

PWNED:¹ Motivation of South Koreans Who Engage in Person vs. Person Gameplay in World of Warcraft

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the two most prominent theories regarding the motivations for South Koreans to engage in player vs. player gameplay in Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games. The data collection process consisted of an ethnographic approach with the researcher immersing himself in World of Warcraft player vs. player gameplay to observe and interview gamers over the course of a year. Results showed that while interviewees displayed motivations that could be considered as psychopathic, the majority of player vs. player motivation stemmed from the innate need of players to validate their masculinity through violence.

Keywords

South Korea, Player vs. Player, Motivation, Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game, Violence, Masculinity

INTRODUCTION

“Blizzard Executive A about a player who is going around killing numbers of other players: What kind of person would do this?”

Blizzard Executive B: Only one kind, whoever this person is has played WOW nearly every hour of every day for the past year and a half. Gentlemen, we are dealing with someone here who has absolutely no life.

Blizzard Executive C: How do you kill that which has no life?”

South Park, with its stark, ‘equal-opportunistic’ satirical commentary on international political and social landscapes, despite being full of vulgarities, portrays here through ‘fictitious Blizzard employees’ an accurate social commentary on the media’s negative depiction of player vs. player gamers (Henceforth PVPers). Even though proven largely

Proceedings of DiGRA Nordic 2012 Conference: Local and Global – Games in Culture and Society.

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otherwise in the academic sphere, these MMORPG gamers in America often live with the negative stereotypes spread by both popular and news media (Williams, Yee and Caplan, 2008). The MMORPG gamers in South Korea, neglecting their professions, schoolwork, personal relationships, and health even to the point of death (BBC Report, 2007), face the same stereotypes as their American counterparts. Concerned parent and political groups as well as academics from around the world have set their sights on PVP gaming, preaching their anti-game violence dogma, positing theories that interactive media violence leads to tendencies towards offline emotional and physical violence, in addition to psychopathic behavior (Bandura, 1994; Sherry, 2001; An, 2006; Bak, 2007; Wiengartner, 2011;). As a result, PVP gamers in Korea have been amalgamated into a simplistic psychopathic archetype of being motivated only by the desire to kill.

Offering an alternative motivation for PVP gameplay, Bartle (2003) proposed that PVP was merely done “for sport.” He observed this when the ‘lone wolf’ PVPers he observed grouped together on occasion to engage in what he described as consensual, rule-bound and sport-like combat.

This research attempts to discover to what extent these two theories behind PVP gameplay motivation in Korea are valid. It begins by analyzing the first theory which posits that PVP games are “Murder Simulators/Trainers” (Grossman, 1999) that appeal to and cultivate psychopathic gamers whose sole motivation is the ‘griefing’ (Bartle, 1996), domination and deprivation of their victims. Next, it will analyze the second theory proposed by Bartle (2003) that the motivation for players to engage in PVP gaming is “for sport.” Building on this premise through feminist sports theory (Messner, 1990), it determines if violent PVP gaming in Korea can be defined as a sport in the context of the role it plays as an expression of masculinity in the unique Korean social gender narrative that PVPers inhabit. Next, it explains the ethnographic research method utilized that consisted of participation, direct observation, discussions, and formal/informal interviews with Korean PVPers. Lastly, it will conclude with a critical analysis of the data and findings, and discuss the possibilities for future research.

Psychopathically Motivated PVP

At the heart of this theory, based on the premise that gamers play violent games either with innate violent tendencies (Williams and Skoric, 2005) or adapt violent tendencies through the influence of violent games (Grossman, 1999; An, 2006, Bak, 2007), there is one universal truth: PVP gameplay is the virtual act of dominating or evoking pain and despair in others, and ultimately taking another human’s life. In other words, psychologically, it is similar to committing an act of physical/emotional harassment and/or homicide. This raises the question as to how someone in a virtual environment can justify inflicting violent harm and/or killing another person. This section is dedicated to answering this question by analyzing connections between PVP gameplay, harassment and homicidal actions that bring psychological and/or bodily harm to others within the context of antisocial personality disorder theory (Henceforth ASPD).

ASPD was specifically selected for this comparison as it is the disorder most commonly associated with serial killers (Johnson and Becker, 1997). The significance of this lies in the fact that the majority of PVP gameplay in World of Warcraft (as well as other MMORPGs) takes place in multiplayer settings, meaning that each PVPper kills/aids in the killing of a great number of people in much the same way a serial killer would. If PVP gameplay is indeed driven by ASPD, then it should share some common features. The

following is a comparison of individuals with ASPD and PVPers in regards to their motivations and characteristics.

Gudjonsson and Sigurdsson (2004) were able to discover through their “Offending Motivation Questionnaire” that individuals with ASPD who inflicted violence with the intent of physical or emotional harm were motivated by *excitement, provocation and financial factors*.

ASPD, often referred to synonymously with psychopathic disorder, is defined by the American Psychological Association (1994) as:

- Acting with little or no regard for the health, safety, or rights of oneself and others
- Lacking empathy, regret, shame and guilt
- Committing acts of violence against others with no remorse, often able to rationalize the injuring and mistreatment of others
- Often displaying aggressiveness and irritability

In much the same way as Gudjonsson and Sigurdsson analyzed the motivations of offenders with ASPD, Yee (2006) analyzed the motivations of MMORPG gamers, PVPers among them. Yee initially identified PVPers’ motivations as manipulative, alluding to their desire to manipulate others for their own enjoyment. However, in more recent studies, Yee elaborated on the manipulative motivation and expanded it to include *competition, provocation and domination*.

PVP gamers are defined as individuals who:

- “Enjoy deceiving, scamming, taunting and dominating other users” and are “inclined [...] to objectify other users and manipulate them for [their] personal gains and satisfaction. (Yee, 2006)
- Impose themselves on others, attain an exponential amount of joy depending on the amount of distress they cause others, and relish in knowing that “a real person, somewhere, is very upset by what [the PVPPer has] just done, yet can themselves do nothing about it” (Bartle, 1996).
- Have a “desire to annoy and exploit other players,” and “will do whatever is necessary to “get a rise” out of others, be it abusive language, team killing, corpse humping, corpse or spawn camping, begging, scams and/or ninja looting” (Seay, 2006).

In conclusion, PVP gameplay and ASPD, in the context of violent behavior, are similar in two ways. First is their motivation for provocation, which is significant as the majority of both their characteristics are related with the act of provoking their victim. Second is their lack of consideration for others, showing no shame, regret or guilt for the violence they inflict onto others, whether it is real life physical/verbal/sexual harassment or in-game verbal/sexual harassment (such as corpse humping/tea-bagging).

Sport and Masculinity Validation Motivated PVP

The concept of “sport” on the surface is extremely broad, covering everything from a broad range of “[activities] undertaken for pleasure” to specific activities “[which require] physical effort or skill, usually carried out in a special area in accordance with fixed rules”

(Oxford Online English Dictionary, 2012). However, underneath this simplistic exterior, Messner (1990) proposes that sport has an ulterior motive in which it is used as a tool by men to “support male dominance through the exclusion of females, [sanction the] use of force and aggression,” (94) and construct a masculine hegemony to validate their masculinity. This section builds on Messner’s premise in order to determine the motivations behind PVP gameplay: first, it will determine whether e-Sports are being used to marginalize women and establish male dominance in Korea, and second, it will explore how Korean PVPers validate their masculinity through their engagement in e-Sports.

In his analysis of the Korean cyber sports industry, Jin (2010, 90) discovered that despite growing numbers of female participants, e-Sports is, and continues to be, male dominated. He offers three explanations for this. First, he proposed that female players cannot endure the intense training that male gamers undergo and are thus rarely selected to join pro gamer teams. This is a stereotype that seems to stem from the fact that women have not developed the ‘physical and emotional hardiness and discipline’ necessary to succeed on a pro gamer team because of their exemption from the country’s mandatory military service. This makes sense juxtaposed with the marginalization of women upon the emergence of boxing and rugby in the early 1900’s due to their assumed ‘lack of physical strength and aggressiveness’ (Messner, 1990, 94).

Second, Jin proposes that the majority of online games produced in Korea are designed to appeal more to males than females. On the surface, the gaming industry is just responding to supply and demand by producing a greater number of games that appeal to primarily male audiences. However, as Taylor (2008, 57) points out, this also effectually marginalizes female gamers by not producing and supporting games that appeal to them and thus discourages their participation in e-Sports. The Korea e-Sports Association (KeSPA) is a prime example of this, as the majority of games they promote and support are first person shooters, real time strategy games, fighting games and PVP gameplay within MMORPGs, all games that Im (2010,26) revealed to be motivationally attractive almost exclusively to male gamers. Female gamers in Korea, on the other hand, were shown to be motivated by games with less-graphic violence and more socially oriented gameplay like “Maple Story, Kingdom of the Winds, Legends of Darkness, Kartrider and Pokemon.” While the KeSPA has ample opportunity to provide support for more games like “Kartrider” (Nexon, 2004), which is currently the only game it promotes that appeals largely to female gamers, it shows no intention of doing so implying that effort is being made to maintain e-Sport as a male dominated field.

Finally, Jin suggests that male gamers are more valuable as a marketable commodity. He observed this through the way which pro gamer team marketers and the KeSPA portray male gamers, emphasizing their “sexy image” in order to attract many female fans. Male gamers in Korea, in addition to their appeal to the opposite sex, also gain the added benefit of being taken seriously as athletes in regards to their ‘physical abilities.’ These are two factors that work against female pro gamers who first, generally do not fit the ideal ‘Miss Korea’ female profile of a ‘beautiful woman’ i.e. skinny, curvy, feminine (Park, 2009, 51), dainty, soft and timid (particularly so due to their participation in aggressive and violent gameplay), and second, are assumed to be inferior to men (and thus not worth paying attention to) at sports due to a deeply rooted cultural discrimination. While no research has been done yet on the challenges female pro gamers face, their situation can be seen as very similar to the uphill battle that early female golfers faced to

become recognized as athletes (Kim 2011). Kim uncovered that the sexual discrimination and condescension these female golfers wrestled with was so strong that the first wave of them had to leave the country to pursue their training in Japan.

Messner states that violence is used often in sports to prove one's masculinity to others while hiding one's masculine insecurity (1990, 97). In his study on American football athletes, he noted that athletes who establish themselves as aggressive and violent "gain a certain level of status in the community and among peers, thus anchoring (at least temporarily) an otherwise insecure masculine identity." Korean e-Gamers demonstrate this same violence pattern in two major ways:

First, not only do e-Gamers in Korea compete aggressively and violently for the top tier positions in their social groups in order to 'gain a certain level of status,' but also they compete to avoid sinking to the 'lowest level of status,' *id est* being labeled as a 'wang'tta.' Chee (2005, 9), describes 'wang-tta' as the worst gamer among the peers within one's social group. The 'wang-tta' is often ostracized in the same way as insufficiently violent football players, with their inability to compete aggressively and violently—in other words their masculinity—called to question (Messner, 1990, 98).

Second, in the same way as a Messner's football players choose their desired attitudes and physical image to achieve a certain violent, masculine image, gamers choose their character's faction, race and class to satisfy their motivation to be viewed as more physically masculine in-game (Ducheneaut, 2006, 16). In terms of faction, gamers must first choose one of two opposing factions before they create their avatar: the good, peaceful, true (Alliance) or the evil, violent, dishonest (Horde). When making male avatars, Ducheneaut discovered that the majority of users chose to make them on the violent (masculine) Horde side, while the majority of female avatars were made on the peaceful (feminine) Alliance side.

The second factor is race. According to the data, the most popular races by far were human (by a large majority) and night elf, which Ducheneaut claimed was for their aesthetically pleasing features. This may be partially true; however what Ducheneaut failed to recognize is that the human race has the best racial special ability for PVP called "every man for himself,"³. A quick glance at the arena ratings on the Korean or US WOW website will reveal that the majority of the top arena participants on the alliance side are indeed human. Therefore the choice to play humans can be largely attributed to the desire to dominate and be more effective at PVP gameplay. Next, according to Ducheneaut's data, the masculine features of the race chosen plays an important role in determining the gender selected for the avatar. The races with the most male gendered avatars in order from highest to lowest are Dwarves, Tauren, Orcs, Undead, Troll, Gnome, Human and Night Elf. Each race will not be elaborated upon here as they have already been examined in depth by Ritter (2010) save to say that the first five classes listed are known for their masculine features including: violent personality/lore background, large physical size and ultra-masculine and/or intimidating physical features.

The last factor to be discussed is how class choice depends on violent image and masculine attributes. According to Ducheneaut, the most popular classes to make male characters with are, in order from highest to lowest, shaman, warrior, hunter, rogue and mage. All of these classes except mage are played by the highest ratio of male avatars, which is quite telling about the nature of class choice. Warriors are the traditional hyper-

masculine class, wearing heavy armor and featuring skills like battle cries and bleeds. Rogues are symbolized by their tendencies to backstab and commit violent, treacherous acts. Hunters are another violent, “traditionally” male-oriented class (Taylor, 2008, 52) that has symbolic roots—namely the traditional male hunter vs. the female gatherer paradigm. An explanation as to why the shaman is the top selection for male characters is not elaborated upon in any existing western sources, but is explained in the context of Korean PVP later in this research.

In conclusion, the motivations for engaging in e-Sports are not all unlike those for other physically violent sports. The predominantly male population of e-Sports athletes in Korea navigates through a familiar sports narrative, defining and validating their masculinity and protecting the sanctity of their patriarchy by engaging in violent gameplay in arena’s where few females dare to follow, much like the boxers and rugby players of the early 1900’s in America. Efforts are being made either on purpose or unconsciously to limit female participation in e-Sports competition by promoting games of genre’s unfavorable to female audiences. Finally, e-Gamers consciously make choices about their faction, avatar race and class for engaging in e-Sports based on relative levels of perceived masculinity in an attempt to validate their masculinity.

METHODOLOGY:

The Ethnographic Research Approach

I learned through over three years of residing in Korea that the entire society is divided up into social circles. There are those that are only accessible by blood, such as the national or family circles, as well as those which are only accessible through social/economic connections, such as work and school circles. Through my attendance at Yonsei University in Seoul, I was able to enter a dongari (similar to a school club), through my ‘membership’ in the school circle, called Mansa (Manhwa Sarang, or Comic Book Lovers). This dongari contained all of the animation and gaming fanatics at the University.

Upon looking for WOW PVPers in the club for my research, I had the great fortune to meet a student named JeongSeong Park who introduced himself as ‘Ian.’ Ian is fluent in English and is currently one of the top ranking PVP players in both rated battle grounds as well as rated arena gameplay in Korea. Through him, I was able to not only gain contact privileges with WOW PVP gamers all across the country, but also a valuable colleague who assisted with all of the in-game components of the project. Through the “invite a friend” feature of WOW, which allows two players to level up characters with a 300% experience bonus, we were able to manleb (‘many levels up,’ or quickly reaching the maximum level of 85) in a mere three days and proceeded to conduct PVP research soon thereafter.

In order to reduce the margin of error and get the most accurate, yet detailed swatch of data, I collected data in two primary ways over the course of two PVP seasons:³

1. Observation and multiple qualitative in-depth interviews with 10 PVPers, conducted in-person for those residing in Seoul and via web-camera and Skype for those living in other cities across the country.
2. Empirical observation of Korean PVPers in over 100 instances each of random battlegrounds (unorganized battlegrounds where chat and actions of random players could be freely analyzed), rated battlegrounds, as well as 326 and 254 2’s

and 3's arena battles respectively.

I chose to conduct the research on the horde faction side of the Hyjal PVP server, which is the most famous PVP server and home of the top PVPers in Korea.

RESULTS

First Impressions of Korean PVP in WOW: Observing 'Baelyeoshim'

I still remember the frightening occasions back in the days when I played Starcraft when a Korean would enter a game room resulting in everyone leaving the game as fast as they could. The reason for this was Koreans were ridiculously good at electronic games compared with westerners—to the extent that many of us believed that Koreans came out of the womb with a mouse in their hand. To find out what motivated Koreans to become so good at games fascinated me greatly, and thus provided me with the motivation to undertake this project.

Having played an ample amount of WOW on the most famous North American PVP server Tichondrius, I came to the Korean servers as no 'noob' to the game. Even so, the differences between almost every aspect of PVP on Western servers and Korean servers were staggering.

The first big difference that I found was there was no PVPing at any level below 85, the cap. On North American servers, you can join battlegrounds anytime from level 10 onwards, but in Korea that is not the case. The reason for this, explained all of the gamers I asked in confusion throughout the Horde capital city Ogrimmar, was the obligation to observe 'baelyeoshim.' 'Baelyeoshim,' roughly translated, means acting in consideration of those around you to avoid bringing guilt, shame and remorse to yourself and all those connected with you. The importance of 'baelyeoshim' is expressed here by Balad, one of the interviewees:

"In Korea we really care about how others look at us. Parents ask their children to not cause trouble or inconvenience other people. If you inconvenience others people look down on you and your family. People who just play by themselves and do hack and slash in battlegrounds are inconveniencing the other players who actually want to win the game."

In the levels leading up to 85, there is no standard set of gear that everyone can wear. Even at 85, it is uncommon for people with an imperfect PVP set to participate in even basic battlegrounds because to be the weakest member of a team means that you are, in effect, not only sabotaging your team, but your entire faction and all those that fight hard to defend it thus not observing baelyeoshim. To do so invites contempt from other players resulting in being banned from battle grounds, becoming black listed by individual PVPers making one unable to participate in future rated battleground and arenas, and the most deadly of all, being looked down upon—a subject I learned more about later. As Ian describes below, in order to avoid this Koreans engage in PVE gameplay to get justice points, which they then exchange for honor points to buy their gear. It takes far longer than it would just to earn honor points by PVPing in a battleground, but it is a small price to pay to avoid becoming a social outcast.

*"A: Alright, we got level 85, let's go do some battlegrounds!
I: Are you crazy, we will just get kicked out..."*

A: What are you talking about? We need to do battlegrounds to get points so that we can buy PVP gear!

I: In Korea, you have to do PVE and PVP quests in PVE environments to get your PVP gear... if you go in unprepared you're just gonna get banned, noob!

A: Oh my god... that is so lame..."

Despite my being a foreigner, I was scolded on multiple occasions for not observing *baelyeoshim*. My largest offense was going off by myself in a rated battleground to kill a stray player that I saw. On that occasion I was thoroughly reprimanded and reminded that I should never leave the group, as the group has been created in just such a way as to create a perfect dynamic in terms of classes, races, and even the personalities of the players. When I did that, not only was I looked down upon by other players, but Ian was looked down upon as well as he had introduced me to the group. As a foreigner, having people scold me was not a big deal, but for a Korean like Ian who recognizes the importance of '*baelyeoshim*,' it was detrimental. The observation of *baelyeoshim* is quite strict and is not only limited to avoiding cultural faux pas, but also working hard to study the battlegrounds and their strategies as well as memorizing all of the class's abilities to ensure that one does not let down one's teammates. With this in mind, the answer to my lifelong inquiry regarding Koreans magnificent gaming skills started to reveal itself to me.

'Ggalbogi' and Looking Down on People: Psychopathic Motivation

Over the course of the year that I played on the Korean server, I analyzed the behavior of the players in an attempt to find some visual evidence that the motivation of Korean gameplay was, as the two theories I had adopted suggested, driven by psychopathic urges, a need to express and validate one's masculinity or perhaps something else altogether. The first motivation that emerged was related with Psychopathic motivations, and is a concept in Korean called '*ggalbogi*' or '*yatjababoda*,' which means looking down on someone in terms of their status, actions, intelligence or abilities. This is, in essence, a motivation that stems from the psychopathic joy of knowing how much guilt, anger and frustration their win, and subsequent '*ggalbogi*' of the opposing team will incur. '*Ggalbogi*' and '*baelyeoshim*' are symbiotic in nature, and exist as a type of irony within Korean culture. The act of '*Ggalbogi*,' is a violation of '*baelyeoshim*,' yet '*ggalbogi*' only exists because of the innate impossibility for people to always observe '*baelyeoshim*.' The reason for this is simply because no matter how clean your record is or how well you perform, the old adage "you can't please everyone all the time" applies, and thus *baelyeoshim* fails and '*ggalbogi*' ensues.

During my first week of matches in rated battlegrounds in the third week of the PVP season, it became evident just how emotionally intense and detrimental '*ggalbogi*' was as a form of emotional violence. Upon each occasion that my team was defeated, every member was extremely pained with the fact that they had lost. Losing in Korean rated battle grounds was not merely internal turmoil in which emotions often flared with members trying to pin blame on a scapegoat (which was usually a healer), obscenities flying, threats from some to leave the guild and threats from others to ban so-and-so. The key factor that caused the injury to players was that the loss meant that somewhere out there, the opposing team was looking down not only upon us, but effectually our guild, its members, and all those associated with those members. This caused feelings widespread anger, guilt, sadness, frustration and feelings of long-lasting emotional injury throughout the group on every occasion.

This hatred of being looked down upon was revealed by Atsubalkum to have cultural

origins, stemming from Korean parents' high expectations of their children:

B: "No, losing in PVP isn't the only time we feel like this. This is the same feeling we get when we don't get the highest marks on exams, or fail to get into the Universities we want to get into, or fail at job interviews. Our parents don't tell us to do our best, they tell us to do better than others... to not lose to others. Do you know the word omchina?"

A: Never heard of it

B: It is a special word in Korean meaning 'mother's friend's son.' Mothers are always comparing their children with other parents children in Korea. If one child gets into a top University, then our Mother tells us to get in too. If we don't, the other mother looks down on our mother, then our mother will look down on us and be disappointed. That's why it makes us so angry and upset to feel this in PVP as well. That's why we all fight so hard and never enter games with anything but the best gear and memorize so many class skills and strategies."

This opens up another perspective that suggests the while there might be a psychopathic-based joy in the 'ggalbogi' of others, that another major motivation is not winning but rather desperately trying not to lose and make 'wang-tta' (Chee, 2005), which results in a loss of masculinity as well as making one's family lose face. This explains the extreme emotional turmoil that occurs upon losing games, in which players aggressively and desperately push blame upon other players as shown by the PVPPer Hanamu:

"Yah sometimes I really get angry easily like some days when my teammates play really bad and my ratings go down like 200 points... well some days I'm just a Gandhi and say yah it's all good, it's only 200 points, but other days it's like 'you jackasses, I heal you but you can't kill people properly.'

'Meju,' Crowd Control, and Human Pets: Masculinity Validation Motivation

All members on battleground teams were organized by age and were expected to uphold the social order by observing baelyeoshim. This was done primarily by speaking in honorific language to seniors and following their every order to the letter, and by speaking in derogatory language to juniors. Surprisingly, I wasn't very high up on the ladder as there were a number of men in their 30's and 40's among us, and thus I was obliged to show the same respect as the others. There were three major exceptions to the traditional Korean ranking by age: ranking by either PVP proficiency level, crowd control capability and healer status. The former case was fairly rare, as the majority of members on the team in which I belonged had achieved fairly high ranks in previous PVP seasons and thus maintained equality in that sense. However, the latter two cases were quite prominent, and had interesting implications on the dynamics of the masculine hierarchy that existed within our team.

Crowd control in WOW, or 'meju' as it is called in Korean, is the ability for classes with certain skills to stun, paralyze or disorient an opponent so that one can, in a way, 'have their way with them.' In other words, it enables players to engage in a form of forcible rape allowing one to dominate the opponent while simultaneously disabling the opponent's ability to fight back or resist. This ability, as explained by the player Burada below, is coveted by many players:

"When I first started, I wanted to choose a class that has a lot of control so that I can help my teammates win. In WOW, rogue is the premier class for CCing...³ so I made my rogue and never looked back."

The status of a 'healer' in Korea brings a contrasting perspective to the data presented by Ducheneaut profiling the healing role as being feminine. In addition, it also provides an explanation of Ducheneaut's data showing that Shaman, a class that is most popular for its healing abilities, outranks all other classes in terms of its association with masculinity (2006). It was observed throughout this research that healers were the most dominant members of every group due to their god-like presence in every battleground. It is up to the healer whether players on a team live or die, so those players must submit themselves to the demands of the healer in every circumstance, and protect the healer from oncoming enemy assaults. In many cases, healers are at the top of the male hierarchy, referring to other team members as their dogs or pets as an expression their supreme dominance over the other men in their group. The following was quoted from Geoshim who plays a holy paladin, arguably one of the most important healing classes in PVP aside from shamans:

"A: One thing about you is you play healer, which means your role isn't exactly focused on killing

G: Well, I kind of think of my teammates as my pets. I'm like a hunter or warlock who uses his teammates as pets to kill people. So I heal my pet and call my pet and say "kill that fucking guy" and they do, and I say goodjob and give them heals.

A: Heals is a lot of power right?

G: Yah all the other people are my pets, they serve me.

A: There aren't many healers In RBG's right?

G: Yah 3 healers. Everyone has a different role. Priests get rid of CC's. The resto shaman heals me. And the other 7 people have to go kill the dam alliance. Priest is dispel, shaman is my heal pet, and the others are my killing pets, I'm the best, I'm a king."

In all of the rated battle-ground groups, as well as the random battlegrounds that I participated in, the most aggressive and outspoken players usually played one of the five major control classes (rogues, mages, warlocks, balance druids and shadow priests) and/or a healing class. These players, despite their age, typically took on leadership roles directing players (in the case of random battlegrounds, players that they had never even met before) where to go, what to do, and most importantly, who to kill. These players were often 'the boss,' calling the shots and making the big decisions during every battle. This suggested that there was a relationship between playing a controlling/healing class and the extent to which one enjoyed dominating others, whether it was one's teammates via the need for heals or one's enemies via crowd control skills. This alpha-dog need-for-dominance mentality led to a predictable pattern of arguments and conflicts in random battlegrounds, and rarely in rated battlegrounds, in which these controlling players shared opposing views regarding the ideal battle strategy. This is important to note as, in comparison to North American PVP in which all players regardless of class, age or gender engage in regular arguments with other players, Korean players rarely fight even in the worst situations due to the importance of observing 'baelyeoshim.'

While, as noted by Messner (1990) and Sweeney (2007), males tend to express their masculinity through the dominance of females and other men by physical force, Korean males engaging in PVP gameplay express their masculinity by the classes they play. However, the classes are chosen on the basis of their ability to control/dominate other players, not on the symbolically masculine image traditionally associated with the classes as was suggested by Ducheneaut's data in theory two. The fact that through PVP gameplay on WOW players can satisfy their innate need to validate their masculinity by dominating their allies or controlling their enemies, in addition to the fact that it takes a mere three days to level up a character to 85 and another week to get a full PVP gear set,

makes WOW a very attractive game for many young Korean male gamers.

CONCLUSION: SADISM OR INSECURE MASCULINITY?

Through this research, in terms of Korean PVP, it is clear that the media and activists like Grossman have largely misconstrued the personality and motivations of PVP gamers due to their obsessive focus on a couple extreme situations. To a minor extent they were correct about drawing correlations between PVP gaming and psychopathy as ‘ggalbogi’ was found to share similar traits with psychopathy. However, those common traits were not conclusively identical, nor were the number of shared traits significant, implying that ‘ggalbogi’ can only be concluded as partially driven by psychopathic motivations. While the motivation for some players to engage in PVP for the primary purpose of doing ‘ggalbogi’ to others is sadistic, it is clear that it is not to the extent to which we could claim that PVPers have murderous motivations, or identify violent PVP games as “Murder Simulators” as Grossman proposed.

In the 50 years since the Korean war, the mechanics of masculinity remain largely unchanged with ‘boys’ still being subjected to a two year military service that makes them into ‘men,’ at which time they are taught extensively about the relationships between physical violence, power, and masculinity. However, through the extensive influence of western nations women have been continually making advances towards greater equality and social power. The recent emergence of the male-dominated e-Sport appears to be, at least in part, a response to the rise in feminism, bearing a great likeness to the emergence of boxing and rugby that Messner (1990) proposed emerged as a response to the undermining of the “traditional patriarchal power bases” of American society.

The major motivation for Korean males to participate in e-Sports was revealed to be its ease as a medium for the expression and validation of their masculinity through its numerous unique features including: convenient, ubiquitous access features, relative ease to establish a powerful identity (characters and full PVP gear sets attainable within only a week of play-time), and ultimately the instant effortless access to a “social hierarchy where they can engage in [...] collective activity” (Jin, 2010, 130) with others upon whom they can inflict violence, express male dominance and define/validate their masculinity through. In the Korean PVP environment, this violence is inflicted through participation in battles or duals, in which players dominate either their allies with healing abilities, or enemies with control abilities, in addition to the ‘ggalbogi’ of others upon winning.

In the young field of game studies, PVP is a largely unexplored area. As such, there are a number of research opportunities ranging everywhere from PVP’s relationship with feminism (not a single female PVPPer emerged throughout the thousands of players met during this study), race and age demographics, as well as unique cultural explorations such as PVP’s relationship with Korean ‘eolchalyeo’ (revenge culture) that derives from mandatory military participation, stress in Koreans due to their working the world’s longest work hours, and the unique motivations based on the opportunities in Korea to become a pro gamer. I conducted the majority of this research in Korean, and even though I speak the language fluently, there are certain cultural peculiarities that might have slipped me by, meaning that in the future similar research conducted in Korean could uncover more important details. No matter what language research is conducted in, the one thing that is truly clear is that e-Sports in Korea, just like sports in America, are “defined primarily by power, aggression and violence [and are] still, by and large [...]”

constructed actively by and for men” (Messner, 1990).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude for the two reviewers for giving me such great advice and direction. I would also like to thank Ian for his countless hours of help as I acclimatized myself to the Korean WOW interface and protection as I was getting ganked in battlegrounds.

ENDNOTES

1. PWNED: An expression commonly used in PVP which is a play on the word ‘owned,’ which is commonly used to express that one has defeated an opponent, usually by a large margin.
2. Grind: A term referring to leveling up repetitively killing experience yielding targets.
3. This ability allows humans to remove all effects that make them lose control of their characters, essentially giving them a free trinket slot which is a massive advantage in PVP.
4. Two seasons is one entire year, with the Vicious Gladiator Season 9 running from December 14th, 2010 until June 28th, 2011, and the Ruthless Gladiator Season 10 running from July 5th, 2011 until November 15th, 2011. The title of each season is used as a prefix on all PVP-purpose weapons and armor released for that season.

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