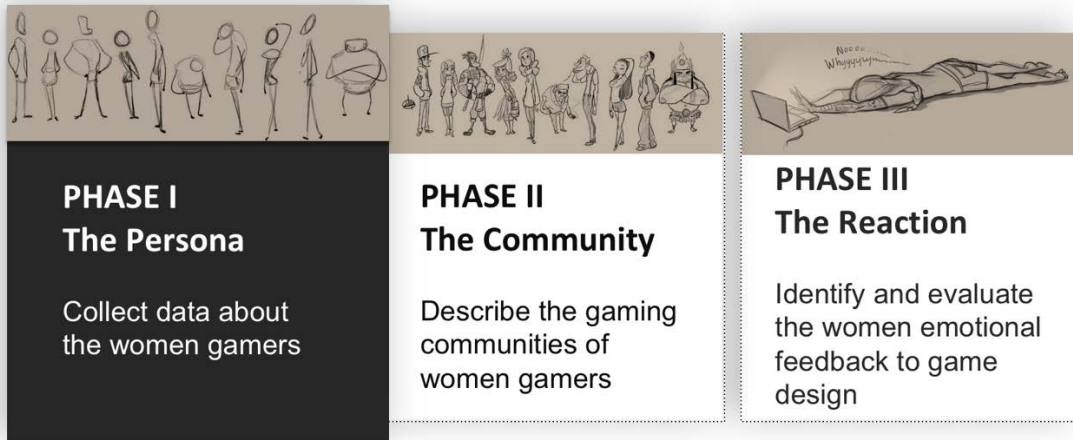# Examining the Role and Journey of Women in Collaborative Core Gaming:
A Comparative Study Between
Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs)
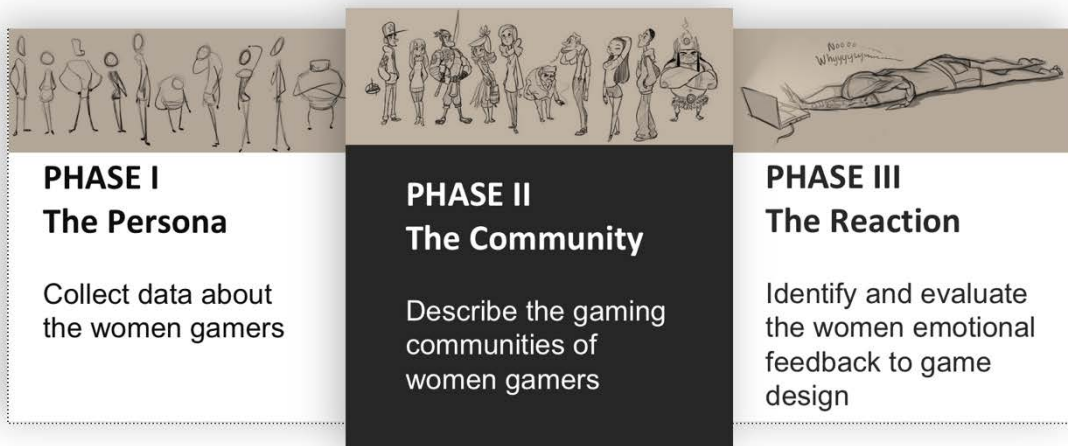## and Fantasy Role Playing Tabletop Games

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Supervisor: Ph.D. Gary David

Inspired by the continual transition and controversial nature of the gaming culture, this study is a comparative inquiry into the online and the tabletop gaming culture from the perspective of women gamers to find out how critical differences between the two spaces mark their experience while they practice the games they love. It is written as a comparative narrative between online and tabletop data collected from Dungeons & Dragons and World of Warcraft. Both games are part of overlapping genres, have similar mechanics, and the player base have common characteristics.
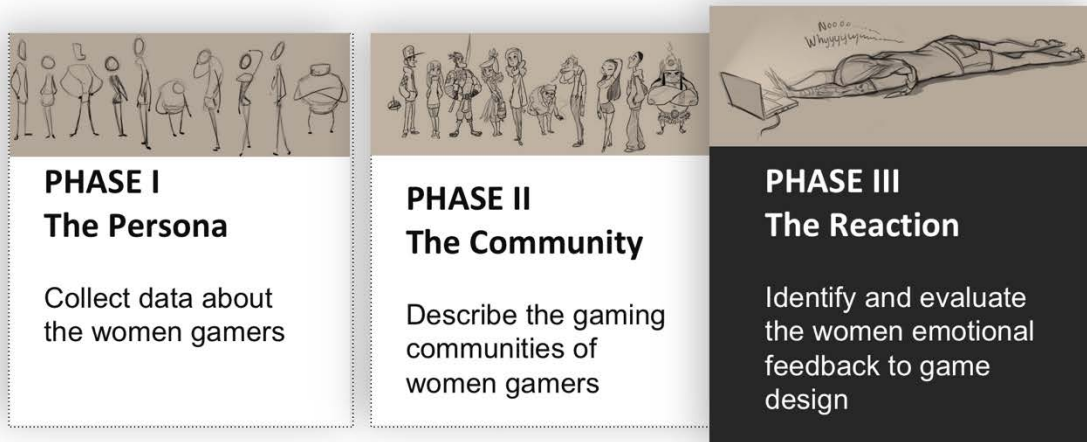
The thesis is structured in two sections. The first section reviews the literature necessary to scaffold the research approach. The second section is a three-fold, comparative ethnographic exploration of the Dungeons & Dragons and World of Warcraft gaming spaces, from the perspective of women gamers:

PHASE I
The Persona

Collect data about the women gamers

PHASE II
The Community

Describe the gaming communities of women gamers

PHASE III
The Reaction

Identify and evaluate the women emotional feedback to game design

- **Unstructured Interviews**
    Approximately 4 hours of conversation relating to the diversity and the demographics of their community, factors and motivators for gameplay, social hurdles and challenges
- **Semi-structured survey**
    - 301 Qualified mixed gender participants coming from twenty-three online and offline sources
    - 36% women, 61% males, 3% non-conforming gender.
    - 26 Questions focused on player and community demographics, playstyle and gaming motivators,   personal and social hurdles and challenges.

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- **Ethnographic Field Work**
30 Hours of ethnographic observations in D&D and PathfinderRPG in private and public settings
- **Digital Ethnography**
50 Hours of digital ethnography on the Magtheridon EU Server for World of Warcraft.
I COMPARED MY FINDINGS TO:
    - Oldenburg's Framework for a "Third Place", after home and work.

PHASE I
The Persona

Collect data about the women gamers

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Identify and evaluate the women emotional feedback to game design

- **Auto-Ethnography**
  - 4 Hours of Auto-Ethnography in World of Warcraft, doing sequential raiding which is similar in mechanics with a game of Dungeons & Dragons
  - 4 Hours of playing Dungeons & Dragons in both public and private communities
1. I DECONSTRUCTED the mechanics I experienced and selected ten for each game.
2. I IDENTIFIED my emotional feedback to each of the ten mechanics according to Desmet's Emotional Framework (2003): Instrumental, Surprise, Interest, Aesthetic and Socio-Emotional
3. Used Scherer (2005) emotional taxonomy to measure the intensity and the valence of each emotion through direct scaling on a five point scale
4. Placed the data on a pleasure-arousal grid and looked at research in the field of psychology for findings that overlapped my emotional mapping.

The thesis, in its entirety, is designed to offer perspective over the online and tabletop gaming space as it is viewed and experienced by women. It also gives insights into the relationships women develop with the community, but also with themselves as they are given the opportunity to recreate a new identity in a virtual world, open to exploration.

Summary of Findings:

	WORLD OF WARCRAFT		DUNGEONS & DRAGONS AND PATHFINDER RPG	
	Female Gamers	**Male Gamers**	**Female Gamers**	**Male Gamers**

DEMOGRAPHICS

		WORLD OF WARCRAFT — Female Gamers	WORLD OF WARCRAFT — Male Gamers	D&D/Pathfinder — Female Gamers	D&D/Pathfinder — Male Gamers
1	Gender division	**29.6%**	**66.9%**	**25.3%**	**72.6%**
2	Most numerous age bracket	16 to 24: **42.9%**	16 to 24: **55.8%**	16 to 24: **37.5%**	16 to 24: **33.3%**
		25 to 34: **40.5%**	25 to 34: **31.6%**	25 to 34: **41.7%**	25 to 34: **31.9%**
		35 and older: **16.7%**	35 and older: **12.6%**	35 and older: **20.8%**	35 and older: **34.8%**
3	Overall Stress Factors	Voice Chat	Voice Chat	Unknown/New Players	Inappropriate humor
		Performance Anxiety		Performance Anxiety	Performance Anxiety

CHARACTERS AND AVATARS

4	Character played most often:	**Nuker** Little responsibility, great damage, dependable on others for protection	**Fighter** Can have more responsibility than a Nuker, first line of attack/defense, protects others	**Fighter** Can have more responsibility than a Nuker, first line of attack/defense, protects others	**Fighter** Can have more responsibility than a Nuker, first line of attack/defense, protects others
5	Being independent and in control of their in-game development is:	Important: **69.5%**	Important: **59.0%**	Important: **40.0%**	Important: **55.1%**
		Not Important: **13.9%**	Not Important: **13.1%**	Not Important: **30.0%**	Not Important: **12.3%**
6	Character played most often is consistent with most played characters reported by the overall population of gamers	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Gender of the character played	Females: **86.1%**	Females: **32.8%**	Females: **55.0%**	Females: **10.2%**
		Males: **0.0%**	Males: **39.3%**	Males: **0.0%**	Males: **53.1%**
		Gender-benders or both genders, equally: **13.9%**	Gender-benders or both genders, equally: **27.9%**	Gender-benders or both genders, equally: **40.0%**	Gender-benders or both genders, equally: **36.8%**

PERSONAL PLAY STYLE AND PERFORMANCE

8	Self-reported play style:	Defensive: **44.4%**	Defensive: **31.1%**	Defensive: **40.0%**	Defensive: **22.4%**
		Offensive: **27.8%**	Offensive: **41.0%**	Offensive: **35.0%**	Offensive: **32.7%**

		Strategist: **58.0%**	Strategist: **49.2%**	Strategist: **55.0%**	Strategist: **53.1%**
		Planner: **33.3%**	Planner: **23.0%**	Planner: **35.0%**	Planner: **36.7%**
		Executor: **25.0%**	Executor: **26.2%**	Executor: **50.0%**	Executor: **20.0%**
9	The opportunities for in-game progress and achievements are:	Important: **72.2%**	Important: **67.2%**	Important: **55.0%**	Important: **69.4%**
		Not Important: **5.6%**	Not Important: **16.4%**	Not Important: **20.0%**	Not Important: **20.4%**
10	Self-reported level of skill is:	Average or below: **41.7%**	Average or below: **29.5%**	Average or below: **40.0%**	Average or below: **34.7%**
		Advanced: **50.0%**	Advanced: **52.5%**	Advanced: **40.0%**	Advanced: **42.9%**
		Expert: **8.3%**	Expert: **18.0%**	Expert: **20.0%**	Expert: **22.4%**
11	Progressing and getting skilled at playing the game is:	Easy: **36.1%**	Easy: **54.1%**	Easy: **55.0%**	Easy: **46.9%**
		Average: **27.8%**	Average: **21.3%**	Average: **30.0%**	Average: **36.7%**
		Difficult: **27.8%**	Difficult: **24.6%**	Difficult: **15.0%**	Difficult: **16.3%**
12	Feeling useful to their community during gameplay is:	Important: **66.6%**	Important: **62.2%**	Important: **60.0%**	Important: **61.2%**
		Not Important: **16.7%**	Not Important: **8.2%**	Not Important: **10.0%**	Not Important: **12.2%**
13	Contributing to their group's achievements is:	Easy: **58.3%**	Easy: **65.5%**	Easy: **70.0%**	Easy: **75.5%**
		Average: **33.3%**	Average: **24.6%**	Average: **20.0%**	Average: **18.4%**
		Difficult: **8.3%**	Difficult: **9.8%**	Difficult: **10.0%**	Difficult: **6.1%**

IN-GAME COMMUNITY & RELATIONSHIPS

14	Their gaming community consists of:	Mostly male: **58.3%**	Mostly male: **70.5%**	Mostly male: **40.0%**	Mostly male: **65.0%**
		Mostly females: **5.6%**	Mostly females: **3.3%**	Mostly females: **5.0%**	Mostly females: **6.1%**
		Gender balanced: **36.1%**	Gender balanced: **26.2%**	Gender balanced: **55.0%**	Gender balanced: **28.6%**
15	In terms of diversity, they consider their gaming community as being:	Diverse: **61.1%**	Diverse: **47.2%**	Diverse: **50.0%**	Diverse: **43.5%**
		Somewhat diverse: **11.1%**	Somewhat diverse: **27.2%**	Somewhat diverse: **25.0%**	Somewhat diverse: **26.1%**
		Non-diverse: **27.8%**	Non-diverse: **25.5%**	Non-diverse: **25%**	Non-diverse: **30.4%**
16	In terms of prejudice against women, their gaming community is:	Unprejudiced: **83.3%**	Unprejudiced: **80.0%**	Unprejudiced: **90.0%**	Unprejudiced: **91.3%**
		Somewhat unprejudiced: **8.3%**	Somewhat unprejudiced: **10.9%**	Somewhat unprejudiced: **5.0%**	Somewhat unprejudiced: **4.3%**
		Prejudiced: **8.3%**	Prejudiced: **9.1%**	Prejudiced: **5.0%**	Prejudiced: **4.3%**

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17	The community and the friends they play with are, to them:	Important: **80.6%**	Important: **65.6%**	Important: **90.6%**	Important: **89.8%**
		Not Important: **5.6%**	Not Important: **11.5%**	Not Important: **0%**	Not Important: **2.0%**
18	Feeling appreciated as a person by their gaming group is, to them:	Important: **83.3%**	Important: **60.6%**	Important: **80.0%**	Important: **67.2%**
		Not Important: **5.6%**	Not Important: **11.5%**	Not Important: **5.0%**	Not Important: **10.2%**
19	How they describe their feelings towards the other people in their gaming community:	**Females about other Females:**	**Males about other Females:**	**Females about other Females:**	**Males about other Females:**
		Top used: **Collaborative: 74.2%**	Top used: **Collaborative 41.7%**	Top used: **Collaborative 73.7%**	Top used: **Joy: 52.2%**
		Least used: **Sadness: 3.2%; Fear: 3.2%; Disgust: 3.2%; Dissing: 3.2%, Trolling: 3.2%**	Least used: **Contempt: 2.1%; Shame: 2.1%; Desire: 2.1%**	Least used: **Shame 5.3%; Fear: 5.3%; Seductive: 5.3%; Hopeful: 5.3%**	Least used: **Seductive: 2.5%**
		Females about other Males:	**Males about other Males:**	**Females about other Males:**	**Males about other Males:**
		Top used: **Collaborative: 74.2%**	Top used: **Collaborative 49.0%**	Top used: **Collaborative 84.2%**	Top used: **Collaborative 70.0%**
		Least used: **Shame: 3.2%; Desire: 3.2%**	Least used: **Fear: 4.1%; Love: 4.1%**	Least used: **Shame 5.3%; Disgust: 5.3%; Seductive: 5.3%**	Least used: **Shame 5.0%; Fear: 5.0%; Desire: 5.0%; Hopeful: 5.0%**
20	Making friends in game is, to them:	Easy: **50.0%**	Easy: **42.7%**	Easy: **50.0%**	Easy: **44.9%**
		Average: **25%**	Average: **32.8%**	Average: **35.0%**	Average: **40.8%**
		Difficult: **25%**	Difficult: **24.6%**	Difficult: **15%**	Difficult: **14.3%**
21	A safe and non-aggressive environment is, to them:	Important: **86.1%**	Important: **55.8%**	Important: **95.0%**	Important: **75.6%**
		Not Important: **2.8%**	Not Important: **21.3%**	Not Important: **0%**	Not Important: **12.3%**
22	In terms of safety, their current gaming community is:	Safe: **72.2%**	Safe: **69.1%**	Safe: **100.0%**	Safe: **87.0%**
		Somewhat safe: **22.2%**	Somewhat safe: **21.8%**	Somewhat safe: **0%**	Somewhat safe: **4.3%**
		Unsafe: **5.6%**	Unsafe: **9.1%**	Unsafe: **0%**	Unsafe: **8.7%**
23	Feeling at ease and safe with other players, is to them:	Easy: **50.0%**	Easy: **59.0%**	Easy: **65.0%**	Easy: **75.5%**
		Average: **16.7%**	Average: **21.3%**	Average: **20.0%**	Average: **12.2%**
		Difficult: **33.3%**	Difficult: **19.7%**	Difficult: **15%**	Difficult: **12.2%**

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24	Being challenged by other players is, to them:	Important: **33.3%**	Important: **50.8%**	Important: **35.0%**	Important: **49.0%**
		Not Important: **33.3%**	Not Important: **25.2%**	Not Important: **55.0%**	Not Important: **26.5%**
25	They dismiss prejudice and stereotyping as harmless humor, specific to the culture	4%		10%	
26	Not feeling hurt by the occasional in-game conflicts is, to them:	Easy: **41.7%**	Easy: **62.3%**	Easy: **60.0%**	Easy: **71.5%**
		Average: **13.9%**	Average: **18.0%**	Average: **15.0%**	Average: **14.3%**
		Difficult: **44.5%**	Difficult: **19.7%**	Difficult: **25.0%**	Difficult: **14.2%**
27	Dismissing negative comments is, to them:	Easy: **38.9%**	Easy: **75.4%**	Easy: **35.0%**	Easy: **71.4%**
		Average: **19.4%**	Average: **4.9%**	Average: **30.0%**	Average: **12.2%**
		Difficult: **41.7%**	Difficult: **19.7%**	Difficult: **35.0%**	Difficult: **16.3%**
28	Feeling supported by their community is, to them:	Important: **86.1%**	Important: **57.4%**	Important: **80.0%**	Important: **63.2%**
		Not Important: **5.6%**	Not Important: **11.5%**	Not Important: **10.0%**	Not Important: **12.2%**
29	In terms of support, their current community is:	Supportive: **72.2%**	Supportive: **63.7%**	Supportive: **95%**	Supportive: **69.6%**
		Somewhat supportive: **25%**	Somewhat supportive: **27.3%**	Somewhat supportive: **5.0%**	Somewhat supportive: **17.4%**
		Unsupportive: **2.8%**	Unsupportive: **9.1%**	Unsupportive: **0.0%**	Unsupportive: **13.1%**
30	Asking for help from other players is, to them:	Easy: **58.3%**	Easy: **55.8%**	Easy: **80.0%**	Easy: **85.7%**
		Average: **16.7%**	Average: **24.6%**	Average: **10.0%**	Average: **4.1%**
		Difficult: **25.0%**	Difficult: **19.7%**	Difficult: **10.0%**	Difficult: **10.2%**
31	To what extent is the space and the community a Neutral Environment for women	**NO,** considering that research showed that more than half of the World of Warcraft women gamers play with their romantic partners or family members and while they do that, they feel they have an "obligation" towards them;		**NO,** considering that all women I met during fieldwork they had their partners involved into the same gaming group; another argument is that women were more formal to their peers than men;	
32	To what extent is the space and the community serve as a Leveler for women	**NO**, considering that women are likely to sustain disproportionate consequences for the quality of their gameplay from male gamers.		**YES,** according to my observations, women with different expertise levels were treated the same; however, the data refers only to either veteran players, regulars in their communities, or to beginners. No mid-range skill expertise was observed.	

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33	To what extent the space and the community enables Conversation and Social Interactions for women	**YES**, there is ample time and even virtual spaces where players of all genders meet and have casual conversations, related or not to the game. However, female gamers tend to shy away from voice chat and they prefer chatting in writing.	**NO**, Dungeons & Dragons and PathfinderRPG gamers are more focused on in-game conversations, casual conversation and interactions are more limited than in World of Warcraft.
34	To what extent is the space and the community Accessible to women	**YES**. The space and the community are available 24/7 and even if there are more interactions in the evening, due to the geographical diversity, chances are there will always be someone available only. Also, anonymity makes it easier for women to hide their gender if that makes them more comfortable. The technological and financial constraints to access the game are identical for both men and women.	**NO**. The space is accessible only at certain hours and days and gamers need to register online in order to participate to the game. For women is even more difficult: On several instances I was the only women at the table and during my fieldwork, I met only two other female gamers; A woman who decides she wants to join the community will have to deal with being a minority in face-to-face encounters with a multitude of strangers, mostly men.
35	To what extent are there Regular gamers in the community	**YES**, even if a minority, most guilds and groups have regular women gamers, who usually enjoy some form of recognition - if not for anything else, for being an exotic minority.	**YES**, all women I met during fieldwork were veterans and well known in the community;
36	To what extent is the space and the community Low Maintenance for women	**YES**, the virtual space becomes casual through the conversation and the lack of formality between gamers that often contrasts with the architecture and the extraordinary landscape design.	**YES**, the low-maintenance spaces are often designated areas - big or small - in comic book stores or gaming stores, rudimentary designed to accommodate the gameplay.
37	To what extent the space and the community accommodate for Humor	**YES**, humor is an essential part of the culture but sometimes it can become jarring and inappropriate for women. One male player in World of Warcraft named his character "an offensive catcalling" but he described his act as innocent humor.	**YES**, even if the humor is drier in Dungeons & Dragons and PathfinderRPG than in World of Warcraft. A lot of the humor is fan service related - puns and references to the game.
38	To what extent is there Familiarity for women in the space and in the community	**YES**, gamers belonging to the same community know about other people's whereabouts and show interest in their well being	YES, during fieldwork I often caught on gamers asking about other female gamers and why they are missing or inquiring about their wellbeing. Women often shared common experiences form the past with the other people at the table.

DEFYING THE BORDER BETWEEN REAL LIFE AND GAMING LIFE

39					
	Confiding to their in-game community about their real-life issues is, to them:	Easy: **50.0%**	Easy: **37.7%**	Easy: **80.0%**	Easy: **49.0%**
		Average: **22.2%**	Average: **24.6%**	Average: **15.0%**	Average: **22.4%**
		Difficult: **27.8%**	Difficult: **37.7%**	Difficult: **5.0%**	Difficult: **28.6%**

40	Keeping the gaming life separate from real life is, to them:	Easy: **25.0%**	Easy: **47.5%**	Easy: **35.0%**	Easy: **63.3%**
		Average: **30.6%**	Average: **23.0%**	Average: **30.0%**	Average: **20.0%**
		Difficult: **25.0%**	Difficult: **29.5%**	Difficult: **35.0%**	Difficult: **16.4%**

EMOTIONAL FEEDBACK TRIGGERED BY THE GAME MECHANICS

Where **INTENSITY is 1 (Least Intense) to 5 (Most Intense)** and VALENCE **is 1 (Least Positive) to 5 (Most Positive)**

|	*Data available only a female gamer (auto-ethnography)*	**Emotional Intensity (Arousal)**	**Emotional Valence**	**Emotional Intensity**	**Emotional Valence**
41	Average Instrumental Emotional Feedback	3.45	3.30	2.67	3.07
42	Average Surprise Emotional Feedback	4.17	3.50	2.67	4.00
43	Average Interest Emotional Feedback	3.71	3.14	3.36	4.00
44	Average Aesthetic Emotional Feedback	3.17	3.00	2.67	4.67
45	Average Socio-Emotional Feedback	2.24	2.94	2.00	2.88
46	**Average Emotional Feedback**	**3.22**	**3.15**	**2.73**	**3.57**
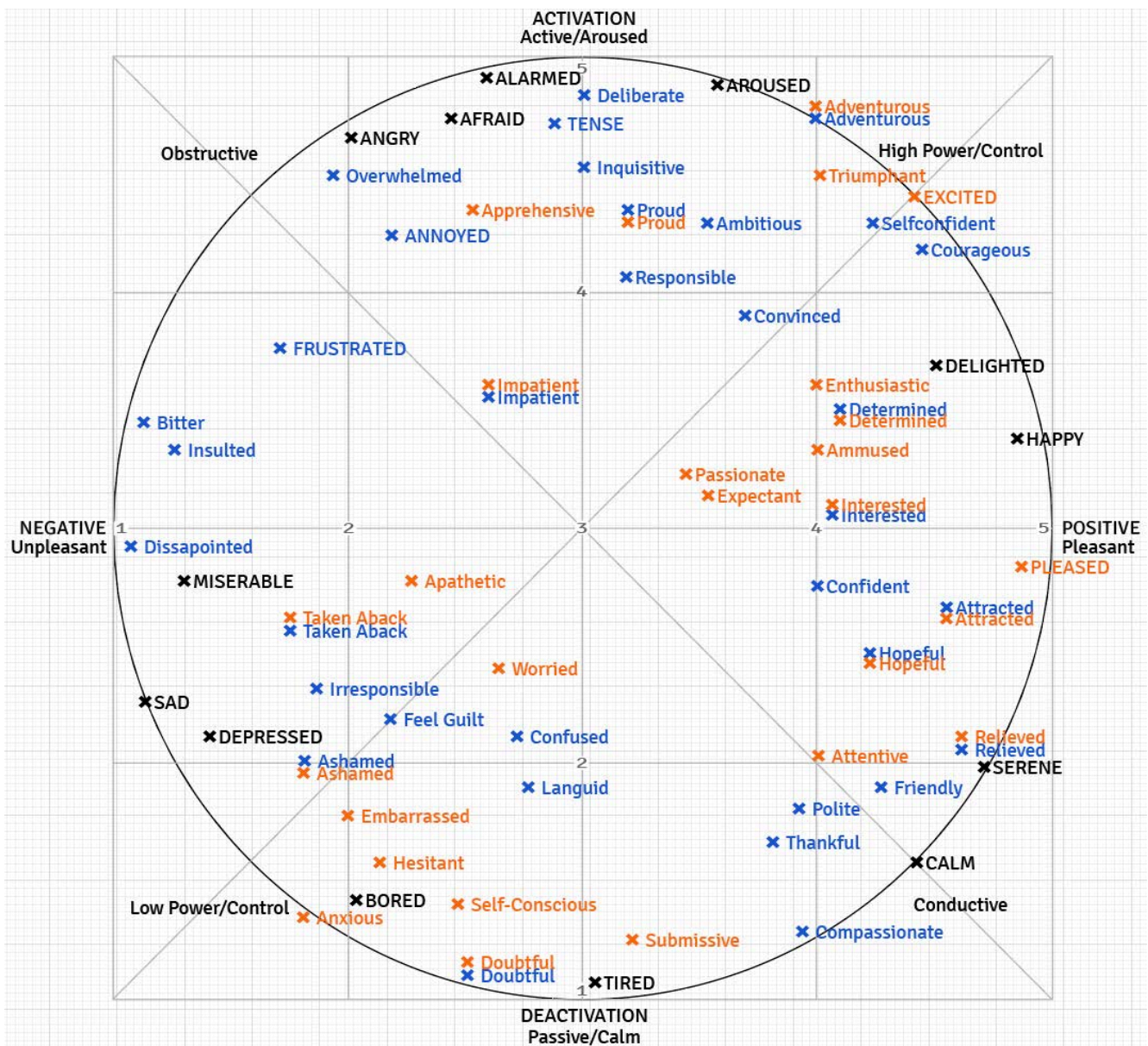
Figure from the research: The emotional reactions identified during similar game mechanics, in Dungeons & Dragons (Orange) and World of Warcraft (Blue), mapped on the Pleasure-Arousal. The moods (Black) serve as baseline for interpretation.