off his fear and ignorance, where fear is presented as a foe the player must slay and ignorance as a puzzle the player must solve. By completing these tasks, Cameron can return to Avalan and be acknowledged as a worthy challenger and defeat the demon bringing the essence of the village voice back with him. The story and game ends with the sage transporting Cameron back to the real world and enter the village while the villagers cheer for their leader. A storyboard of the original game story can be found on the enclosed CD.

The Gameworld and Quest

It was decided to let all players have to travel the same route through the game rather than allowing for multiple routes in order to give the players as equal a story as possible. This is possible by using the linear corridor as explained by Aarseth [2005], but while also making the world interesting by employing controlled freedom by making the map so big that it wouldn't look like a controlled path and revisiting by blocking off a part of the map by putting an obstacle in the way that the player first cannot defeat, but receives the means to later. Making the obstacles as beatable foes introduced slowly can give the player some training, thereby preparing them for the fights in the Spirit World and increasing the challenge while letting the player increase his skill along with them. A rough map of the world can be seen in figure 4.1. Quests were made as being objective- and place oriented rather than time oriented to give the player time to investigate the worlds and become acquainted with the fighting mechanics. The weapons acquired are needed in order to proceed in the game, ensuring that the player must go to each location to get access to the next.

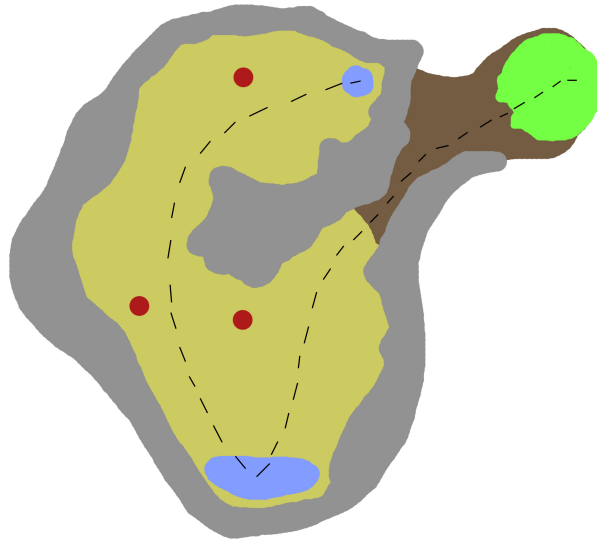


Figure 4.1: Rough map of the known world. The brown area is the starting area with the green indicating the village. Yellow shows the valley with the blue indicating places of the Sage's spot and the portal to the Spirit World whereto the player must go and red indicates enemies.

The Spirit World was designed to lead the player in a circle starting and ending at Avalan, where the two tasks that the player must complete is rewarded with new and stronger weapons, as was mentioned as a

role induction technique by ?. The travel through the Spirit World (see figure 4.2) symbolizes the growth of the character as he conquers his fear (represented by a foe) and learn to use his wits (represented by a riddle the player must solve), and the weapons Courage and Intellect are manifestations of his added traits that he must possess in order to make the village prosper again.

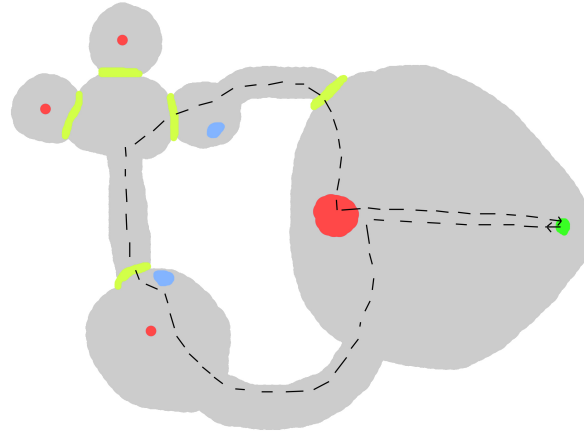


Figure 4.2: Rough map of the Spirit World. Green marks the portal leading in and out of the world with red showing enemies. Blue marks the rooms with obtainable weapons and yellow marks doors that are only opened upon death of a foe or the completion of a riddle.

4.2 Implementation

The game was created using the Bethesda Creation Kit for the Elder Scrolls: Skyrim and was developed as a mod for the game in order to use the system's graphics and mechanics. The Kit features a landscape builder that can be used to create a separate worldspace from the original game and already created items can be placed and manipulated in the world. The kit uses standard 3D manipulation tools to translate, scale, and rotate objects and characters, and the landscape is modeled and textured using the system (see figure 4.3). Characters are created using the system's character creator.

received a message saying the quest had been completed and showing a pop-up window telling the player that the game was over:

```
Scriptname deathscript extends ObjectReference
```

```
Quest Property TestQuest00 auto
```

```
Event OnDeath(Actor akKiller) if (akKiller == Game.GetPlayer()) Debug.MessageBox("The demon Avalan has been slain and as he dies the voices returned to the people from which he had stolen them! From this day forth, you are no longer known as Cameron the son of Alistair - you are Cameron the Demon Slayer.") TestQuest00.setStage(40) endIf endEvent
```

This script specifies that for the quest called TestQuest, if the actor on which the script is attached is killed by the player, a window shows up with a string output and the stage of the quest is set to 40.

A mod created by JustinOther at the NexusMods webpage was used to stop the system from going into third-person mode when the player killed an NPC with a critical strike. This was done to prevent some participants from going into third-person mode while others may not depending on if the system used the scene¹.

4.2.1 Finished Product

Due to some issues with the chosen game system (see 4.2) the story was slightly altered; instead of the Sage following the player through the valley to the Spirit portal and assisting in killing the obstacles, she stays at her spot and instead offers the player help in the form of a weapon and armor, making the player able to defeat the obstacles in the form of bears and wolves. Instead the Sage meets the player again when he first enters the Spirit World. Problems also arose with the demon Avalan, as it proved too complicated to script his interactions with the player and due to time constrictions the Spirit World challenge was made to let the player have to kill three of his own demons before facing Avalan. The ending with the Sage leading the player back to the village could not be finished in time and ended by being a pop-up window telling the player that he had won. An intro was not made either, resulting in the player having to read about the character and the background story before game start (see figure 4.4).

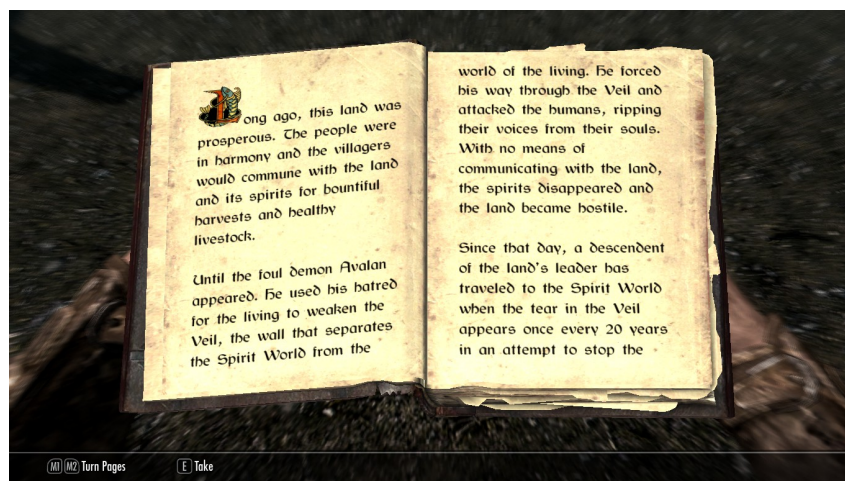


Figure 4.4: A screen shot of the book the player must read about the background story for the game.

The book tells the player to go to the south of the valley to the old Sage. When the player closes the book, he is standing in the village and upon walking out the villagers stand by the gate to see the player

¹The mod was obtained from <http://www.nexusmods.com/skyrim/mods/33/>

off. The village is kept in earth colors to make it seem less lively and the stone walls are broken. Outside the village walls a ruined farm with dead horses and a broken breakwater is encountered along with a dead tree to show the effect of losing the voices. The player must travel through a short ravine and into the valley which is more properous with grass and trees. Two bears block the west and north of the valley to stop the player from entering the Spirit World before time and use revisiting. When traveling south the player comes to an old shrine on a hill with big torches and the Sage's tent.



Figure 4.5: The Sage while giving the quest-monologue to the player.

The Sage sits on a chair outside the tent and will initiate a monologue when the player interacts with her whereafter she gives out the quest and tells the player that she will meet him in the Spirit World and that the player can take the equipment found in a chest by the tent, which contains armor and a sword to allow the player to defeat the bears blocking the path north. Upon entering the tear in the world the player is automatically transported to the Spirit World and where the Sage is waiting. As mentioned above, the player has to kill three demons before getting to Avalan; the world map was changed to fit the new quest structure, as can be seen in figure 4.6.

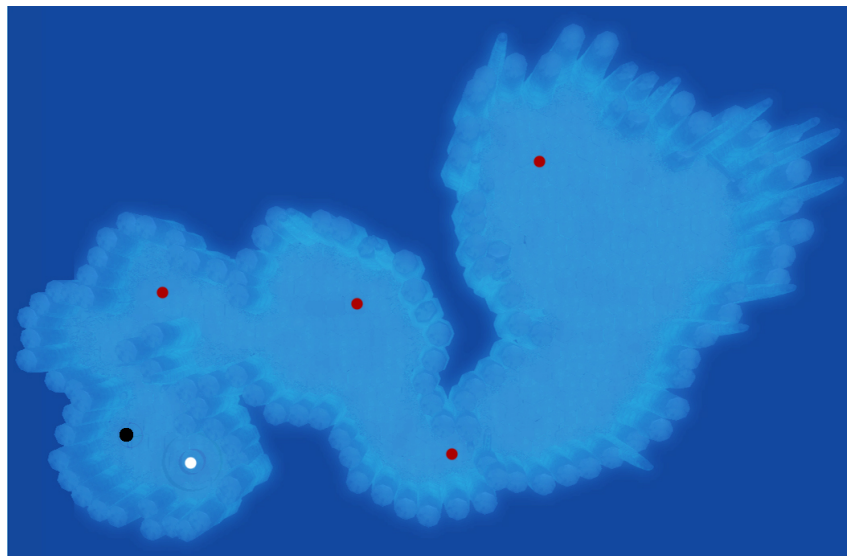


Figure 4.6: The final map of the Spirit World - red shows enemies, black shows the Sage and white shows where the player spawns.

The player encounters four enemies in the Spirit World: Anger, Fear, Pride, and Avalan. Different preprogrammed AIs were used to make for different fighting styles. Anger was created using the standard Flame Atronach attack style which makes it a long-ranged enemy. Fear was set to be cowardly to run away from the player and attack in instances and Pride was set to hit unarmed. Each of the three demons has an item for the player that the player must equip to be able to kill Avalan, being a necklace, a sword and a shield named after the counterparts of the demons names (Calmness, Courage, and Compassion). Avalan was set to attack the player head on and block some of the incoming attacks from the player in order to make him hard to defeat. After killing Avalan, the player is presented with a pop-up window telling what happens after the demon dies (see figure 4.8).



Figure 4.7: The four demons encountered in the Spirit World (from upper left to lower right: Anger, Fear, Pride, and Avalan).

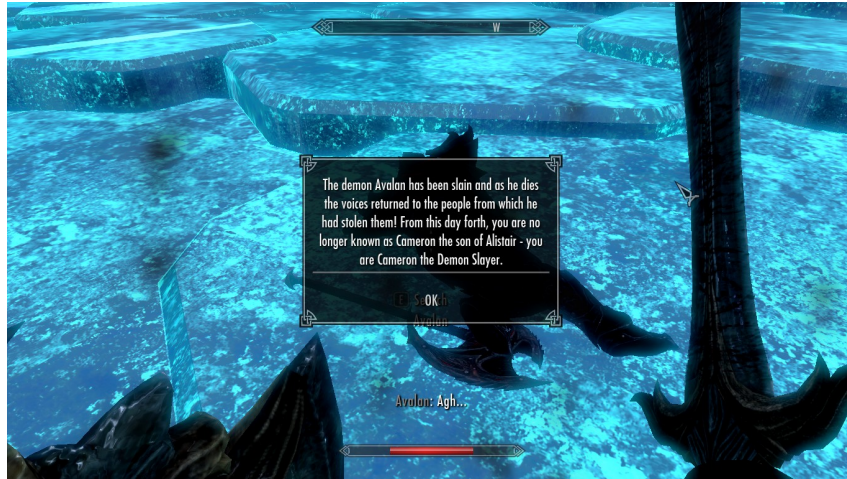


Figure 4.8: The ending to the game.

Chapter 5

Testing Method

This test aims to explicate if there are perceived differences in the player-character position dependent on point-of-view while playing. It is hypothesized that a first-person perspective will induce a lack of character identity, thereby either letting the player substitute himself for the character or use the character without relating to it as a person.

Shaw [2013] requests in her article more studies that take on a qualitative approach as these are sparse in game research. In both her studies Shaw uses the approach of the 'gaming interview' as explained by Schott and Horrell [2000] due to the ability to look into identification during exposure, as is advocated by Cohen [2001] since identification only happens during this time. In the studies by Schott and Horrell and Shaw [2013] the interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants and in the study by Shaw [2011] interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants when possible and else in another location. This was in all three studies done to get a more '*play like*' atmosphere and Schott and Horrell explains that interviews were more conducted like conversations between the present people. In her studies, Shaw [2011] spoke with the participants *"about the game, what they were thinking during certain periods of play, where they saw themselves in relation to the character, and what they liked or did not like about the game"*. Due to finding that many studies weren't, according to her, looking into actual identification, Shaw [2011] chose to let the participants themselves define identification with a game character. Using the suggested items for measuring identification (see Cohen, 2001) would also be problematic for testing identification in games; questions such as *"While viewing the program, I wanted character X to succeed in achieving his or her goals"* or *"When character X succeeded I felt joy, but when he or she failed, I was sad"* considering that often the goal of the game is the goal of the character and therefore is a goal enforced on the player by the game, and Shaw reported that Cohen's questions were better at indicating that a game was good rather than indicating identification. While Shaw chose to use the game interview in order to question the participants on their identification with the character while playing, it is possible that letting the player first experience the relation with the game and the character and then talking with them could prove more beneficial:

Cohen [2001] states that though identification only happens during exposure, audience members may not be aware that they are identifying with the character at that point but may still be aware of their absorption into the media and assess to what degree they identified with the character. Identification is also explained as a lack of self-awareness, and I therefore put into question if interrupting the player and asking into *his* or *her* feelings during exposure can hinder the identification process in a short-term play experience. Shaw had asked her participants to choose games in advance or had the option to choose between an array of games, and games may have been chosen based on pre-conceived notions

of affordances and have been evaluated ahead of time, and it can be seen from citations in the paper that some players had played their games before and therefore may have learned about the character beforehand. The testing scenario in this report is based on a first-time experience in order to not let some participants have a bigger knowledge of the character, as it was mentioned by a participant in a focus group that already established characters did not need to be explicated due to the player already knowing them and possibly affecting the grounds for obtained player-character positions. The research question aims to see if only some of the positions explained in third-person games are obtained in first-person games to investigate how the Game Trigger View affects it. As the data gathered mainly centers on the third-person perspective, the interview should not force participants into the pre-established positions in case the view-point may substantially alter the perceived position of the player. Therefore the interview conducted here to gain information on how the player responds to first-person characters as a semi-structured interview taking place directly after exposure rather than a structured interview to allow for new positions to emerge.

5.1 Interview Method

The semi-structured interview is constructed with an interview guide for pre-made open-ended questions. The guide used can both have questions phrased to be read directly to the participant or simply have topics which the interviewer wish to cover. The advantage of the semi-structured approach is that it must not be strictly followed and the interviewer can use probes to make the participant expand on the previous question Given [2008]. Interviews can be unstructured with the interviewer starting off with quite vague questions thereby not letting the participant in on a certain direction, such as "what is it like being a gamer". The interviewer can use a more unstructured approach and go on to more structured questions afterwards.

In order to keep the interview open in the beginning to account for different types of player positions it was decided to incorporate a more unstructured question into the semi-structured framework which would allow for the participant to explain their relation to the character without being imposed the categories found in the Analysis. In a previous project on player-character identification, I used a drawing depicting the outline of the character in a questionnaire in order to let participants try and draw where they perceived themselves compared to the character and illustrate their relation to it. In the previous investigation interesting trends could be found of participants drawing eyes and dots outside the character to symbolize being outside the character and brain and heart to symbolize feeling as the character during play [Schandel, 2013]. The first study was a 2D game using a cartoonish character. In order to better reflect the character used in the current game, the outline is here more proportional to the actual human body. A comparison can be seen in figure 5.1¹. While the original outline was used for a questionnaire, the outline in this test is used as a tool for the participants to better illustrate their position and help for the interview, though the drawings will be evaluated to see if they themselves can give information to the discussion on the validity of the player-character position model.

¹Outline from: <http://medicalanatomy.net/outline-human-body/outline-human-body-895/>

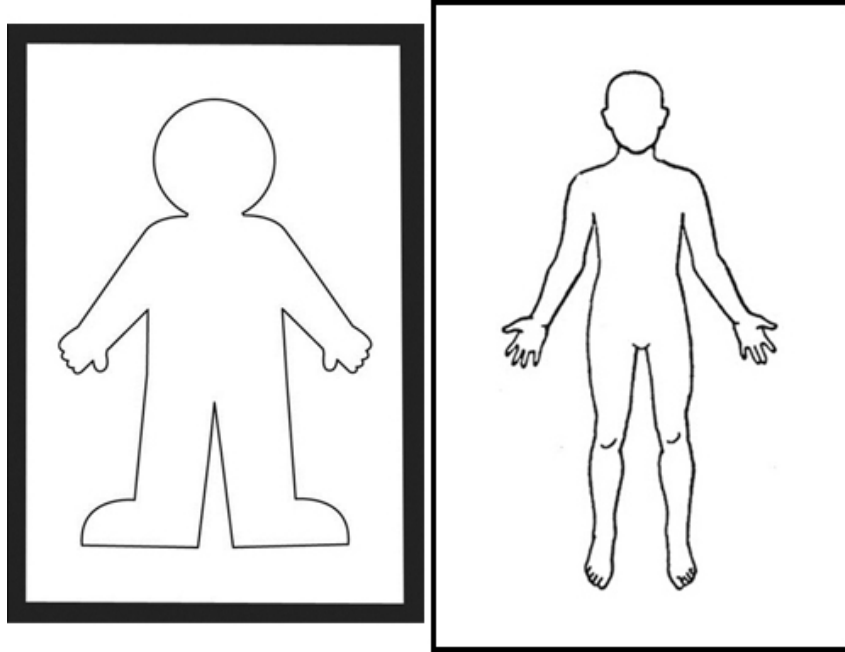


Figure 5.1: The outline of the character used in the questionnaire (left) and the outline used in this interview (right).

It was mentioned by some participants in the focus group interview that opposite genders between player and character could affect the position of the player. If the research question should hold true and that players therefore will either take a very distanced or very personal position to the character, it is considered best to only use male participants to avoid using participants who are due to gender biased towards one position.

5.1.1 The Interview

The interviews were conducted at the Copenhagen Campus of Aalborg University with a section shielded off for the participants to play the game in without observation and an adjacent section for the interview to take place in. All participants played on a laptop with external mouse and a headset to cancel out possible noise from the surroundings. The participants were first asked questions about age and game playing habits and were hereafter asked to read the controls for the game. Participants were reminded that though the system was created using the Bethesda engine it was not the Skyrim story. Due to missing an introduction video, participants were asked to look at a picture of the character Cameron and to read a description adding information about the character. Participants were allowed to keep the play instructions while playing, but not the character paper so participants could not use it to remind themselves of the character's appearance while playing. Participants were told to play the game for as long as they liked, though the game should take around 15 minutes to complete. Should they have questions the interviewer was played on the other side of the room dividers. After having played the game, participants were asked to sit by another table for the interview, where the audio was recorded using a camera. The original intent of the project was to structure between-group interviews in order to record differences between participant statements, but due to a lack of time only the first-person perspective was tested to investigate the range of positions that could be registered.

5.1.2 Interview Guide

An interview guide was written with fully phrased questions, though the phrases were not followed explicitly during the interview. Firstly participants were asked what they liked and did not like about the game to evaluate if participants generally liked the experience. Afterwards participants were asked to use the outline explained above, where they could use four differently colored pens and asked to illustrate their relation with the character and their position during play using as many colors as they wished and drawing anywhere on the paper that they saw fit to explain themselves. The interviewer would ask questions about what the participant had drawn and what it meant, using an unstructured approach. Using the outline drawings, explicating questions were asked about how close the participant felt to the character while playing and if there were instances in the game where he felt like the character. The difference between identification and projection was phrased using the phrases used by some participants about the difference in the "player being the character" versus the "character being the player", and if the participant had priorly indicated no such relation, they were asked more directly into how they felt about the character if needed. Participants were also asked what they thought of the role they had been playing and if they found it compelling to take on and if they thought they had any similarities with the character to assess elements of wishful- and similarity identification. Lastly, participants were asked if they felt their relationship changed when they died (where the camera would swap to a third-person view of the character as he is struck down) and when they used the inventory for equipping gear and weapons as well as using potions.

A pre-test was conducted to find errors in the texts and approach, leading to some changes in the explanation of the controls as some functions had been forgotten. The texts used for testing as well as the interview guide can be found as appendix.

Chapter 6

Findings

A semi-purposive sampling was done by selecting medialogy students at the Copenhagen campus of Aalborg University, as it was considered that many of these students play computer games. 10 males between the age of 19 and 28 with a mean age of 24.3 were found and played a minimum of 10 minutes and afterwards participated in the interviews. Eight out of 10 participants completed the game and two stopped due to giving up on the final enemy.

6.1 Player-Character Positions

During the interview, many ways to explain the relation between participants and the character were used. The research question looked to see if only two positions could be obtained in the first-person view based on the remarks from some participants in the focus groups and from theories stating that the representation of the character is necessary for the identification process to take place. How participants explained their position both through drawing and words have been described and analyzed below.

Controlling the character

Instances of the participants stating to control the character was found in several interviews. Two participants (P3 and P9) used the explanation of puppeteering and P4 used the character outline to show a skeleton equivalent to the one used in 3D animation programs and a pair of Google glasses as his way of controlling the character. Furthermore P3 drew an angel and a demon, and while these could seem like helpers of the character, the participant explained that it was the angel and demon making the character kill one of the Sage's chickens even though P3 knew that the character would have not done so if the character himself was in control. P2 explained that in the beginning due to having to get into the game he first felt his relation to the character as if the character was a *mecha-suit* and himself as the pilot, but after having gotten used to the controls he perceived the character as being a representation of himself. The notion of representation was discussed during the interview, and the participant agree that the representation was more a matter of the "character being him", rather than "him being the character". This way of explaining the difference was used by the interviewer in many of the interviews, and it helped to separate those participants who explained a relation closer to a form of Identification from those stating that they did not feel like the character. P5 drew a marker below the outline's head to signify that he was inside the character, but only in regards to controlling the character's body and not his mind, as it was another part of the character that could think and feel and describes him and the character as separated. P10 also described a separated relation, but while drawing his place in the outline in the head to explain that in the game is was the participant's mind in the character's body, making

him in control of the character's decisions. While P10 says that he felt he knew what the character wanted he did not care for it and therefore chose actions based solely on what he would do. The notion of making the character do something "against his will" illustrates the distance taken by the participants and thereby making them Users rather than Helpers.

Viewing and Helping

Two participants explained their relation to the character as a matter of viewing the character. P7 explained his relation as "journeying on the back of the character" and being "*right next to the character, even though it's first person*" where he would follow the character. P8 explained that he perceived the experience as being presented with a representation of the character's experience and watching his story and also indicated a lack of controls. He however still perceived himself as inside the character, but not *as* the character. On the outline he drew a red circle around the character's neck, engulfing the lower part of the head and upper part of the chest. When asked, this marking was both a matter of not perceiving the camera as being up by the character's eyes, but also as where he felt he were inside the character psychologically. P8 indicated feeling sympathy rather than being close with the character and helping him. P1 remarked that when learning the inventory system he was using the items and helping the character.

Towards Identification?

The first participant (P1) explained a relation where he felt as the character while playing and especially in battle as a 'shared personality'. His drawing circles the brain to show the use of logic and a heart to display that he felt emotions towards the NPCs in the game. The hands were marked to show that he felt as if he was the one holding the weapons and even feeling their weight. The interview revealed an instance during his gameplay that matches the projective identity as explained by Gee; by accident, P1 killed one of the chickens by the Sage. P1 explained that if it had just been him killing it it would not have mattered, but he became affected by it because it was wrong of the character to kill the Sage's chicken. The participant explained that he felt like the character having "his history in his head" and stating that he was the character. Upon dying he said that it was weird to see himself dying. Another participant, P6, also explained a relation of being the character, pertaining to "taking the character's viewpoint" and also says to "take the character's history upon him". Both these participants described feeling sympathy towards the mute villagers and that they made the participants feel they had a responsibility to help them. How the participants explaining taking on the stories of the character and feeling a responsibility for the villagers together with attesting to *being* the character suggest identification.

The Symbiosis and Projective Identification

Some of the participants (P1, P2, P4, and P5) remarked a mutual relation between themselves and the character where phrased along the line of 'he is me and I am him' showed a form of inseparable togetherness that was not registered in the focus groups when discussing the third person character. Blending one's own and the character's emotions together was also mentioned. During gameplay some participants also tried to impose their own playing styles onto the character, such as trying to sneak or using two swords instead of a sword and a shield. This could relate to the Projective Identification as explained by some participants in a focus group, where they would put their own person into the "spare room" of the character and also relates to Gee about projecting their own wishes as to how the character is played.

Forgetting the Character

Instances of the participant forgetting the character happened for three participants; P10 generally saw himself as controlling the mind of the character but sometimes during conversation the character would 'disappear', meaning that the participant forgot about the character being there and felt like the NPC was talking to him as a person. He also noted that the character disappeared when using the inventory menu thereby making it more like equipping and improving himself.

In one of the focus group interviews, a participant noted that in FarCry 3 he experienced that the character he played (which was explained as "his own") was different from the one he saw in the cutscenes. The same was explained by P4, as he did not perceive the character to have own emotions and therefore put his own into it and thereby 'creating' a character that was not the one he was presented with and who he explained could really be anyone while also attesting to the character being him.

The Character Role

Participants were asked about the appeal of the role and if they perceived similarities with the character. Most participants answered no to having similarities and others described being the opposite of the character, seeing themselves more as not having to act out of duty or being more akin to an anti-hero or even a villain. The role of the character was not very sought after either. The role was perceived as unintelligent, with too much responsibility, and too 'played out'. The two participants responding that they felt like the character both noted the role as appealing, whereas the other participants had reservations towards it. This suggests that wishful identification is positively related to the position in regards to identification. The same two participants did not note differences in similarity but did not confirm it either, as both focused on the experience of being the character.

6.1.1 Shifting Positions

The interviews revealed that some participants moved positions for various reasons; a participant explaining that he was the character during play viewed himself and the character as two separate beings when using the inventory menu, and giving the character gear was like using a doll. Another explained that in battle health potions were for him while when outside of combat the potions were for the character and yet another explained that when being in conversations and in the inventory menu he could forget the character and therefore felt like it was him as a person that was being talked to. Though participants didn't indicate it as something that shifted their position, two participants stated that after the character having died once they lost value. Though all participants dies during play, only the two explained a change of any sort for the revived character.

Some participants indicated a shift happening or feeling closer to the character in battle rather than when walking around. One participant used the term of flow and explained going out of the character when bored, where another used the suit-analogy until he had learned the controls. P7 explains that action makes the character and player closer. A participant mentioned that the reason for not changing his view on the relation while using the inventory was a matter of suspense of disbelief, while other noted shifting due to the interface either because it caused a disruption in the immersion and others stating that it was more like equipping themselves due to easier forgetting the character.

6.1.2 Seeing the Character

During the test, participants were first introduced to a portrait of the character and the game would go into a third person view when the character died. Some participants commented on how seeing the character here had affected their relation; P7 notes that not knowing what a character looks like creates

a detachment and that the introduction paper had helped in being less detached (though still feeling like a follower due to the character being pre-defined). P10 responded with the opposite remark that knowing what the character looked like had created a bigger distance between him and the character. P8 noted that seeing the character die did not change his relation to the character, but he believes that playing the entire game in a third-person perspective would have made him feel different about the character, though he did not know how. P6 admitted to using the armor representation in the inventory as a way to connect with the character, as he could get a bodily representation of the character by knowing what he was wearing. P4 noted that when seeing the character die he felt more attached to the character due to there having something to relate to beside arms.

Chapter 7

Discussion

In the Discussion we will look at the results gathered from the interviews and compare them to the Player-Character Position model having been constructed in the Analysis as well as evaluate the approach and the game for biases.

7.1 Evaluation of Data

The User, the Viewer and Identification were found as positions for all participants and their statements matches those explained in the Analysis.

The projective identity has by Gee [2003] and Waggoner [2009] been explained in relation to self-created characters and has not received much discussion for the non-roleplaying game where the player has control over what choices to make and who the character should be and using own traits in the creation of the character. For preset characters Gee only quickly mentions that the effect should express itself by the player evaluating if his performance was worthy of how the character should have performed, though it in the model is also used as explaining a character where personality traits had been added by the player when there were "empty spaces", which with enough lack of personality (or when created from the bottom) could be seen as a projection of the player's person into the character and both explain a monadic position that is fitted to match what the player wants the character to be. The symbiosis experienced was both mentioned by a participant attesting to being the character, one who thought of the character more in regards as a representation of himself in the world, one creating a 'player-character' that overwrote the original character, and one who perceived himself as only being in control of the body. While blending in one's own traits and emotions can be related to the projective identification as explained in the model, it is questionable whether the inseparable connection between the player and character can be solely attributed to the same position; Gee explains part of the projective identity as an identity *onto which the player has projected his values and desires*. While this can explain what happens when participants merge their own feelings into the character or try to use other weapons than what was intended from the game, it doesn't as such explain a relation in which the player and character become one. In compliance with psychoanalysis the projective identification is one where the trait(s) of the player is put onto the character and *then* identified with rather than a feeling of blending the two together. It is here unclear if this is because the projective identification and the symbiosis explained by the participants is the same or if the two are actually different from each other. This is also in conjunction with players saying that the character being them was more a matter of forgetting the character or using the character as a representation rather than having put all their traits onto the character. This form of projection was explained by P2 when he told that when spending much time with his MMO characters he could go

from them representing him to him being them. The reason P2 was categorized as having a User-position rather than a Projection-position was due to him stating that he and the character weren't very close and that he was only familiar with who he was. Further investigations into how players explain their relation with the same character in a third-person view may reveal if there are differences and if it in the end could lead to two different models depending on view, where the third-person model includes projective identification and projection and where the first-person model includes projective identification or symbiosis together with substitution.

7.2 Evaluation of Procedure

Using the method of employing the interview after the gameplay session did not seem to make it difficult for the participants to recall how they felt in relation to the character. However, participants seemed to have more trouble describing their relation than had been found in the focus groups. Whether this was an effect of the interview method is not clear, but it was observed that the outline method was not a helpful tool for all participants seeing that some marked the areas they controlled and then did not know what to draw to illustrate their relation. A more indepth investigation into the first-person relation should have been conducted to try and find codes that could help explain the symbiosis and the substitution better, and starting with looking into the third-person relation could possibly have given better data which could have then been compared to a more thorough comparison to the first-person game.

7.3 Evaluation of Game

The system used for the game employs a fast way to create a game allowing for both first- and third-person view as well as using the system's code and assets to construct a game world. However, the system proved to be more difficult to master than originally thought, leading to changes in the game that no doubt has affected the game experience of the players and therefore may quite possibly have affected the experienced positions; the system itself is quite capable of creating cutscenes which could have been used for both an introduction and an ending video to negate the need for introduction texts and having to show the character on a piece of paper rather than in-game, thereby better simulating a true game experience. As the Skyrim game is an RPG, some of the game elements could not be removed. The leveling system employed is constructed to give the player experience points as he progresses through the game and attributing so-called 'perks' which can be used to alter the character into different fighting styles and with special abilities. Several participants had played Skyrim before and knew the concept of the original game, but the fact that the system is build for creating one's own character may have affected the positions as well: Some participants tried to use the game to match how they preferred to play Skyrim (like sneaking and using different weapons) thereby attempting to form the gameplay after their knowledge of what was possible to do which would not have been possible with a specially made game that would have prevented the player from using the system in an unintended way. The use of the inventory was by some also noted as being familiar and some commented on how the environment looked compared to the Skyrim game. It may also be that some participants have been more focused on knowing that one normally can create their own character and therefore have kept that in mind when playing, as two of the participants focused on the fact that they had been given a predefined character rather than making their own, though it is not known if the same concern would have appeared in a game not using an RP engine as one noted only playing RPGs while the other also noted the action-adventure genre.

Though the character had been designed to have a character diamond, most information on him was

showed through text. Some participants stated that he didn't show emotions and could have used an inner monologue, thereby making the character appear flat to some participants which due to the lack of perceived personality may have made identification harder.

Chapter 8

Conclusion and Future Perspectives

This report used a grounded theory approach in order to investigate the relations that computer game players obtain with the pre-defined characters they play. Using data from a game forum and focus group interviews data was coded and a model for the Player-Character Position was constructed to illustrate the complicated relations that arise due to the player being affected both by the character and the game system. A game was constructed that could test both the third- and first-person perspective and compare them to the model, though so far only the first-person relation has been investigated using the game.

After the first investigations into the Player-Character Relation a research question was constructed asking in to the validity of first-person games being able to facilitate as many positions as the third-person view, as it was indicated by some participants and theorists that the first-person view would force the player into a position of either some using the character or substituting themselves with the character, thereby making it impossible for the player to identify with the character in the game.

Through inductive research employed through semi-structured interviews, it was found that players of first-person games view themselves as users who control the character, help or follow the character, and also identifies with the character, thereby indicating that the first-person view allows for some of the same positions as the model depicts. However, further investigation into the participants perceived symbiosis with the character need to be further investigated to validate if what they described pertains to a form of projection or if the lack of character view affects the player in a way where this process differs. The fact that player-character positions are not stable but move depending on the game system's output could be seen in the statements by the participants as well. Thereby some of the theory for the player-character positions seems valid, but of course need further testing to ensure its validity.

This report has only started on unraveling the relations between the player and character and still needs new insight and research to expand on the theory and possibly find measures whereby one can test the positions in the future. If this model can be refined and at a point adequately depict the relations obtained in games with pre-defined character it could possibly benefit future studies understanding the player. Future studies should however also take the player into regard as a separate category, as it is possible that some players due to biological deficits in for example people with autism spectrum disorder, who have been found to have problems with empathy and thereby may not be able to reach a state of identification.

The model may in time also prove valid as a tool for designers of both entertainment and serious games to decide how best to construct the game and character depending on the relation that one wishes to evoke. As of now, a new play session using the same game in a third-person view has already been scheduled and the results and evaluation with a comparison to the first-person data will be presented at my exam in

June 2014.

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You play Cameron, a warrior descending from the village leaders throughout time. All your life you have been revered as the son of Alistair, the village's last leader. You have been trained in combat and the village people look up to you as you carry the blood believed to slay the demon Avalan, who ripped the voices from the humans and made them incapable of speak or communing with the spirits of the wild. It is believed that only the sons of the leader first entering the Spirit World are capable of killing the demon and restoring the voices. As the oldest son that task now falls to you, and you are eager to avenge the death of your father after 20 years of grief.

How to play

Controls: Navigating the mouse lets you move the camera and the direction your character is walking in. You use **W**, **A**, **S**, and **D** to make the character move FORWARD, LEFT, BACKWARDS, and RIGHT. In order to SPRINT you hold down **left ALT** while moving – sprinting can only be done for a limited while and is displayed as a green bar in the lower right corner of the screen. When not sprinting the bar replenishes. Jumping is done using SPACE.

A crosshair is placed in the middle of the screen. In order to pick up items or open chests, move the camera so the crosshair touches the object and click **E** – this will also be displayed on the screen. The same is done for talking with characters. The inventory can be accessed by clicking **I** and can be navigated using both the mouse pointer or W, A, S, D. As you constantly get new equipment, it is important to remember to take items from chests and enemies that you kill. New items are equipped by finding them in the inventory and pressing **E**.

When encountering an enemy, left-clicking with the mouse makes the character attack. To block and enemy, press and hold the right mouse-button. The character can move around while fighting. Beware of your **health**, which is displayed by a red bar in the bottom of the screen. If your health drops you die and must restart from the last save. To **quicksave**, press **F5** – you are allowed to quicksave as often as you wish. Potions can be used to restore your health when they are acquired. To use a potion, press **I** and select Potions in the menu. You can exit the menu by pressing **ESC**.

Please keep the game in First-Person mode at all times! Please don't touch the mouse-wheel unless it is to put the camera mode back into first-person view.

The game ends when a pop-up window appears after having killed the last enemy. Please contact the interviewer when this happens.

Interview

Before playing:

How old are you: _____ Gender: _____

How often do you play video- and computer games on average:

What games do you typically play?

Genres:

Titles:

Interview

Afterplaying:

Where there things you liked about the game:

Were there things you didn't like:

Outline notes:

“This is an outline of the character Cameron that you played in the game. Please use this to illustrate your relation to the character while playing. You are free to use as many different colors and draw wherever you see fit on the paper to explain it.”

Why did you draw as you did?

[illegible]

To be used with the outline:

How close did you feel with the character:

Would you say that you were the character? How would you describe being the character and what do you think made you feel that way? Would you say that the character was you? Were you neither:

What did you think of the role of the character? Is it one you liked or felt enjoyable to undertake/be:

Were there any similarities between you and the character:

Did you ever die or have to use potions?

How did you relate to the character when you died/had to use the interface:
