



Designing for Sociability in Virtual Game Worlds

Bob Moore

PlayOn project

Massive summit, UC-Irvine, April 20, 2006

PARC PlayOn Project

- 3 years of research on the **social dimensions** of MMOGs
- PARC tradition started by **Pavel Curtis** with LambdaMOO
- **PlayOn blog** for sharing early findings with the game industry, academics & players
- Publish findings in top academic journals and influential online forums (e.g., Terra Nova)



*MMOGs represent the most successful
3D virtual worlds to date*

PlayOn Team Members

- **Bob Moore, Ph.D.** – sociologist/conversation analyst; avatar-mediated interaction, video analysis & virtual ethnography
- **Nic Ducheneaut, Ph.D.** – social/computer scientist; social activity metrics, social network analysis & visualizations
- **Eric Nickell** – computer scientist; data mining & software infrastructure
- **Nick Yee** – *Daedalus project*, graduate student, Stanford; surveys & statistical data analysis



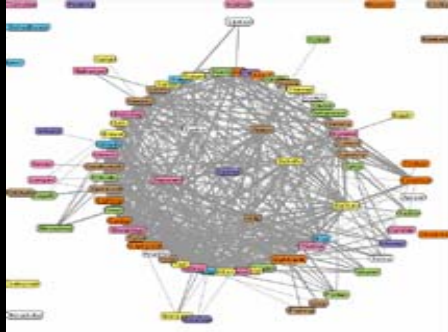
Understanding Online Sociability: From Micro to Macro

Sociability:

“a distinct social form that distills out of the realities of social life the pure essence of association... the sheer pleasure of the company of others.”

-Georg Simmel (1949)

Understanding Online Sociability: From Micro to Macro



- What is it like to have a **virtual face-to-face conversation** in games?
 - Video-based analysis of avatar-mediated interactions (e.g., comparative study of 6 avatar systems)
- What are games' **public spaces** like?
 - Ethnographic and quantitative analysis of social interactivity in public spaces in games (e.g., comparative study of SWG cantinas & starports)
- What kinds of **social networks** do players form?
 - Quantitative analysis of player behavior (e.g., longitudinal census of 5 WoW servers, 250K characters, 8 months)

From visual realism
physics, lighting, anatomy, mo-cap...



To interactional realism
embodiment, gesture, talk, eye
gaze, facial expression...

From modeling 3D spaces buildings, cities, transportation networks



"a great variety of public places that host regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work."

-Ray Oldenburg on "Third Places" (1989)

To building "third places"
place-based activities, urban planning, player creation

From single player
supporting solo- or small-group experience



To networks of players
social networking support, guild tools, guild migration



Thank you

Ren-Faire: a virtually life-like RPG

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