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## SOCIAL NETWORKS 2

**Online Game Communities are social in nature.**

Cindy Ahuna on May 15 2001

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**Social environments evolve from online games. Communities form between single players and the online service. Communities also form out of the interaction between the multiplayer and the online service. When communities form, it functions as an open system fueled by semantics. Sharing knowledge, solving problems, working as a team, playing, building, quarrelling, cooperating, planning and forming relationships are some of the elements of gameplay. Web based games provides the arena for social complexity for the casual, traditional and multiplayer gamer.**

Who are the friendly characters that will play with you if you play with them?

In 1969, "SpaceWar", developed by Rick Blomme, was the first two-player game designed to play on PLATO. In 1961, the "Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations" was the first network to run on the Illiac computer system. PLATO was created by Professor Chalmers Sherwin, under the direction of electrical engineering professor Don Bitzer, co-inventor of the plasma display pane at the University of Illinois.

During 1970 through 1977, multiplayer games included "SpaceWar"; a version of "Star Trek"; "Avatar", a Dungeons and Dragons-style game; "Airflight", a flight simulator; and "Empire", which supported 32 players on PLATO. In 1972, PLATO hosted 1,000 simultaneous users. In May 2001, Sony's "EverQuest", a massive multiplayer online role-playing game, hosted 60,000 to 80,000 players daily.

In 1973, David R. Woolley designed "Notes", a communications software for PLATO. Due to the release of this software, "Talkomatic", precursor to IRC with handles and chat rooms, was developed for PLATO. A maximum of five people wrote and read each other's messages on the same screen. Chat rooms were open and uncensored. A player logged on using their real or an anonymous name, and played either gender role.

In various online chat rooms found on AOL's games and in Sony's "EverQuest", text is censored when gamers use brand or offensive words. Role-playing genders, sometimes referred to as gender swapping or multiple representations, is possible when gamers change or hide the genders of their characters using anonymous names.

In "EverQuest", with more than 360,000 subscribers, thousands of gamers play characters of the opposite gender. Gamers are free to explore relationships while in character. Male gamers find that female characters generally get treated better in male-dominated virtual worlds. Sometimes men find it easier to chat with other characters and escape the competition. In online games, multiple representations allow players to see how other players solve problems. "There are a lot of rumors and anecdotes about people referring to play games as men or women because they are treated differently," says avid gamer J. MacLean.

In a lecture titled "Programs, Emotions and Common Sense", Marvin Minsky emphasized in his book the idea of multiple representation. "If you understand

something very precisely in one way", Minsky claims "you don't understand it at all." "You know it by rote. What does the word understand mean? Understanding means having many different ways to deal with things," said Minsky. Children memorize history by rote, but they usually don't understand it. Sometimes gamers falsely assume they are interacting with a person who matches the gender's name. Perhaps on one level, Minsky's definition can be applied as a working analogy for multiplayers who role-play playing games. If multiplayers had more ways of identifying the characters, they might be able to understand who the friendly characters were when they played with them, but then again, that might take all of the fun out of the game.

Artist/curator Anne-Marie Schleiner, describes social developments in gaming: "Multiplayer games can be very social. In the shooter genre, players sometimes band together into "clans", groups who fight against other groups. Sometimes the social bonds developed in these clans extend beyond the game into friendship and players offer each other moral support through personal hardship and help each other find jobs," said Schleiner.

Social environments evolve from online game communities. "A great example is "Air Warrior", a WW2 flight simulation with players are so dedicated, they've held conventions. Massive multiplayer role-playing games are also famous for the strength of their communities "the guilds in "EverQuest" are a great example of this phenomenon," says MacLean. In contrast to single player games, communities are vital depending on the game. For example, "for a game like chess, where skill levels can be critical, many people prefer to play with someone of relatively similar skill," says MacLean.

In a global point of view, the Internet is the living organism that hosts many online systems. Boundaries of geography, economy, culture, degrees of education and family traditions have disappeared. Gamers are co-authors that take part in the experience. Communities are playing fields for social interaction. When gamers send messages to other gamers, they are free to exchange email addresses and meet beyond the game community. Communities have become an extension, a new medium of human touch.

When communities form, a semantic world of sharing knowledge, solving problems, working as a team, playing, building, quarreling, cooperating, planning and forming relationships develop. Games are formal because they have a set of rules. A game is a system because it has a collection of parts that interact with each other in complex ways. In "EverQuest", the Game Masters hold the most power. Online games run on a '24x7' calendar. Generally, online the role-playing games are maintained by paid subscriptions, whereas, online fighting games are free. Communities exist in time by free and paid subscriptions. Gamers occupy real estate within the online game. Communities live in both space and time. Thus, it is a lifelike system.

Popular game boxes vary from Sony PlayStation, PlayStation 2; Nintendo's GameCube projected to ship Nov 5, '01 in the US; and Microsoft's Xbox projected to ship Nov 8, '01 in the US. "Although game boxes offer higher resolution graphics in comparison to PC gaming, they are a closed hardware platform and less amenable to multiplayer social games. Multiplayer gamers cannot insert their own character skins into shooter games in a game box or with a multiplayer game, such as "EverQuest". "EverQuest" can easily receive updates on the game over time that get rewritten over the original game software," says Schleiner. Many gamers develop friendships with other gamers in different countries using the chat session in "EverQuest".

In some ways, there are as many different types of gamers as there are games. General definitions include:

- \* Generally, casual gamers are people who enjoy simple decision making games and typically play less technical 3D graphic games.
- \* Generally, traditional gamers are people who enjoy a more complex game.
- \* Multiplayers (simultaneous players) are defined as those who play with other gamers in the same game.

What makes an online game exciting, interesting, social or more fun than another game? Motivation evolves from sensory gratification, role-playing, personality, taste, adrenaline, sociology, immersive and engaging environments, and the element of fun. Games in general motivate ideas. Topics include life, survival, strategy, role-playing, and building relationships. In all circumstances, the player learns by playing. "Building colossal virtual worlds are very important. In a virtual world, everything has a purpose. I love games, " said Minsky during his lecture, "Programs, Emotions and Common Sense".

In Star Trek CCG, gamers can buy and sell, trade and collect digital cards, watch or judge games, and attend tournaments. One disadvantage, prior to downloading the plug-in, a high risk is indicated. The risk is associated with the possibility of gamers

accessing your computer if you proceed with download. This warning appears with this statement: "JavaScript or a java applet from DigitalDeck, Inc. is requesting additional privileges." This plug-in is required to run the application.

Because game communities are social in nature, knowledge and understanding are more apparent in virtual worlds. "Wouldn't it be nice to connect two thoughts," said Minsky.

Who first revolutionized interactive web authoring in the twentieth century?

In June 1995, Macromedia first announced the development of "Shockwave", a plug-in based playback engine for Director content. This project was produced in partnership with Netscape. In November 1995, developers were given access to the first beta version of the Windows Shockwave plug-in. In December 1995, the public was given access to the beta version of the Windows Shockwave plug-in. In January 1996, developers were given access to the first beta version of the Macintosh Shockwave plug-in. In March 1996, the first version of the Shockwave plug-in for both Macintosh and Windows was released to the public as a final product. This Shockwave release was soon followed by the release of Director 5.0 in June of 1996. Director 5.0 published content for web-playback using the Shockwave plug-in. This version utilized the use of a compression utility called "AfterShock", a utility that is no longer used in the current version.

During the summer of 1995 through 1996, other interactive authoring tools were available, such as Hypercard and Mtopolis, but none of them offered a web based player option during the time Macromedia released the first version of Shockwave. There were other browser-based competitors, namely Java which was announced by Sun in June of 1995 and VRML. The three competitors involved Shockwave, Java and VRML. In addition, RealNetworks produced their first browser plug-in at the same time. This was the dawning of the plug-in era.

The result of this research is courtesy of Thomas Higgins, Macromedia.

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##### Biographies:

Marvin Minsky is Toshiba Professor of Media Arts and Sciences and Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His research has led practical advances in artificial intelligence, cognitive psychology, neural networks, and the theory of Turning Machines and recursive functions.

Ann-Marie Schleiner is engaged in gaming and network culture in a variety of roles as a writer, critic, curator, and gaming artist/designer. Her work investigates the domains of avatar gender construction, computer gaming culture, and hacker art.

J. MacLean is an avid gamer.



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