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Choices and characters in roleplaying games

How types of choices affect the player/character connection

Faculty of History and Philosophy

Institution of Game Design

Jens Berglind

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Supervisor: Patrick Prax

Examiner: Steven Bachelder

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Abstract

The connection that players can feel toward their characters in pen-and-paper roleplaying games is a known phenomenon that has been previously studied and is recognized among roleplaying enthusiasts. Pen-and-paper roleplaying games are a complex form of games, with three distinct frames which are ludological, social, and diegetic (also called narrative). The frames are different aspects of the game as well as the base of different motivations for players, who value the frames in a varied degree. The goal of this thesis is to examine if in-game choices based on the diegetic frame in contrast to the ludological frame are correlated with the player/character connection.

The method used for data collection is distribution of a quantitative questionnaire on the internet, spread to Swedish roleplayers through social media and associations tied to SVEROK. With their answers, the analysis identifies correlations between the player/character connection and the three frames of pen-and-paper roleplaying games, as well as other correlations noted in the data analysis. The literature revolves around the two core concepts; the player/character connection and the three frames of roleplaying games. The result shows that diegetic choices in contrast to ludological are weakly correlated with the player/character connection.

Keywords: Pen-and-paper roleplaying game, character, roleplaying, player/character connection

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1.0 Introduction

The concept of character connection has been more extensively studied in non-interactive media such as film (Kallin, 2013). Kallin use the work of Giovannelli (2009) as a base for his definition of character connection, which here is applied to roleplaying games in relation to the player, and is therefore phrased as “player/character connection”. This connection is defined as what makes a person empathize with a character, feel sad for their defeats and happy for their success. (Kallin, 2013)

The three frames of roleplaying games; social, ludological, and diegetic, was firstly recognized by Fine (1983), and have been a part of how researchers look at roleplaying games since then. As motivations, the social frame is the motivation of fellowship (Hunicke, R.; LeBlanc, M.; Zubek, R., 2004), to play as a social activity. The ludological frame is the pure game system, to optimize one's character and to play for the joy derived from using the game system. Lastly, the diegetic frame is the narrative of roleplaying games, to collectively create a story with the game.

Emotions and behaviors in pen-and-paper roleplaying games have earlier been measured by Meriläinen (2012) with a quantitative online questionnaire, where the questions were phrased in the sense of how frequently a player experienced a certain emotion while playing, and how frequently their behavior in the game looked in a certain way. Otherwise, most research on roleplaying games has been quantitative (Meriläinen, 2012), using observations and/or more in-depth interviews.

The research conducted on roleplaying games is far less common than the research on exclusively digital games, which makes it an area with less theoretical background than digital games research. However, much of the earlier research on roleplaying games recognize the different frames of roleplaying games as well as the emotional immersion, in general as well as specifically towards the players own character. This paper will use the diversity of player motivations as described by the three frames and investigate them in relation to the player/character connection, with the presumption of the hypothesis that the diegetic motivation in contrast to the ludological is a contributing factor to the player/character connection.

1.1 Background

Pen-and-paper roleplaying games originated around the late 1970's, from tabletop war gamers who were bored with realism and decided to add something new to their hobby. (Fine, 1983) Even at that early stage, Fine observed the three frames of roleplaying games, and the player/character connection as concepts. Later research on roleplaying games has studied both these concepts more closely.

The first study of pen-and-paper roleplaying games was published in 1983 by sociologist Gary Fine, who examines the roleplaying game, the players, and their motivations. Since then, not much research has been conducted in the area until more recent years. The International Journal of Role-Playing is an e-journal that released its first issue 2008, and has at the current date released four issues. So even though roleplaying games is a recent area of research, and is less explored than research in the area of digital games, research on roleplaying games is becoming more common.

As this paper investigates a contrast between narratology and ludology, it should be mentioned that a debate has existed for several years where academia, industry and players alike have argued which of these aspects that are most important for games, how they relate to each other, and if they are compatible with each other. Several have earlier drawn the conclusion that narratology and ludology is inversely related in games, such as Adams (2005) and Juul (2001). However, most of this debate is regarding digital games, even though it is debated regarding pen-and-paper roleplaying games as well (Bergström, 2013). This paper does not take a stand in this debate, and will let the data show the relationships between these aspects.

1.2 Terms and abbreviations

Game Master (GM)

The Game Master is the participant(s) in a roleplaying game that plays as the world and all the other monsters, factions and characters that are not player characters. (Kallin, 2013)

In-Game

Something that is related to the game. For example, a player speaking as their character is an example of an in-game action.

LARP

Live Action Roleplaying Game. A form of roleplaying game where the participants act out their characters actions in a physical environment, in contrast to PnP RPGs when the actions of the players are primarily spoken.

Off-game

Something that is not related to the game. Referring to real-world objects and events that is not present in the game world is an example of an off-game comment, such as discussing the latest movies.

Pen-and-paper roleplaying game (PnP RPG)

This type of roleplaying games can also be called tabletop roleplaying games.

1.3 Question Formulation

The hypothesis is that a player of pen-and-paper roleplaying games will be more likely to develop a connection with their character if their most frequent reason for decisions in-game is based on the motives of their diegetic character, rather than if they base those decisions more frequently on creating numerical advantages through the games rule system, i.e. basing their choices on the ludological frame. Therefore, the question formulation is:

Is a player more likely to connect with their character if their in-game choices are more frequently based on diegetic reasons rather than ludological reasons?

2.0 Theoretical Framework

2.1 PnP RPGs

Pen-and-paper roleplaying games can also be called tabletop roleplaying games. Dormans (2006) definition is used to explain what this paper means by this term.

“Pen-and-paper roleplaying games are the oldest form of roleplaying games. The label pen-and-paper stems from the fact that most of these games use pens and papers to keep track of the game. Critical character information is recorded on "character sheets" and often locations are mapped out on pieces of paper or similar material. These games are played around the table or in a similar domestic setting. For this reason they are sometimes also referred to as table-top roleplaying games (akin to table-top strategy games). Pen-and-paper roleplaying games tend to be more told than enacted. In these games one plays a character by describing what she does and what she says. Rules are used to determine the abilities of the character and effectiveness of her actions. Dice are often used to introduce an element of chance into the resolution of the rules.” (Dormans, 2006)

PnP RPGs is the type of game that will be looked at in this paper. However, there are other types of roleplaying games than the pen-and-paper kind. Dormans (2006) divides the types into pen-and-paper roleplaying games, live action roleplaying games (LARPs), computer roleplaying games and massively multiplayer online roleplaying games. There is also a multitude of sub-genres, and there have been several efforts to find a universal working definition, but the definitions all suffer from being either too specific or too broad. (Arjoranta, 2011) This paper has chosen a broader approach by using Dormans (2006) definition, but is exclusively looking at the pen-and-paper type of roleplaying game.

Narrative

The PnP RPG is a type of game with a narrative component.

“Role-playing games portray some sequence of events within the game world, which gives the game a narrative element. However, given the configurative nature of the players’ involvement, these elements cannot be termed narrative according to traditional narrative theory.”

(Arjoranta, 2011, p. 4-5)

The narrative of the PnP RPG is tied to one of the three frames of PnP RPGs; the diegetic frame.

Many roleplayers state that the narrative is an important part of roleplaying games for them.

(Merilänien, 2012)

Roleplaying

The act of roleplaying is similar to when children play make-believe. (Lankoski; Järvelä, 2012)

Roleplaying in itself is not necessarily tied to a game system, and is not a game, but a form of play. It can be described as an interactive process where the participants are defining and re-defining the contents and properties of an imaginary game world (Montola, 2008)

“I see roleplaying as an interactive process of defining and re-defining an imaginary game world, done by a group of participants according to a recognised structure of power. One or more or participants are players, who portray anthropomorphic characters that delimit the players’ power to define.” (Arjoranta, 2011, p. 6)

Roleplaying is the type of play that creates narrative in the PnP RPG, and is therefore tied to the diegetic frame of the PnP RPG.

2.2 Player/character connection

Giovannelli (2009) states that consumers of traditional media, such as film, can form a connection with the presented characters and therefore be more emotionally invested in the narrative. It has been observed that players of roleplaying games can connect with their characters, in a manner where the players have emotional reactions to their characters' victories and defeats, to a higher degree than people usually respond to characters in traditional narratives. (Cover, 2005)

As what a character is in the context of a PnP RPG is central to the hypothesis, the definition of a character that this paper uses is the following. One part of a character in the context of a PnP RPG is a numerical representation of a character's traits, often on paper. (Dormans, 2006) A character is also a diegetic person, which combines physical, mental and social properties. (Montola, 2008)

“The characters controlled by the players may be defined in quantitative and / or qualitative terms and are defined individuals in the game world, not identified only as roles or functions. These characters can potentially develop, for example in terms skills, abilities or personality, the form of this development is at least partially under player control and the game is capable of reacting to the changes.” (Arjoranta, 2011, p. 4)

The character in a PnP RPG is how the participants interact within the game. When a participant roleplays, they do so in the context of their character. (Fine, 1983) As it is also the numerical representation on paper where the participants keep track of the values of their character (Dormans, 2006), the character is related both to the diegetic frame and the ludological frame of the PnP RPG.

To continue with the player/character connection, it has been shown to be influenced by the social frame of the PnP RPG. Cover (2005) notes that when all the participants of a roleplaying group are equally immersed in the current situation, the shared investment in the activity heightens the emotional experience of roleplaying. This is enforced by Kallin (2013), who in his study finds that the fellowship (Hunicke, R.; LeBlanc, M.; Zubek, R., 2004) part of crafting a

narrative together with friends is a contributing factor to that players form a connection towards their characters. Kallin (2013) also states that this connection have a positive correlation with exposure of the character over time, taking choices with consequence, having finality in those choices, and having control of what actions your character takes. Kallins (2013) definition is used to describe character connection:

“My personal definition of this bond would be that it is what makes us connect to a character and feel their pain, joy or suffering. It is that black, sucking feeling in the pit of your stomach when your favourite character dies; or that feeling of true awesomeness and badassery when Daenerys Targaryen marches off with the slaves in the latest episode of Game of Thrones. If you, the viewer, did not care about her you would not feel as strongly when she has this moment of triumph.” (Kallin, 2013, p. 1)

The player/character connection is what the hypothesis presumes is correlated with a player taking in-game choices based on the diegetic frame rather than the ludological frame. To look at possible connections with Cover (2005) and Kallin (2013), the weight that a player puts into the social frame will also be measured.

2.3 The three frames of the PnP RPG

It has been observed that motivations for playing roleplaying games can be divided up into the social, ludological, and diegetic aspects. (Dormans, 2006; Fine, 1983) Players of roleplaying games value these aspects in different magnitudes, and can base their in-game actions on the three factors in varying scale and frequency. Through this division of player motivation, the data collection will inquire how much weight players put into the different frames when doing in-game actions and choices for their roleplaying character.

Bergström (2012) notes that the rule framework of a PnP RPG can be leaning towards a “narration first”-priority (such as “World of Darkness”), or a “rules first”-priority (such as “Dungeons and Dragons”). This supports the notion in the hypothesis, that players may put more weight to the diegetic frame or the ludological frame when they make in-game decisions. The division of ludology and narration is also supported by Adams (2005), who concludes that

ludology and narration generally is inversely proportional in games. Juul (2001) is also along the same line and states that narration and interactivity cannot exist at the same time. He concludes that the relationship of reader/story is completely different to the relationship of player/game, as a player both has a role inside the game and is an empirical subject outside the game. However, both Juul's and Adams' articles focus on digital games, even though Adams mentions PnP RPGs as an example of more fluent interactive narration. This division of frames of the PnP RPG will be used to say something about its role in the context of the player/character connection.

Diegetic

The context of the game world and its characters in a roleplaying game is diegetic. It is where orcs, vampires and other game elements exist. As Montola (2008) explains by example, a diegetic rule can be that carrying a sword within the city limits is punishable by fine. The word "diegetic" comes from the Greek word "diegesis", which means "to describe, narrate". As a game world in a roleplaying game is co-narrated by the participants (Montola, 2008), it is a diegetic world. And as a player of a PnP RPG describes what their character does, a character in the context of a PnP RPG is a diegetic character. "Diegetic" is a more technical term for what one otherwise could call "narrative". These words are not necessarily equivalent, but will be used as such in this paper. As stated by Arjoranta (2011), the narratives created by PnP RPGs cannot be seen as narrative by traditional definitions because of the cooperative creation amongst the participants, which is why the term "diegetic" is more suitable. However, the diegetic actions create a narrative, which is why the terms are closely related. The diegetic aspect of the PnP RPG is the diegetic frame, and is what once made roleplaying games become its own type of play as it diverged from miniature war games. (Fine, 1983)

Diegetic frame

This frame of a roleplaying game can be explained as the narrative frame. When a player speaks as their character, they are acting in the diegetic frame. It is the frame that the hypothesis states as being possibly correlated with higher levels of affection for a participant's character. The diegetic frame as a motivation is to put the experience of a story first. A diegetically inclined player typically acts on their character's personality, and makes their choices to fit the continuum of their character. The diegetic player may also act on what would be considered to create an

exciting or cinematic scene, and aim to create a narrative excitement curve closer to traditional media such as books and movies.

It can be in conflict with the ludological frame when there is a choice if a rule should be momentarily discarded for the sake of the diegetic immersion. Many diegetically inclined GM:s have a set of rules that can be changed on the fly and approximated for the sake of the diegetic experience, while more ludologically inclined ones rather spend more time to use, and at times find, the correct rules for the sake of ludological consistency. These frames can also conflict when the diegetic frame suggests acting on human traits and quirks such as cowardice, laziness, or phobias. To use a classical example, it might not be preferential from a mainly ludological perspective to flee from a monster that one's character has been contracted to kill if there is a reward down the line, but a diegetically inclined player might instead evaluate the situation regarding how their character should react to such an encounter based on their character's personality and previous experiences, and through that makes a decision that is not optimal from a ludological view.

Ludological frame

The ludological frame of the roleplaying game is the framework of rules. Rolling dice to decide the outcome of an action is a typical example of an act in the ludological frame. (Dormans, 2006) This is the frame that the hypothesis states as possibly negatively correlated with higher levels of affection for a participant's character.

The ludological frame as a motivation is the striving after power and using the rules to optimize the power of one's character. This power can be manifested in concepts such as stats and skills, in-game currency and items. Classical examples of the ludological frame can be taken from the PnP RPG "Dungeons and Dragons", where the focus of the rules lies in the combat mechanics. The character sheet, the skills, the pre-made classes and so forth presumes a setting where powerful heroes kill monsters. Many strategy guides and articles have been written on how a player should pick skills to optimize the combat usefulness of their character, and a classic adventure setting in "Dungeons and Dragons" is to kill all the monsters in a dungeon to obtain treasures in the dungeon, and/or a similar reward from a non-player character who have hired the player character(s) for this purpose. The ludological motivation can also be to provide

ludological consistency, meaning that the rules will always be the same and will not be bent for the sake of other frames.

Social frame

The social frame is the social context where a group of people meet to play a roleplaying game. It is the fellowship aspect of games, as described by the 8 kinds of fun model. (Hunicke, R.; LeBlanc, M.; Zubek, R., 2004)

“On the other hand, some players use roleplaying just as an excuse to be among friends and have some fun. When asked about his most rewarding experience one player talks about the social setting of roleplaying games and recalls the attic where he gathered with his friends for a couple of beers and game of Shadowrun.” (Dormans, 2006)

The social frame has been shown to in some cases correlate with players forming a connection with their characters. (Kallin, 2013; Cover, 2005)

2.4 From theory to data collection

To investigate how often a respondent takes their in-game decisions on the different frames, the questionnaire asked three separate questions on how often the diegetic, social, and ludological frame strongly influences the respondents' in-game choices. As these motivations are not necessarily mutually exclusive, two questions were asked on how often the diegetic frame got priority when it conflicts with the ludological or the social frame.

It could be relevant to see how much the respondent values the different frames, to see if that would be different from which frames the respondent base their in-game actions on. So three separate questions were asked on how much the respondent valued the different frames. The introductory questions defined the nominal variables of age and sex to describe the population. To describe the population further and look at player habits, there were also questions on how frequently the respondent plays PnP RPGs, for how many years they have been playing, and how important they think their hobby is to them.

Three questions were asked to measure how the player feels about their character(s). As participants of Kallins (2013) interviews stated that they felt attached to their characters, the first

question of the category inquired how often the respondent feels attached to their character(s). Since Cover (2005) states that tragic incidents are often felt stronger by players who are emotionally immersed in the game than victorious events, two questions were asked on how often the respondent gets an emotional reaction when their character(s) faces either tragedy or success. This is also supported by Meriläinen (2012) who finds a difference between how often a player experiences a positive or a negative emotional reaction by an in-game event.

2.5 Conclusion of the theoretical framework

To conclude, the PnP RPG has three frames; diegetic, social, and ludological. The importance of these frames can differ greatly between players. There is also a concept of how a player can emotionally connect with their character, where some contributing factors have been investigated in previous research.

The hypothesis is about investigating a possible correlation between which frame that a player favors when making in-game choices and the player/character connection. As it has been stated by Cover (2005) and Kallin (2013), the social frame can contribute to the player/character connection. To go further into that, the hypothesis is that the diegetic in contrast to the ludological frame might correlate with players feeling a connection toward their characters.

3.0 Method

To collect the data, a questionnaire has been distributed online and collected answers from roleplayers. A quantitative approach is chosen for the research question, as the hypothesis want to investigate if there is a general correlation between two concepts in PnP RPGs. A larger data sample will make it more valid to generalize from the gathered data. (Eliasson, 2006) Earlier roleplaying research has mostly consisted of qualitative research, with small samples which might suffer from not being representative of roleplayers in general. (Meriläinen, 2012) As this paper aspires to have a more balanced group of respondents to be representative of the roleplaying community at large, the quantitative approach has been chosen.

The data collection has measured in what extent the player perceives that they base their in-game actions on the diegetic frame, the social frame and the ludological frame. It has also measured the players perceived level of connection with their character, as well as a number of nominal variables to describe the population. The questionnaire uses a 5-step Likert scale to let the respondents evaluate how much they agree with a statement, how often they do a certain action or feel a certain emotion while playing.

To increase the validity of the data collection, a test group has been conducted with four potential respondents before the data collection was started to ensure that the questionnaire is understandable. All participants in the test group were students at a higher education, to ensure that they could find potential academic flaws as well. Two participants were game students and two studied humanitarian subjects. They were in the age range of 20 – 25, and there were two men and two women.

3.1 Respondent target group

The target group for the questionnaire was players of pen-and-paper roleplaying games. This was limited to people living in Sweden. To get respondents, the link to the questionnaire was spread on social media, which was then spread further with the snowball effect (Meriläinen, 2012). A number of roleplaying associations tied to SVEROK (Sveriges roll- och konfliktpelsförbund, Swedens roleplaying- and conflict-game association) was also contacted. The associations were found through <http://hitta.sverok.se/> (SVEROK's online tool to find any gaming association tied to them). Roleplaying associations with diverse geographical locations were selected and was sent an email with a short description of this report, and was asked to spread the questionnaire within their association.

This method might exclude potential respondents who do roleplay, but do not have a larger social circle of other roleplayers or who are active in a roleplaying association tied to SVEROK. People who live outside of Sweden are also actively excluded. There is also a bias amongst roleplayers that mainly play roleplaying games for the narrative, social or ludological aspect, which may deem the other factors as non-valid reasons to play roleplaying games. (Bergström, 2012) This could influence their answers and modify them towards their own ideological view on roleplaying games, even though a hardcore narrativist may base their in-game decisions on ludological factors as well, just not in the same proportions.

The division of the answers in the questions about the respondents playing habits is based on personal experience of the Swedish roleplaying community. For example, in my experience, a playing frequency somewhere in the range of once per week and once per year is the most common. This is why specific options for more or less frequent playing habits was not provided, but instead just stated "or more frequent" and "or less frequent" at the different ends of the scale. To make sure that the respondents would understand the questions about in-game choices, an example was added under each question where an in-game choice was described being done for different reasons. It is with intention another wording used for the questionnaire than the terms that are used in this paper. For example, "diegetic" is phrased as "storytelling" in the questionnaire. This is to ensure that the respondents understand the terminology and can relate the questions to their experiences of roleplaying games.

3.2 Limitations of methodology

This report limits the scope of roleplaying games to only PnP RPGs. As the central question is whether the player/character connection is related to in which magnitude a player base their in-game decisions on the different frames of the PnP RPG, this report will cover that question only, with the exception of descriptive variables and the differences within subgroups that might show. The report will not handle any other subjects related to roleplaying games, player choices or the player/character connection.

As the data collection is in the form of an anonymous quantitative questionnaire distributed online, there are a few issues with the methodology. There is a risk that the respondents misinterprets a question due to biased wording, or answer the questions in an unthoughtful manner because of the easy accessibility. (Evans; Mathur, 2005) However, this risk has been lowered by having a test group of potential respondents giving feedback on the questionnaire before it was distributed. (Eliasson, 2006) In addition, as the respondents were asked to evaluate how often they experience a certain emotion or motivate an action with a certain basis, the measurements are not exact and are based on the respondents' view of their own hobby engagement. There is also a risk that the respondent is not aware of how they play roleplaying games, or that they are biased towards a play style and modify their responses toward their personal ideal.

The more exact approach to this could have been observation. However, observing players to estimate how they motivate their choices and their emotional responses would also be problematic. As one can do a choice that looks motivated by one frame, but is actually based on another, that data would also be distorted. To measure emotional responses with observation would also be difficult, as people express their emotions differently. Perhaps a combination of observation and quantitative interviews would be the most accurate methodology to study these concepts further. The strength of the chosen method is mainly that the larger population that makes it possible to do broader generalizations, in contrast to the lost accuracy.

4.0 Result

The data was analyzed with SPSS, and the charts have been built with Microsoft Excel.

For measuring correlations between variables, the Pearson coefficient has been used (denoted as “r”). Its values go from -1.0, meaning a perfect negative correlation, and 1.0, meaning a perfect positive correlation. (Eliasson, 2006) Values close to zero are seen as not showing a correlation. The following notations of statistical dependence are the ones that are used in the data analysis.

According to Cohen (1988) a correlation between $\pm .10$ and $\pm .29$ indicates a weak dependence, a correlation between $\pm .30$ and $\pm .49$ a medium one and a correlation of over $\pm .50$ a strong one. (Meriläinen, 2012, p. 55)

4.1 The statistical group

The questionnaire was answered by 315 respondents over the duration of a week. Out of these, there was an overrepresentation of male respondents, with 244 men (77.5%), 65 women (20.6%) and 6 respondents (1.9%) of other gender identities. Age-wise, there was a majority of respondents in the ages 20 - 35 (215 respondents, 79.7%).

As my population for the survey is Swedish pen-and-paper roleplayers, there is no exact number on how many individuals that are engaged in the hobby. There are currently 110 000 members of SVEROK. However, not all of these are pen-and-paper roleplayers (SVEROK covers a range of other gaming activities such as board games, organized computer games and LARPs). Keeping in mind that a person can be a member of several associations under SVEROK, and that there are roleplayers outside of SVEROK, I roughly estimate the Swedish roleplaying community to consist of 10 000 – 50 000 people.

4.2 Player habits

The data on player habits showed indications on a respondent group who are fairly hardcore players. Firstly, it was common to have a longer experience with the hobby. The largest group in the question “*For how long have you been playing roleplaying games?*” was the one with the largest number of years, “> 15 years”, applying to 115 respondents (36,5%). This prolonged hobby experience shows that the respondent group were experienced players.

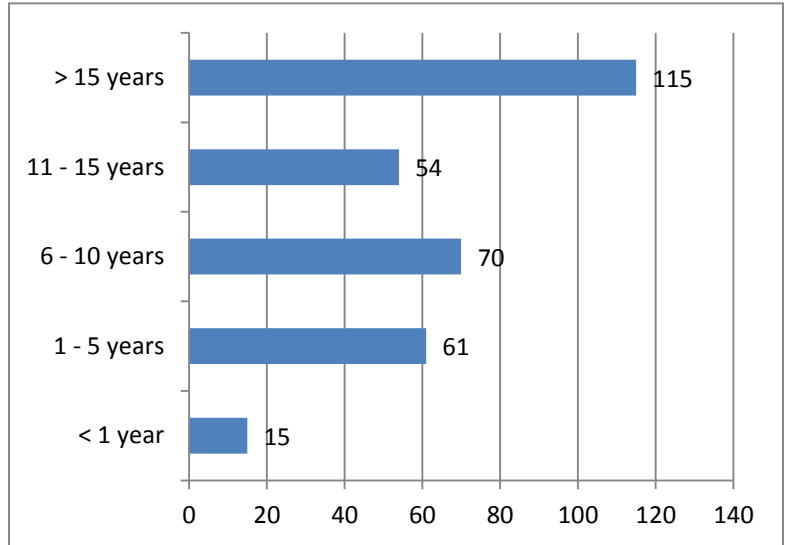


Figure 2.1: For how long have you been playing roleplaying games?

The majority of the respondents also deemed roleplaying games as an important part of their lives, where 237 respondents (75.2%) did either somewhat agree or completely agree with the statement. This shows that the respondent group consisted of dedicated roleplayers.

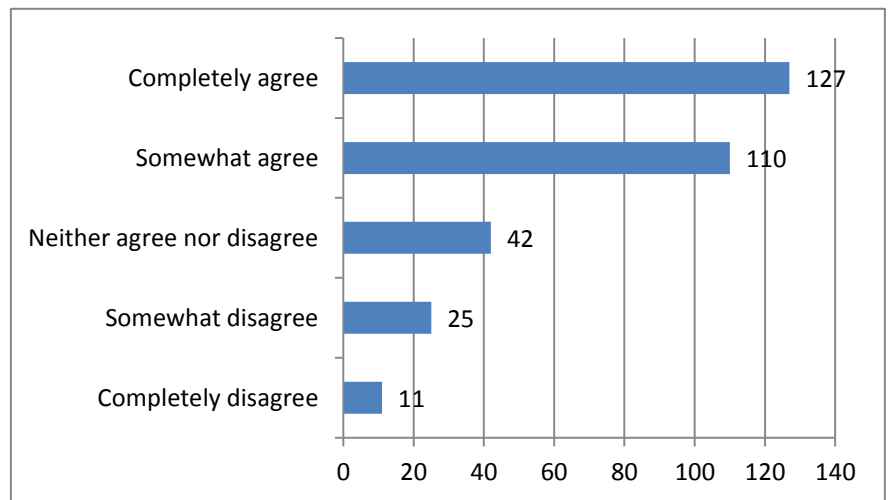


Figure 2.2: Roleplaying games are an important part of my life.

The most common frequency of roleplaying sessions was the category “*Every month*”. A majority of the respondents, 193 (61.3 %) were generally playing roleplaying games either every month, every week, or more frequent. This shows that the respondent group consists mainly of players who put much of their leisure time into their hobby.

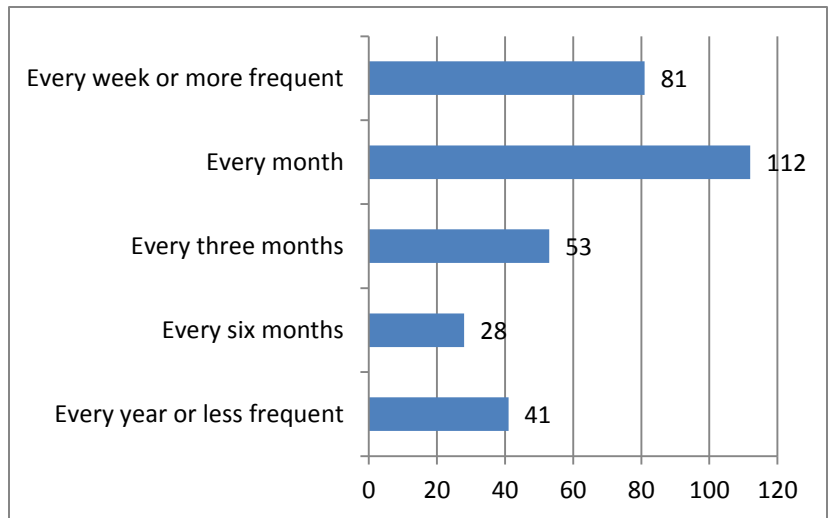


Figure 2.3: How often do you generally play roleplaying games?

A clear majority valued both the social and the diegetic frame. There was a wider spread regarding the ludological frame. This shows that the social and diegetic frame is something that is generally considered important to the respondent group, while there are parted opinions on the value of the ludological frame.

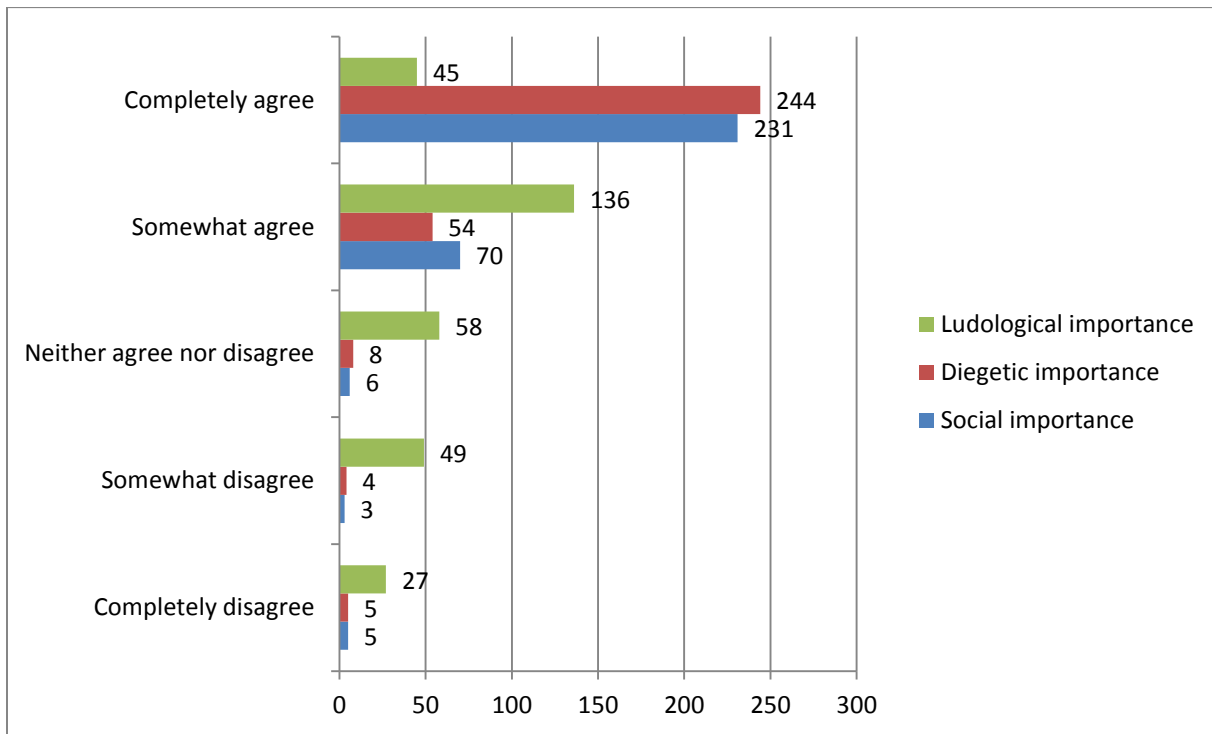


Figure 2.4: Perceived importance of the three frames.

4.3 Player choices

Of the three frames, respondents had their in-game choices most frequently influenced by the diegetic frame. 283 of respondents (89.8%) answered “Often” or “Very often” on how often the diegetic frame strongly influenced their in-game choices. This corresponds with that a clear majority of the respondents deemed the diegetic frame to be important to them.

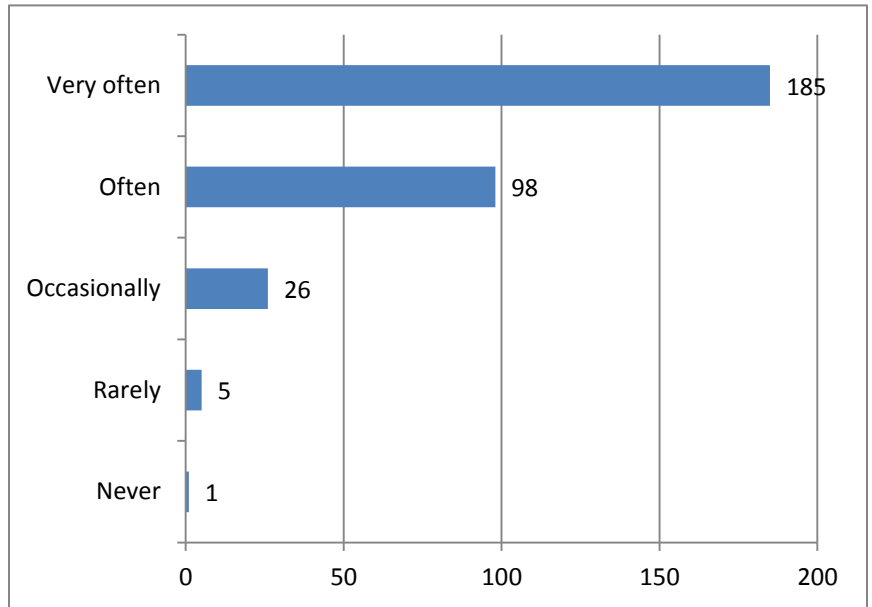


Figure 3.1: How often does the storytelling strongly influence your in-game choices?

The answers on the questions on how often the respondents’ choices were strongly influenced by the social frame and the ludological frame were more evenly distributed than the answers regarding the diegetic frame, but both with a majority of the respondents in the categories of “Occasionally” and “Rarely”. This shows that these two frames are less important to the respondent group when it comes to in-game choices.

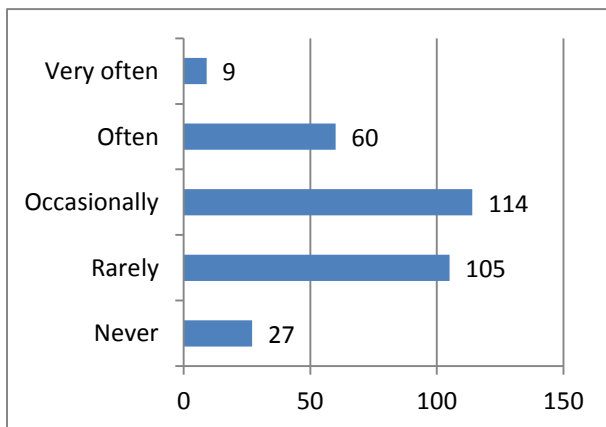


Figure 3.2: How often does the gaming aspect strongly influence your in-game choices?

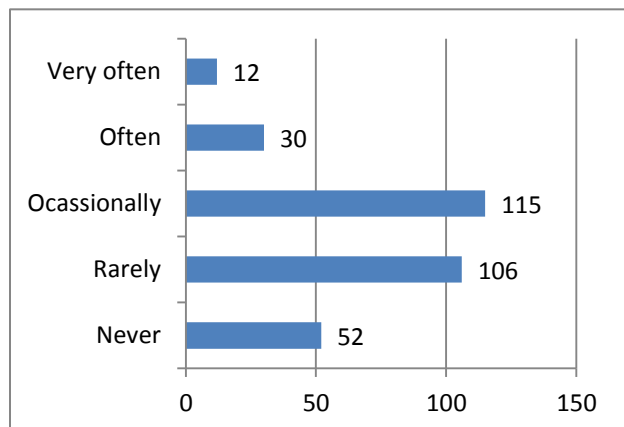


Figure 3.3: How often does the social situation strongly influence your in-game choices?

A clear majority, 257 (81.5%), prioritized the diegetic frame over the ludological frame. The contrast between the diegetic and the social frame were more ambiguously distributed with the majority of respondents, 222 (70.4%), in the categories “Occasionally” and “Often”. This is in line with the previous strong leaning towards the diegetic frame by the respondent group.

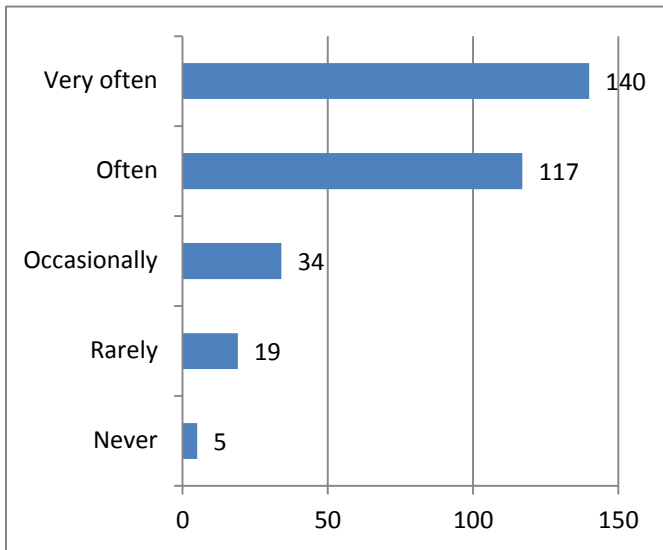


Figure 3.4: How often does the storytelling influence your in-game decisions when in conflict with the gaming aspect?

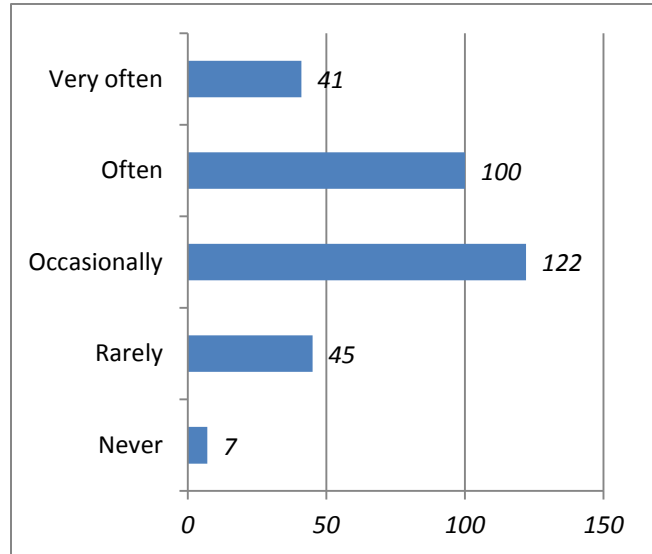


Figure 3.5: How often does the storytelling influence your in-game decisions when in conflict with the social situation?

4.4 Player/character connection

A clear majority often or very often felt attached to their characters (232 respondents, 75.3%), and often or very often felt happy when their character faced success (267 respondents, 84.8%). The three questions meant to measure the player/character connection all had a strong correlation between them.

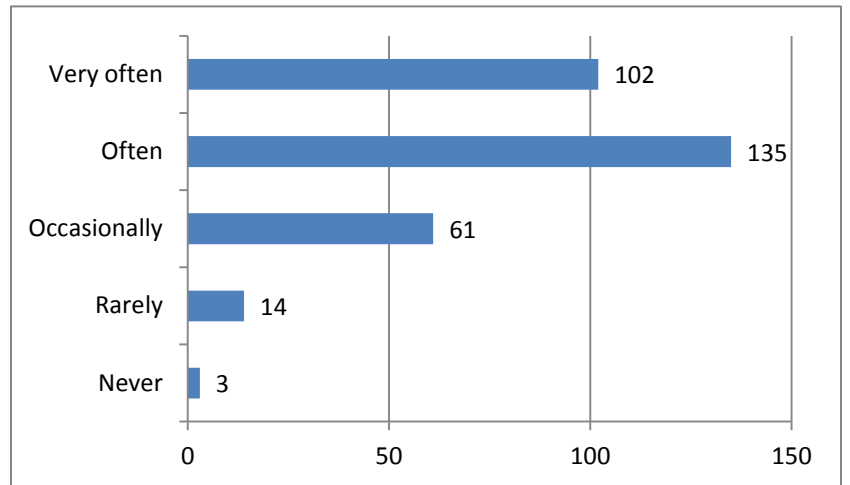


Figure 4.1: How often do you feel attached to your character(s)?

	Sad over character's tragedy/death	Happy over character's success
Connection with character	$r = 0.601$	$r = 0.506$
Happy over character's success	$r = 0.575$	

Figure 4.2: Correlation between questions on the player/character connection.

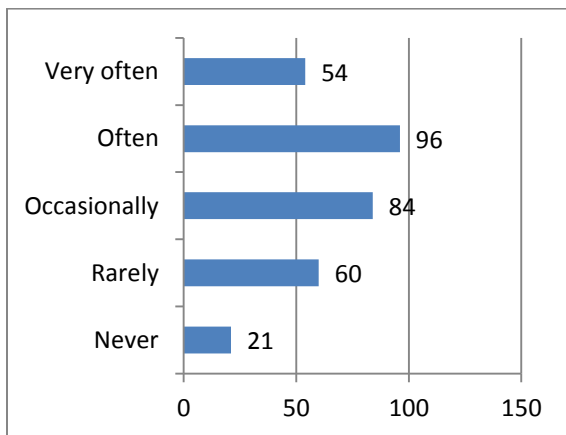


Figure 4.3: How often do you feel sad when your character(s) faces hardships or dies?

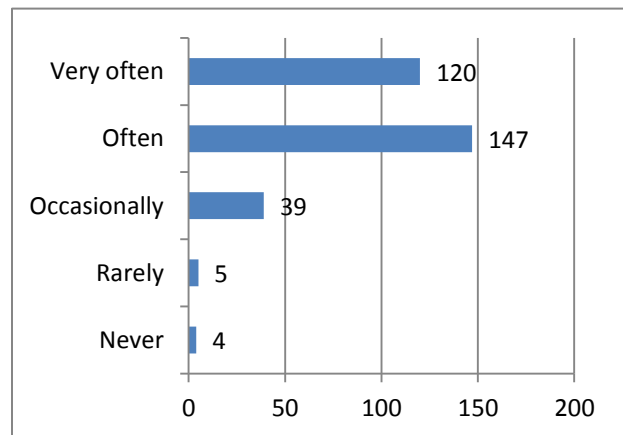


Figure 4.4: How often do you feel happy when your character(s) faces success?

4.5 Correlations

The main correlation that was said to be tested in the hypothesis, if taking diegetic choices over ludological is correlated with the player/character connection, showed to have a weak dependence with two of the questions which measured the player/character connection.

	Diegetic choices over ludological
Connection with character	$r = 0.224$
Sad over character's tragedy/death	$r = 0.080$
Happy over character's success	$r = 0.158$

Figure 5.1: Correlation between taking diegetic choices over ludological and the player/character connection.

	Diegetic choices over social
Connection with character	$r = 0.197$
Sad over character's tragedy/death	$r = 0.078$
Happy over character's success	$r = 0.140$

Figure 5.2: Correlation between taking diegetic choices over social and the player/character connection.

There was a greater dependence, however still a small dependence, between the respondent valuing their hobby and the player/character connection. Valuing the hobby also correlated with having played for a long time, playing frequently, and with valuing all of the three frames.

	PnP RPG importance
Connection with character	$r = 0.249$
Sad over character's tragedy/death	$r = 0.171$
Happy over character's success	$r = 0.225$

Figure 5.3: Correlation between valuing roleplaying games and the player/character connection.

	PnP RPG importance
Social importance	$r = 0.241$
Ludological importance	$r = 0.205$
Diegetic importance	$r = 0.347$
Playing PnP RPGs for long	$r = 0.210$
Playing PnP RPGs often	$r = 0.405$

Figure 5.4: Correlation between valuing roleplaying games and player habits.

There was one significant gender difference in question 15 (“How often do you feel sad when you character(s) faces hardships or dies?”). 46 of the female respondents (70.8%) answered “Often” or “Very often”, while 100 of the male respondents (40.8%) had answers in that range.

Respondents of other gender identities were evenly divided over “Occasionally”, “Often” and “Very often”, making them a group who statistically more than male and female respondents respond with negative emotions to their characters tragedies. Overall, 150 respondents (47.6%) had answers in the range of “Often” and “Very often”.

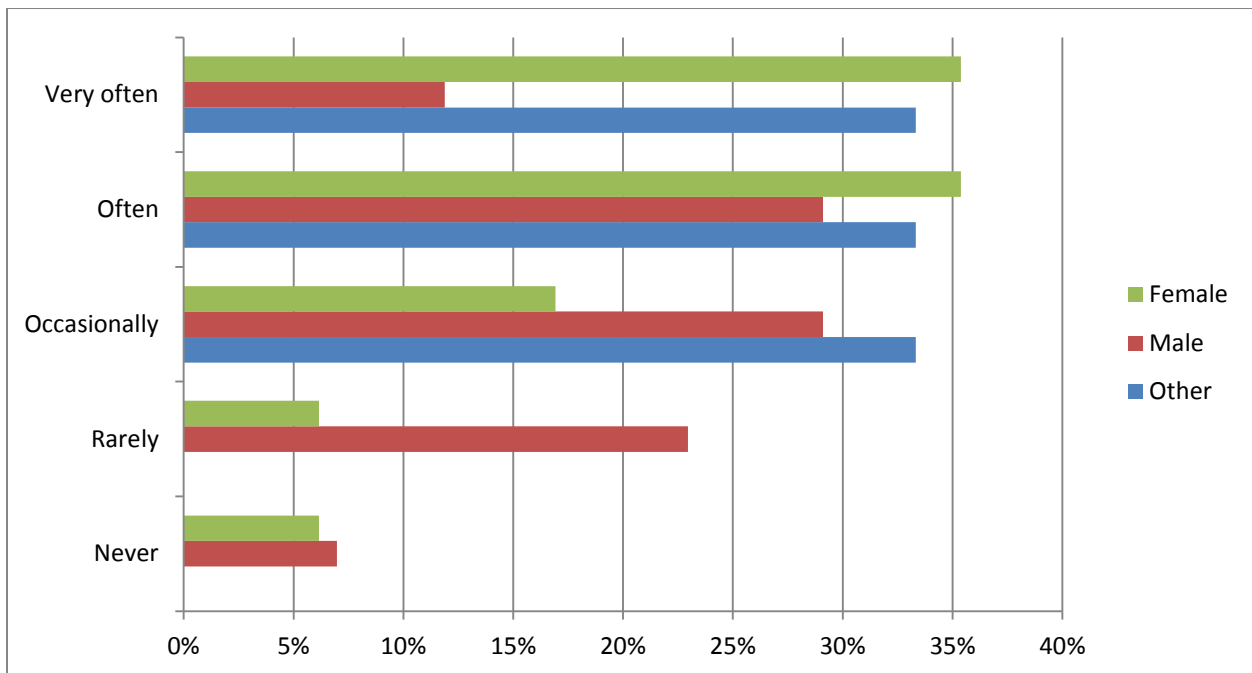


Figure 5.5: How often do you feel sad when your character(s) faces hardships or dies?

There were weak correlations with valuing the different frames and the player/character connection, with the diegetic being the most strongly correlated with all of the three questions that measured the player/character connection.

	Social importance	Ludological importance	Diegetic importance
Connection with character	r = 0.112	r = 0.082	r = 0.237
Sad over character's tragedy/death	r = 0.000	r = 0.135	r = 0.146
Happy over character's success	r = 0.043	r = 0.170	r = 0.173

Figure 5.6: Correlation between valuing the frames and the player/character connection.

In the context of choices, the diegetic frame was also more strongly correlated with the player/character connection than the other frames, with the exception of social choices being slightly more correlated with happiness over one's characters' success.

	Social choices	Ludological choices	Diegetic choices
Connection with character	r = 0.079	r = 0.023	r = 0.214
Sad over character's tragedy/death	r = 0.081	r = 0.081	r = 0.106
Happy over character's success	r = 0.198	r = 0.100	r = 0.196

Figure 5.7: Correlation between types of choices and the player/character connection.

When correlated with each other, the strongest correlation between the frames when it came to choices was between the social frame and the ludological frame. When it came to how the respondent values the different frames, the strongest correlation was between the diegetic frame and the social frame.

	Diegetic choices	Ludological choices
Social choices	r = -0.123	r = 0.265
Ludological choices	r = -0.092	

Figure 5.8: Correlations between types of choices.

	Diegetic importance	Ludological importance
Social importance	r = 0.424	r = 0.196
Ludological importance	r = -0.016	

Figure 5.9: Correlations between perceived importance of the different frames.

5.0 Analysis

5.1 Relationships between frames and player/character connection

To firstly look at the correlation sought by the hypothesis; based on the Pearson correlation, the diegetic frame in contrast to the ludological can be seen as weakly correlated with the player/character connection. (Figure 5.1) Also, the diegetic frame, both in the context of valuing the frame and basing in-game decisions on it, had a weak connection with the player/character connection. This correlation was greater than the correlation with the other two frames. (Figure 5.6 – 5.7) This shows that the diegetic frame is more closely related to the player/character connection than the other frames, even though the correlation is weak.

Going on to the social frame, which has been shown to correlate with the player/character connection in previous studies, it was not shown to be correlated to the player/character connection. (Figure 5.7) This suggests more complexity in the question than just being universally correlated. Cover (2005) describes that the social frame can heighten emotional immersion when all participants have a high level of engrossment in the diegetic context. Kallin (2013) concludes that playing with others whose characters' in-game responses to your own character forms the character over time can be a contributing factor to the player/character connection. As these cases are specific, and do not imply basing choices on the social frame, but rather being compatible as a group within the social frame, one can see why the social frame did not correlate with the player/character connection in the data collection of this paper.

5.2 Relationships between frames

The relationships between all the three frames had varying correlations. The strongest correlation between the frames when it came to choices (Figure 5.8) were social and ludological, and the strongest correlation when looking at how the respondent valued the different frames (Figure 5.9), was the one between the diegetic and the social frame. This is similar to the result of Meriläinen (2012), who found that what players valued about roleplaying games, and what their focus was during the play session was not necessarily the same.

Both Adams (2005) and Juul (2001) put ludology and narration in contrast to each other. However, both of their articles are about digital games, where the quick improvisation of a GM cannot be found (which Adams mentions). This implied relationship is somewhat along the line of the data, as those two frames are not correlated, but not inversely correlated either. Bergström (2012) finds that the rules of PnP RPGs can be leaning towards “narrative first” or “rules first”, which at a first glance can seem to support the previous theories. However, he also finds that the rules can support the diegetic frame in ways such as providing inspiration for the setting (by presenting examples and possibilities of skills and actions to be taken in the game world). This study is more nuanced, and only studies PnP RPGs, which gives a broader perspective on the relationship between these frames. Bergström’s explanation of the relationship between the ludological and the diegetic aspect might better explain the data of this paper than Adams and Juul’s theories. That the ludological aspect also can lift the diegetic frame, for example by providing consistency, shows that this relationship can be ambiguous. This may explain the lack of any clear relationship between these frames. Another argument for why the relationship between ludology and narrativity might be more complex in PnP RPGs is Juul’s (2001) view that a sequence of events in a game creates a story, which would mean that the actions of a purely ludological player still creates a narrative, even though it might be of another flavor than the story that comes out of a more diegetically motivated type of play.

To discuss the frames in contrast to each other when it came to choices, it was far more common to prioritize the diegetic frame over the ludological frame, than to prioritize the diegetic frame over the social frame. However, when it came to choices, the diegetic frame was most often prioritized first for the majority of the respondents compared to the other frames. This is likely because of the respondent group being mainly diegetically inclined players, and being fairly hardcore players regarding hobby experience, playing frequency and valuing of the hobby. The stronger opposition to the ludological frame than the social could be because of the bias between diegetically respectively ludologically inclined players. (Bergström, 2012) A clear majority valued the social frame highly as well as the diegetic frame, which may explain why the contrast with the social frame was not as significant.

5.3 Other correlations

A respondent valuing their hobby correlated with to have been engaged in the hobby for a long time, playing frequently, and with valuing all of the three frames (Figure 5.4), as well as the player/character connection (Figure 5.3). This could indicate that how involved the player is in their hobby, the more likely they are to get emotionally immersed in the game, and through this aspect forming a connection with their character regardless of their style of play.

The strong correlation of the three questions on the player/character connection indicates that the form of measurement was successful, in the way that the questions measured different yet related aspects of the same concept.

The difference between sexes regarding how often a respondent had a negative emotional reaction to their characters tragedies was similar to what Meriläinen (2012) found, as his results showed that female respondents were more often inclined to have negative emotional experiences from roleplaying games.

6.0 Discussion

In this section, contents of the analysis will be discussed in a broader perspective.

6.1 Relations between frames

As stated in the analysis section, the three frames had different relationships when it came to valuing the frame, and basing in-game choices on the frame. One reason for that the social and diegetic frame is negatively correlated in the context of choices could be because of the social rule about not talking of things unrelated to the game (Montola, 2008), commonly known as “offing”, to discuss things that are off-game. So a diegetically inclined player who wants to experience a story might often see off-game discussions as something that ruins the game for them. Even though they would not base their in-game decisions on the social frame, they could still appreciate the social frame in the context of creating and experiencing a story together with their friends. As the ludological frame was more correlated with the social in terms of choices (Figure 5.8), one explanation for it could be that the ludological immersion is not as easily disrupted by off-game discussions as the diegetic, or that the ludological frame in other aspects might be more integrated with choices in the social frame than the diegetic frame is.

6.2 Gender differences

The respondent group was predominately male, and the significant gender difference found was whether the respondent felt sad when their character faced death or tragedy. (Figure 5.5) This could be because men are less inclined to empathizing with a tragic event, or because gender roles expect this division of emotional responses.

To look at how the question of gender is used in roleplaying games, Meriläinen (2012) found in his study that a clear majority of the respondents have played characters that have been different to them in a number of ways. 76.4% of the respondents had played a character that was of another sex, and a majority (88.3%) agreed to some extent that they thought it was easy to experiment with different social roles while playing roleplaying games. Looking at this, it would seem like PnP RPGs is a context that is not as enforcing of gender roles as other hobbies might

be. Traditionally however, roleplaying games have had a predominately male audience, and the attitudes to non-male players have been unwelcoming. (Fine, 1983) Looking at the question in this perspective, these attitudes might still live on to some extent and enforce gendered behavior in a hobby that otherwise leans toward experimentation with identities. However, purely regarding gender balance, this seems to be more evened out as of today. Meriläinen (2012) had a more balanced respondent group in terms of gender (59% men and 41% women) than this paper's data collection. However, Meriläinen (2012) included both PnP RPGs and LARPs, and had a purely Finnish population in the data collection, which could influence the numbers. This increased diversity could be a reason for improved attitudes towards non-male players since Fine's book was written, together with changing attitudes in society as a whole as well.

There was also a formulation in the question where the difference between sexes was observed that may have been misinterpreted by several respondents. The question asked how frequently a respondent would feel sad over their character's hardships or death. "Tragedy" could have been a better word than "hardships", as one respondent commented that they would have answered differently if "hardships" and "death" had been different questions, along with a comment that hardships are just a part of the fun. Here, the respondent probably interpreted "hardships" as having a conflict in the play, which is central to both narrative and ludology. "Hardships" was rather intended as something tragic happening to the character in the line of losing someone close to them, which is something people would generally empathize with if it would happen to a friend.

6.3 Diegetic styles of play

The respondent group consisted mainly of diegetically inclined roleplayers, which could be representative for the Swedish roleplaying community. During the data collection, participants commented about a movement of roleplayers in Sweden who are playing a form of roleplaying games they call "indie roleplaying games", which are small roleplaying game systems that focus on rewarding the player for their roleplaying efforts and build the rules around a very specific setting. The indie roleplaying games are put in contrast to what is called "tradspel" ("traditionella

spel” or “traditional games”), which is described as generalized roleplaying game systems with more open settings, such as “Dungeons and Dragons”.

Bergström (2012) describes in his study that the most diegetically inclined roleplaying group he observed simplified the games rules, and had chosen a less complex rule system from the beginning. This illustrates the contrast between ludology and narratology in PnP RPGs. This group saw the rules primarily as a framework for their diegetic play, in contrast to the more ludologically inclined groups who found motivation solving problems through usage of the game system, and using a more complex game system to get more ludological depth. The indie roleplaying games can be seen as a reaction to this conflict that roleplaying groups tend to lean either toward a diegetic or a ludological style of play.

Even though diegetically inclined players are seeking out indie roleplaying games instead of the traditional kind, they would probably not erase other PnP RPGs amongst the primarily diegetic players. In Bergströms (2012) study on different forms of creativity in roleplaying games, he finds several creative factors and how they become a motivation for players. The form of creativity that is to as a group expand and add details to the game world is a creative aspect that is closely related to the diegetic frame, and is an aspect that is taken away in order to create a more tailor-made experience in the indie roleplaying games.

To conclude the discussion on frames and play styles, it is important to bear in mind that the division of motivations by the three frames is a very rough generalization, and that many nuances and variations of the different frames can exist in different contexts for different players. The examples that are used in the theory section and in the questionnaire have been phrased to be simplified classical examples that most people who have played PnP RPGs in some form would be able to understand and relate to.

7.0 Conclusion

To answer the hypothesis, there is a correlation between the player/character connection and taking diegetic in-game decisions over ludological in-game decisions. However, as this is a weak connection, and there is no connection when comparing with how often the respondent feels sad because of their characters tragedies, the data shows that this question probably is more complex than the hypothesis had presumed it was, and the hypothesis is therefore not proven. However, diegetic decisions and diegetic appreciation was more strongly related to the player/character connection than decisions based on and appreciation for the other frames. To summarize this relationship, the player/character connection is related to the diegetic frame more than the other frames, but not necessarily in contrast to them and the dependence between the concepts is weak.

The social frame does not seem to be related to the player/character connection in general. Previous research has shown that the social frame can contribute to the player/character connection in certain cases, but social compatibleness between the participants can be seen as a contributing factor to the player/character connection rather than choices based on the social frame. The data indicates that the three frames have different relationships in the context of how the player values the frame, and how their in-game choices are influenced. The largest difference here was the diegetic and the social frame, which were positively correlated in the context of how a player valued the frames, and negatively correlated when it came to in-game choices. This shows that which aspects a player appreciates is not necessarily what they focus on when making in-game decisions.

There is a conflict between narratology and ludology in PnP RPGs as observed by Bergström (2012), but it does not have to be the same form of relationship between these aspects as it has been observed in digital games. Several aspects point towards a possibility for a more harmonic relationship between the narratology and ludology in PnP RPGs than in digital games. Adams (2005) holds the GMs of PnP RPGs as a role model of what would be desired in the narratives of digital games; to seamlessly add new elements and characters on the fly during the gaming session to make the narrative experience more dynamic and tailor-made. Juul (2001) argues for that presented narrative and ludological actions cannot take place at the same time. However, in the context of PnP RPGs, these aspects are more closely related. Speaking as your character is an

action in the diegetic frame, but it can at the same time be means to achieve goals in the ludological frame. Arjoranta (2011) argues that roleplaying games rather should be defined as language games, which could be a more suiting approach to the matter, to see language as a part of the mechanics of the game because of this closer relationship between narrativity and ludology. Bergström (2012) supports this notion further, by investigating different forms of creativity in PnP RPGs in relation to the rule system, and finding that several aspects of the rule system does support diegetic motives, such as providing narrative consistency in the game world. And to see this more harmonic relationship in practice, the indie roleplaying games movement work to find rule system solutions that enforces and supports the diegetic play. This dynamic between narratology and ludology can be important to bear in mind when designing a rule system for a PnP RPG, and when designing content for one.

8.0 Further research

As there were only weak indications of the correlation that this paper was trying to show, there is a point in doing further research in the area of both the three frames of PnP RPGs as well as the player/character connection in PnP RPGs to understand the concepts further.

On the note of the ludology versus narratology debate, it would be interesting to see a study on how different game systems that support either a more diegetic form of play or a more ludological form of play affect the play style and the player/character connection amongst the participants. Regarding the social frame, one could go deeper into which contexts of the social frame that heightens the emotional immersion, and if there is variations that either supports the diegetic or the ludological frame.

In conclusion, there are still various aspects to investigate regarding the dynamics between the different concepts presented in this paper.

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10.0 Appendices

Data_characters_and_choices_in_roleplaying_games.xls

Questionnaire_characters_and_choices_in_roleplaying_games.pdf