PLAYER-ROLES IN MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAMES, AND PERCEIVED SKILL AND RELATIONSHIP BENEFITS, DIVERGE WITH SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

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Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) afford an enriching range of leisure, educational, and social opportunities. Individuals are motivated to play MMORPGs through a variety of psychological mechanisms. Drivers include a sense of achievement associated with progress through game structures, the excitement generated by immersive experiences and, in particular, the social rewards of interacting, and developing relationships, with other players and groups. Other data highlight player characteristics linked to hazardous patterns of MMORPG play that can be detrimental to health and well-being, sometimes categorised as 'gaming addiction'. Strikingly, some of the most salient aspects of vulnerability to these problems include difficult social experiences such as loneliness, introversion, hostility to others as well as social disadvantage (e.g. unemployment). Collectively, these reflections highlight the possibility that individuals' motivations to play MMORPGs (to the benefit of well-being or otherwise), and the choices that they make within these games, reflect their broader social values and attitudes. However, almost nothing is known about how MMORPG play relates to social values, attitudes to others, and political ideology even though these factors may well mediate players' gaming experiences and any resultant cognitive and social benefits.

Here, we surveyed 5,847 players of Jagex's Runescape to test the relationships between player-role preferences and players' social values, attitudes to others (as trait hostility) and political orientation. We sought to test the hypotheses that players' choice of in-game roles (Skillers, Killers, and Questers) and the benefits they derive from gaming are linked to social values, their resentment or suspicion of others (as hostility), and their liberalism-conservatism. We focused upon (i) whether the skills that players gained from MMORPG play helped them in other areas of their lives; (ii) whether their online relationships had produced benefits for their offline relationships; and (iii) the importance placed by players on their in-game achievements relative to their real-life achievements.

Overall, players were most likely to report prosocial orientations reflecting our sample being drawn from a long-established MMORPG, with a strong and well-recognised community ethic. However, players who prioritised skill acquisition/improvement (Skillers), combat (Killers) and narrative challenges (Questers) also differed in broader socio-cognitive factors. Killers were the most likely to show individualist and competitive social value orientations, report the most hostility to others and

report the most conservative (social and economic) political ideology. Questers reported the least hostility and most liberal outlooks. Players identified as individualists reported the weakest benefits of MMORPG play. By contrast, the most hostile players reported the strongest importance of in-game relative to offline achievements (possibly indicating hazardous play) but the strongest cognitive and social benefits. Finally, players with libertarian outlooks reported the strongest benefits while players with liberal-left outlooks reported the weakest. These findings offer new perspectives on the socio-cognitive processes of MMORPGs, and can inform discussion of how individuals derive leisure, education and social capital benefits from MMORPG play. Critically, our research provides evidence that the choices of player-roles reflect social and political cognitive processes and that even those vulnerable to patterns of play that might damage health and well-being appear to gain the most tangible benefits from these games.