FLUCTUATING IDENTITIES IN CYBERSPACE AND CYBERFEMINISM
A comparison of Philippine and Korean experiences

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Abstract

This essay provides a critical take on a Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) as an example of a cyberspace activity and applies empirical studies on online game players and feminist theories like Haraway's postulation of the cyborg and Braidotti's nomadic subject to see if Sadie Plant's expectation regarding cyberspace is feasible. It looks at the results of the survey answered by Philippine and (South) Korean players to see how the theories and reality match when comparing two different cultures.

According to feminist theorists like Sadie Plant, cyberspace would give women more freedom and even a chance to avenge themselves against patriarchy. She insists that male participants' conceptions of reality and identity are upturned in cyberspace, allowing the return of the repressed, the return of the feminine, perhaps even the revenge of nature. In this paper, I will provide a critical take on a Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) as an example of a cyberspace activity, and will apply empirical studies on online game players and feminist theories like Donna Haraway's postulation of the cyborg and Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subject to see if Sadie Plant's expectation regarding cyberspace is feasible. I will also look at the results of the survey answered by Philippine and (South) Korean players to see how the theories and reality match when comparing two different cultures.

Cyberspace and MMORPG

Cyberspace has become a significant part of media and contemporary

life. According to Internet World Stats, there are 1.463 billion internet users in the world and over 578 million users are in Asian countries. The largest internet café chain in the Philippines, Netopia, conducted a study on the local internet café industry and its customers in 2004. The results showed that there were over 5 million online gamers in the Philippines and they spend an average of 60 Philippine pesos (Php) a day to play in internet cafés. The study also discovered that there were around 14,000 internet cafés in the Philippines. The officers of the Commission on Information and Communication Technology (CICT) commented that this popularity of internet gaming in the Philippines will help them achieve their goal of developing the Philippine digital infrastructure, and the online games leading this popularity in the Philippines are mainly Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG). The situation of the global Massive Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG) market is similar to that of the Philippines, where more than 60% of its market is dominated by the game *World of Warcraft (WoW)*, which in 2009 was the most famous MMORPGs in the world.

Online games, especially MMORPGs, are some of the best examples of the ubiquity of cyberspace. MMORPG is itself a huge instance of cyberspace and millions of players construct their virtual lives in it through their avatars. *WoW* is the most successful online game in the world today. According to MMOGChart.com, the single game *WoW*, with its 10 million-plus players, dominates more than 60% of global online game markets. *WoW* is a Middle Age fantasy-based online role playing game. There are two camps in conflict in this world, the Horde and the Alliance. The Horde camp represents the alliance of monsters like Orc and Undead, and the Alliance camp represents the alliance between humankind races like Humans, Dwarfs and Elves. Players can choose any one of these races and once they choose, they automatically become a member of one of the camps in which their characters' race is involved; this membership leads players into conflict with the other camp.

Figure 1. World of Warcraft. The conflict between two camps, Alliance (left) and Horde (right).

Players in different camps can kill each other and if one kills players belonging to the other camp, the game gives the surviving player honor points, which can then be exchanged with special items later. Therefore, it is a huge motivation for players to kill one another in this game. The players in *WoW* not only play in cooperation with some players but also against other players. Players in the same camp have to help each other defeat players in the other camp, but at other moments the two camps also have to help each other defeat a few legendary monsters in the game. Therefore, players are required to think strategically in order to survive the complications in the various types of conflict. Such conflict and motivation are the key elements that make the social interaction in this area of cyberspace more prevalent and stronger, compared with other genres of online games, and the complexities of conflictive social interactions make MMORPGs worthy of study as models capable of exhibiting qualities and varieties of human behavior.

Studies on MMORPG Players

Considering these interactivity and sociologic values in MMORPGs,

scholars in game study often insist MMORPG is more than a game. They have recognized MMORPG as a new platform for social science research. These scholars' main focus has been the players. Through examining the players' behavior, they have tried to answer the questions 'who play, why and how do they play?' regarding the players. Richard Bartle's player type was the first significant attempt to answer these questions. In his paper "Heart, clubs, diamonds, spades: Players who suit MUDs" (1996), he divides players into four types (achiever, explorer, killer, socializer) in MUDs, which are considered as the originators of MMORPGs. According to him, MUDs have different meanings for each type of players. MUD is a game for the achiever, a pastime for the explorer, a sport for the killer and a form of entertainment for the socializer. Therefore, the motivations of game play are also different for each type of player. However, Bartle's study on MUD players has been often criticized since it was not based on empirical evidence such as practical data from surveys or interviews with players.

Criticizing and supplementing Bartle's player type, empirical approaches to the study on players have actively been conducted in recent years. The paper "The demographics, motivations and derived experiences of users of massively multi-user online graphical environment" (2006) by Nick Yee is the result of his three-year survey of 30,000 MMORPG players. As the title of the paper shows, Yee focuses on the issues of the players' motivations regarding and their experiences in MMORPG. According to his research, 85.4% of the respondents were males whose average age was about 26, with a range of 11 to 68. This result indicates that MMORPGs appeal across generations but at the same time cyberspace is overwhelmingly male-dominated. Regarding the motivation, the result says the players vary according to gender and age differences. Especially regarding gender, the dominant motivation for male players turned out to be achievement and manipulation, whereas for female players, it turned out to be relationship and immersion.

Dmitri Williams, Nick Yee and Scott E. Caplan's collaboration "Who plays, how much, and why? Debunking the stereotypical gamer profile" (2008) is a research report on 7,000 players of *EverQuest 2*, an MMORPG produced by Sony Entertainment. This research focuses on the existing stereotypes on players and players' real life identity as well as their motivation for playing. According to the result, prevalent stereotypes of computer game players, who are supposedly young males, pale, and socially inept, are not valid anymore. Players in the US turned out to be richer, healthier, and more

educated than the average US citizen. Also the research found that 80.8% of the respondents were males and the players' most favored motivation was achievement. As a result of being the most favored motivation, achievement was also the motivation that most positively concerned players' playing time.

Economist Edward Castronova is a game study scholar who discovered the value of virtual economy in the cyberspace of MMORPGs. He studied players' behavior mainly through the elements of a virtual economy that the players react to in cyberspace. In his paper "Virtual worlds: A first-hand account of market and society on the cyberian frontier" (2001), Castronova discovers that in the cyberspace of *EverQuest 2* the GDP per capita is higher than that of China and India, and the currency in *EverQuest 2* is worth more than the Japanese yen. These virtual GDPs and currencies would not be valuable in real life as they were in cyberspace but for the players who need to buy weapons and armors to defeat dragons online, it could be more valuable than real-life GDPs and currencies.

These studies based on empirical approaches have proved that MMORPG as cyberspace has enough potential to be a new field for social science study, and indeed it has become a study field for social science. Focusing on human behavior in the cyberspace of MMORPG, theses studies discovered how humans react to and interact in the virtual reality of MMORPG, and also how the special circumstance of virtual reality affects human behavior. Also MMORPG itself has a hospitable environment as a new platform for social-science study. By allowing researchers to access its huge database of players it enables the researchers to track down players' behavior and interactions in cyberspace without disturbing the players.

Since enough significant empirical studies on MMORPG players have already provided hard evidence based on their data findings, it would be worthwhile to invite other perspectives for studying the players at this point. The perspective of cyber feminist's theory provides a useful critical approach to the issues of male identity in cyberspace. By defining the cyberspace as a female-oriented place, cyberfeminist theory can pioneer the investigation of male identity in cyberspace. Since, as the empirical studies above showed, at least 80% of MMORPG players are males, the male identity as determined by cyberfeminist theory would be significant at least as one of the steps for critiquing the male players' identity in the cyberspace of MMORPGs.

Sadie Plant on Cyberspace

According to Sadie Plant in *Beyond the Screen*s, cyberspace opens up new possibilities for the creation of a female-dominant culture. She argues that cyberfeminism constitutes a post-human insurrection against patriarchy that had dominated technology, and it is marked primarily by an alliance between females and machines. Technology has always been used by man to expand his power and strengthen his domination. However, the character of machines and cyberspace, which are the products of technology, are defined as feminine rather than masculine by cyberfeminists. According to them, if the truly human is the real man, then machines cannot be a man. Like the nature of femininity, machines are unpredictable. They can go wrong or break down anytime and anywhere so that men always try to achieve perfect control over them. In the case of cyberspace, cyberfeminism defines it as a space of woven matrix. Just as the Jacquard loom was the origin of software, so cyberspace is also built on this weaving mechanism. Moreover, the way of communication that hypertext provides in cyberspace is arguably feminine. By breaking all the concepts of straightforward narrative, hypertext allows the users to have communication that is developed by women and defined as hysterical by men.

However, MMORPG as cyberspace seems, at least on its appearance, a male-dominated place. Even though players have to be engaged with both machine (computer) and cyberspace (internet) to play MMORPGs, these games seem to affirm and assist the expansion of male power in cyberspace. The reasons are not difficult to deduce. First of all, all the worlds of MMORPGs are built on conflict and war. There are always at least two camps in conflict in MMORPGs, and players grow their avatars mainly through participating in the war. Reflecting this character of the worlds in MMORPGs, the Yee and Williams research findings have discovered that at least 80% of the players in MMORPGs are males. Also the main motivation of the players is achievement and this motivation most positively concerns players' playing time. Therefore, an MMORPG could be described as a place where males rush in to celebrate and enjoy their masculinity. Thus one might initially conclude that the cyberspace of MMOPRG is far from female-dominated, contrary to cyber-feminists' assertion. However, Plant sees this masculinity in cyberspace as a lure that tempts men to enter cyberspace and in order to destroy their identity:

Cyberspace certainly tempts its users with the ultimate fulfillment of

the patriarchal dream, leaving the proper body behind and floating in the immaterial. But who is adrift in the data stream? All identity is lost in the matrix, where man does not achieve pure consciousness, final autonomy, but disappears on the matrix, his boundaries collapsed in the cybernetic net (1993, 10).

Plant's "ultimate fulfillment of the patriarchal dream," therefore, explains the result of the empirical research done by Yee and Williams that discovered that most of the players are males and their main motivation is achievement. As Yee and Williams' research findings show, at least 80% of the players in MMORPG are male players and these players play MMORPG mainly for achievement. The main achievement that most players pursue in MMORPGs is reaching the pinnacle state of game play by attaining the highest level of their avatar. This level can be attained mainly through killing monsters and enemy players. From this killing, players get experience points for leveling up their avatars and also can attain powerful items that increase physical and magical power of their avatars. Therefore, reaching the highest level for a player is getting more masculine power and at the same time strengthening the avatar's domination against those of other players, and this coincides with the idea of the ultimate fulfillment of the patriarchal dream. Thus, putting together Plant's argument and the empirical studies on MMORPGs, it becomes clear that male players voluntarily enter the cyberspace of MMORPG to realize their patriarchal dream through achievement.

The reason the male players try to fulfill their patriarchal dream in the cyberspace of MMORPG would be because it is almost impossible in real life; it is something that they couldn't achieve in their real life. In his book *Synthetic Worlds* (2005), Castronova asserts that "People go to the synthetic world because it offers emotional joys that the Game of Life does not. The Game of Life, on Earth it seems, is not a very good game at all, at least not for some people" (2005, 76). Furthermore,

It seems that the moment of obtaining income is a happy one, but the happiness does not last. From the perspective of play theory, the treadmill of income acquisition in ordinary life does not provide a good game; there are not enough moments of success, and new rewards appear only infrequently and for too few people. As a result, very many of us come to feel like we are getting nowhere at all. Behavioral psychologist Tibor Scitovsky (1976) put it bluntly: Our economy is

joyless (Castronova 2005, 76).

According to Castronova, the emotional joys in the synthetic world come from the successes and rewards that the players cannot achieve easily in reality. In MMORPGs, these successes and rewards are accomplished mainly when the players kill the monsters and enemy players. From this killing, the players not only can reach higher levels but also can obtain powerful items that strengthen the physical and magical power of their avatars. Therefore, the success and rewards in MMORPGs can be regarded as steps for being more powerful and in the end fulfilling the patriarchal dream. Therefore, on this point, Sadie Plant and Castronova's theories are complementary to each other. For Plant, the emotional joy that Castronova explains is the "ultimate fulfillment of the patriarchal dream," and for both of them, this is the main element that tempts the players into entering the cyberspace of MMORPGs. After this consideration of the theories of Plant and Castronova, a question then arises: How does the fulfillment of the patriarchal dream concern with the loss of male identity in cyberspace as Sadie Plant asserts? At this point, it is still questionable if the male players can lose their identity in the cyberspace of MMORPG while they are fulfilling their patriarchal dream. Although Plant asserts that since cyberspace is female dominant space, the male identity will be destroyed once he enters cyberspace, how this female dominance in cyberspace could destroy male identity is still not clear in her statement.

> Hooked up to the screens and jacked into decks, man becomes the user, the addict, who can no longer insist on his sovereign autonomy and separation from nature. Increasingly integrated with the environment from which he always considered himself distinguished, he finds himself traveling on networks he didn't even know existed, and entering space in which his conceptions of reality and identity are destroyed. This is the return of the repressed, the return of the feminine, perhaps even the revenge of nature (1993, 13).

Do the separation from nature and traveling along networks really destroy male participants' conceptions of reality and identity? What the male participants aim to do in cyberspace is just enjoy the fulfillment of their patriarchal dream without unnecessarily losing their identity. In this regard, it seems there is no need for male participants to lose their identity at all.

By comparing and matching the studies of Plant, Castronova and empirical researchers, it became clear that the Plant's idea on the ultimate

fulfillment of the patriarchal dream is convincing enough. This patriarchal dream is explained as joy for Castronova and achievement for empirical researchers like Yee and Williams. Although the terms they use are different from each other, patriarchal dream, joy and achievement indicate one and the same thing that is empowering masculinity. Therefore, cyberspace, especially that of MMORPGs, could be the best place to realize the fantasy of masculinity for male participants. In this sense, cyberspace indeed attracts male participants with its pro-masculine appearance as Plant asserts. However, to explore the possibilities of loss of the male identity in cyberspace, Plant's argument alone seems not enough to be convincing. Therefore, to explore Plant's assertion on the loss of male identity in cyberspace more, this paper will invite other feminist theories like cyborg feminism and the nomadic subject, and will see how male identity in cyberspace could possibly be further configured.

The Cyborg and the Nomadic Subject

According to Donna Haraway, cyborgs are Utopian for feminists. Cyborgs break the dualism in patriarchal society, specifically the binaries between man and woman, good and bad, white and people of color, transgressing the border between subject and object, self and other with their hybrid characteristics:

It is not just that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex domination. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves (Haraway 1991, 181).

Cyborg is a word coined in 1960 by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline. It is a compound of "cybernetics" and "organism" that designates a "cyborgian man-machine hybrid," and it is the body designed to help humans survive in the environment of outer world or space. If this origin of the word "cyborg" is considered, then it seems that avatars in cyberspace, especially in MMORPGs, can be also called cyborgs, because the bodies of avatars not only enable humans to have a life in cyberspace but also because they represent a hybrid of human endeavor and the computer code.

Figure 2. Avatar selecting stage in MMORPG (Mabinogi: Heroes, 2009).

As new generations of MMORPG come out, avatars tend to become more realistic and the options players can make on it also become more detailed. This tendency of being more realistic and detailed helps players to achieve a relatively more realistic life in cyberspace and also helps them have a higher level of identification with it. For a cyborg, this tendency of development is quite a welcome outcome.

Therefore, for the male participants, deciding to play an MMORPG is akin to giving up their patriarchal domination, in the sense that they agree to transform into cyborgs instantaneously and surrender their individual consciousness. Yet the major fact that attracts male players to MMORPGs is ironically the patriarchal dream as Plant asserted.

Like the cyborg, the nomad is explained as an image of diversity in postmodernity. As the cyborg has its hybrid characteristic in transgressing the border between subject and object, the nomad has its own figuration, as described by Rosi Braidotti, which comes from its homelessness and rootless characteristics:

The nomad expresses my own figurations of a situated, culturally differentiated understanding of the subject. This subject can also be described as post-modern/industrial/colonial, depending on one's locations. Those locations do differ and those differences do matter. In so far as axes of differentiations like class, race, ethnicity, gender, age,

and others interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, the notion of nomadism refers to the simultaneous occurrence of many of these at once. Nomadic subjectivity is about the simultaneity of complex and multi-layered identities (Braidotti 2002, 10).

Before applying Braidotti's nomadic feminism to MMORPGs, one thing that has to be considered is the difference that exist among migrants, exiles, and nomads. Braidotti defines the migrant as closer to "home" values, in the traversal from home to the host country, which are fixed locations and roots. The exile, on the other hand, is almost completely not returnable to the home country, but also there are two fixed locations, as in the case of the migrant. The nomad, however, relinquishes and deconstructs any sense of fixed locations and roots, and is more related to the characteristic of the nomadic feminist subject according to Braidotti.

Hence, the main question that arises is: which of these three options do the MMORPG players most resemble? There is another interpretation on this matter from Castronova:

Whether the synthetic world grows does depend on the nature of experience within it, but, critically, it also depends on the nature of experience here on Earth. People will go where things are best for them. It is an issue of migration (Castronova 2005, 71).

Castronova here considers only two places, Earth (real world) and the synthetic world (cyberspace), and defines the traversal between the two as an issue of migration. However, what Castronova misses here is the fact that there are multiple synthetic worlds, not any single one, so the participants in synthetic worlds will also go where things are best for them among various possible synthetic worlds. Therefore, the players in MMORPGs, who are also the participants in synthetic worlds, are nomads rather than migrants. There are no fixed locations or roots for the players, who may will themselves to go to any MMORPG that gives them the greatest pleasure or the best fantasy of masculinity, and once they are either satisfied or disappointed sufficiently, they will move to another MMORPG for more or a newer fantasy of masculinity. There are no rules for their movement around on the various MMORPGs, and this principle is exactly like the nomadic subject that Braidotti defines.

At this stage we may be able to conclude that, as Sadie Plant says, the conceptions of reality and identity of male players traveling within

MMORPGs are destroyed by their voluntary acquiescence in becoming cyborg and nomadic subjects, paradoxically in exchange for their patriarchal dream. If we recall the studies of Castronova and empirical researchers like Yee and Williams, the dominant motivations for participants in cyberspace are joy and achievement. Joy, Castronova says, comes from rewards and successes, which the participants couldn't easily have in real life. Therefore, this joy is directly related to achievement and this achievement is considered as a main motivation for male players by empirical researchers. Since the main achievement in MMORPG for players is empowering their avatar through leveling up and getting powerful items, it is exactly coincidental with the idea of Plant on the ultimate fulfillment of patriarchal dream. According to Plant, the ultimate fulfillment of the patriarchal dream tempts men to enter cyberspace and they lose their identity in this matrix. At first, I expressed doubt if male players would necessarily lose their identities in the cyberspace of MMORPGs. However, after considering the possible implications of the cyborg and nomadic subject in MMORPGs, at least it appears likely to us that male players' identity in cyberspace is situated in a place where their boundaries become much vaguer than in real life.

To see if these boundaries really can collapse in the cyberspace of MMORPGs, I conducted a survey on MMORPG players focusing on gender issues. From observing the perspective and behavior of players regarding gender issues in the cyberspace of MMORPG, this paper will hopefully provide visible evidence about the collapse of boundaries in cyberspace.

Survey on MMORPG Players

In this survey, I tried to look at how MMORPG players deal with gender issues and choices. The one thing a player has to do before she or he starts an MMORPG is selecting her or his avatar's gender. Almost all MMORPGs allow the players to choose any gender for their respective avatars, regardless of their real-life gender. How the players choose their gender and react to it would be the key to figuring out whether the boundaries of male players' identity are destroyed in cyberspace. Also by comparing two nations of players, Filipinos and (South) Koreans, this survey will see if there is any difference between two nations of players regarding their attitude and behavior toward gender issues in cyberspace.

Method

The subjects of this survey were Philippine players (a total of 50 players comprising 40 males and 10 females) and South Korean players (32 males and 2 females for a total of 34). In the Philippines survey sheets were distributed through three internet cafes in Quezon City, Metro Manila. Two of them are located in the campus of the University of the Philippines Diliman and another is located in the adjacent Philcoa area. For Korean players, the survey sheets were distributed through the Somegate website (www.somegate.com), which is one of the most active online community websites for Korean *WoW* players. The survey sheet was posted on the bulletin board of Somegate and players participated in the survey by writing their answers on the reply section of the board. Anonymity of the participants was completely guaranteed. The only bits of personal information the survey required were gender and age. In the case of Korean participants, since the Somegate website lets its users use nicknames instead of IDs or real names, and classified its users' personal information, the participants could freely join the survey without the risk of identity disclosure.

The questionnaire for the survey consisted of six main questions except for the request for gender and age. The questions are focused on gender issues regarding the players' playing style toward the gender issues in the cyberspace of MMORPG. The number of questions is small and the questions were made as simple as possible to not distract the participants' personal thoughts and to extract spontaneous answers.

One limitation of this survey is the relatively small sample size and unequal number of respondents between the Philippines and Korea. It can be difficult to draw broad generalizations from the results of this survey for these reasons. However, the survey shows clearly distinct differences between the players of the Philippines and those of Korea.

Result

Table 1. Survey Questions and Results (P: Philippines, K: Korea).

1. Do you regard your character (avatar) in online RPG as yourself?
        Yes (P: 61%, K: 33%)   No (P: 39%, K: 67%)
 	
2. Have you ever played an online RPG as an opposite-sex character?
        Yes (P: 55%, K: 88%)   No (P: 45%, K:12%)
    (Go to Question No.3)   (Go to Question No.5)

3. Have you ever deceived other players about your real gender when you play as an opposite-sex character?

        Yes (P: 19%, K: 11.5%)   No (P: 36%, K: 76.5%)

4. Did you ever experience confusion in your sexual identity when you assume an opposite-sex character?

        Yes (P: 17%, K: 0%)   No (P: 38%, K: 88%)

5. Which sexuality of character do you usually prefer?

        Opposite-sex character (P: 34%, K: 36%)
        Same-sex character   (P: 65%, K: 39%)
        No preference (P: 1%,   K: 25%)

6. What is your attitude toward other players who assume opposite-sex characters?

        Positive   (P: 16%, K: 0%)
        Negative   (P: 21%, K: 2.5%)
        Neutral   (P: 63%, K: 97.5%)

Question 1 shows that Philippine players are far more serious about being consistent with the gender of their avatars than Korean players. While 61% of Philippine players regard their avatar as themselves, 67% of Korean players do not share this anxiety. The matter becomes clearer in Question 2. Almost half of Philippine players (45%) have not assumed opposite-sex avatars because, consistent with their response to Question 1, Philippine players tend to regard their avatars as themselves. On the other hand, 88% of Korean players have assumed opposite-sex avatars, which mean Korean players are much more flexible than Philippine players when it comes to choosing their avatar's gender.

There is not much difference between the two groups of players in Question 3. Regardless of their flexibility in choosing their avatar's gender, not many players conceal their real gender from other players except for some reasons. The main reason Philippine players hide their actual gender is to gain advantage from other players. Filipino respondents answered that if they pretend to be female, it is easy to get items and game money from male players. In case of Korean players, only four players (11.5%) answered they have deceived other players, and two of these four are female, which is

also the total number of female respondents in the survey. The reason female players conceal their gender is because they had been discriminated against when they told male players that they were women. They said Korean male players tend to underestimate female players whenever they play together. This is a fairly notable result because it tells us that while Korean male players are much more open in choosing and playing opposite-sex characters than Philippine players, at the same time their orientation within the society of MMORPG players remains patriarchal, in that they discriminate against and underestimate female players.

Question 4 shows that the players hardly feel confusion regarding their real sexuality even when they assume opposite-sex avatars. Especially, no one answered yes among the Korean male players (since of course they were in the MMORPG precisely for their fantasy of masculinity). Question 5 also shows that while 65% of Philippine players usually insist on playing a same-sex character, only 39% of Korean players usually play same-sex characters. The result may be related to that of Question 2. Question 6 shows that while 21% of Philippine players are negative about other players who assume opposite-sex avatars, only 2.5% of Korean players are negative about it.

Discussion 1 – Gender issues overall

The answers the players made about why they prefer opposite-sex or same-sex avatars reveal that there are two types of players: those who regard their avatars as themselves, and those who don't. The players who preferred same-sex avatars mainly answered that it is easy to immerse in the game when they play avatars of their own sex. Also many said they cannot imagine themselves playing opposite-sex avatars because their avatars should represent them. In contrast, the male players who prefer female avatars mainly answered that they play female avatars because of the latter's pulchritude. Some gave specific answers that attraction to a pretty female avatar is natural for male players. Also others remarked that playing MMORPGs takes an inordinately long time so their avatars should represent pretty women who can give them continuous visual pleasure.

Figure 3. Images of female characters in MMORPGs (from left: Blade & Soul, PristonTale 2, and Cabal).

Are they subliminally appealing to male players to 'Play me! Play me!'?

However, there were interesting answers both from same sex- and opposite sex-preferring players. One Korean male player who always chose male avatars reasoned that he liked such avatars because he was a man. And he shortly asked himself afterward, 'I'm a man and I like male avatars?' Also, a Korean male player who preferred to use female avatars reported that he felt confusion about his gender identity from the reaction of other players who treated him as a real female. He said this misrecognition of his gender by other male players upset him so much that he had never played female avatars since then. These two reports tell us that there are possibilities of confusion in gender identity of players regardless of their preference and logic in the choice of their avatars' gender. In other words, players intentionally choose their avatars' gender for better immersion or more visual pleasure but side or unintended effects occur, which can affect the players' self-identities whether they may be aware of it or not.

Discussion 2 – The two different attitudes toward gender issues

As the answers to Questions 1 and 2 show, Korean players show much higher level of flexibility than Philippine players when it comes to choosing their avatar's gender. While almost half of Filipino players have never played opposite-gender avatars, 88% of Korean players have experienced playing opposite-gender avatars. Also the preference of the avatar's gender shows that while 65% of Filipino players prefer same-sex avatars, 61% of Korean players

prefer opposite-sex avatars or have no preference.

Then what could possibly cause this quite distinguishable difference between Filipino and Korean players regarding gender issues? At first, data from the survey show that gender and age distributions between the Filipino and Korean groups are not even. While the proportion of female participants among Filipinos is 20%, it is only 6% among Koreans. Also age distribution between the two groups reveals a huge difference. While all the Filipino participants were in their teens (65%) and twenties (35%), all the Korean participants were in their twenties (59%) and thirties (41%). These unequal distributions of gender and age between the two groups might have affected the result of the survey.

However, since about 58% of Filipino female players and 41% of Filipino male players averred that they have not used any opposite-sex avatar, the 20% of proportion of female players in the Filipino group does not significantly affect the final result, which is 45% of total Filipino players who have not used an opposite-sex avatar. Therefore, the unequal distribution of gender between Filipino and Korean groups cannot explain why the Filipino group shows a much higher level of loyalty to their original gender (45%) than does the Korean group (12%).

In terms of age, while the majority of Filipino participants comprised teenagers (65%), all the Korean participants were in their twenties (59%) and thirties (41%). However, between age groups, there is almost no difference regarding their experience of playing as opposite-sex avatars. In the case of the Filipino group, almost 45% of teenagers said they have not assumed any opposite-sex avatar and also almost 46% of players who are in their twenties answered the same. In the Korean group, 10% and 14% of participants who were in their twenties and thirties respectively answered they have not assumed an opposite-sex avatar. Therefore, the unequal distribution of age between the two groups also cannot explain the different level of loyalty to the original sex of either group. At this point, playing an opposite-sex avatar has almost nothing to do with gender or age difference but rather it seems to mainly deal with the different character or situation of the two nationalities since, in each group, the level of loyalty to one's original sex appears almost regardless of gender or age.

What then could be the character or situation of the two nationalities that caused the difference in attitudes toward this gender issue? This question

is out of the range that this survey can answer but one could at least relate some historical, social, and cultural factors with this issue. However, since these factors are too broad and sometimes even tricky to deal with, it would be better to limit the field of the current problem. Most types of cyberspace have become prevalent with the rise of the internet and rapid growth of its infrastructure. Especially, by taking advantage of high-speed internet accessibility and the dramatically increased capacity of computer processors, the visual-based forms of cyberspace like online games have become able to expand their influence on the online internet network. According to Plant, since men are tempted to venture into cyberspace and lose their identity in it, the accessibility and influence of cyberspace might affect the degree of the loss of identity. Therefore, it can be assumed that the more chances for men to be tempted by cyberspace, the more chances for them to lose their identity as well. Taking off from this assumption, this discussion will look closely at the type of internet industry that shows the accessibility and influence of cyberspace in two countries.

As the survey results showed, Korean players are much more likely to play opposite-sex avatars and react much less negatively toward players who play opposite-sex avatars in comparison with Filipino players. I cannot conclude that Korean players' identities get more easily lost in the cyberspace of MMORPGs than Filipino players from this result but, at the very least, it is clear that Korean players show a higher degree of boundary collapse than Filipino players. Then for the validity of the assumption I made above, the Korean internet industry has to have a higher level of accessibility and influence than the Philippines, so it can provide players more chances to be tempted by cyberspace and thereby lose their identity. According to a report, "Global household broadband penetration rankings" (2008), published by the analyst firm Strategy Analytics, South Korea is ranked first place with 95% of its households provided with internet access via broadband. In the case of the Philippines, the country is ranked 52nd with only 5% of households having internet access via broadband.

Table 2. Global Household Broadband Penetration Rankings (Strategy Analytics, 2008)

Rank	Country	HH Pen	Rank	Country	HH Pen
1	South Korea	95%	30	Greece	39%
2	Singapore	88%	31	Turkey	37%

3	Netherlands	85%	32	Hungary	34%
4	Denmark	82%	33	Slovakia	32%
5	Taiwan	81%	34	Poland	32%
6	Hong Kong	81%	35	Argentina	31%
7	Israel	77%	36	Romania	31%
8	Switzerland	76%	37	Latvia	30%
9	Canda	76%	38	Czech Republic	28%
10	Norway	75%	39	Mexico	28%
11	Australia	72%	40	Chile	27%
12	Finland	69%	41	Croatia	23%
13	France	68%	42	China	21%
14	United Kingdom	67%	43	Malaysia	21%
15	United Arab Emirates	65%	44	Venezuela	17%
16	Japan	65%	45	Brazil	17%
17	Sweden	63%	46	Russia	14%
18	Estonia	62%	47	Bulgaria	13%
19	Belgium	62%	48	Peru	11%
20	United States of America	60%	49	Saudi Arabia	7%
21	Slovenia	58%	50	Thailand	7%
22	Germany	58%	51	Vietnam	7%
23	Ireland	58%	52	Philippines	5%
24	Spain	57%	53	Albania	5%
25	New Zealand	57%	54	Ukraine	4%
26	Lithuania	51%	55	Egypt	3%
27	Italy	51%	56	India	2%
28	Austria	50%	57	Indonesia	1%
29	Portugal	40%			

Also according to an IDC report on the online game industry, titled "Asia/Pacific (excluding Japan) online gaming 2006-2010 forecast and analysis" (2006), the scale of South Korea's online game market in 2005 was about US$ 630 million and the scale of the Philippines's online game market was US$ 13.4 million. This comparison shows that the scale of the online game market in Korea is about 47 times that of the Philippines. From these data, one could logically expect that Koreans are much more exposed to the online cyberspace enviroment than Filipinos are. Most Koreans can access the

internet for 24 hours at home and the influence of the online game market in Korea is considerably bigger than it is in the Philippines. Therefore, at this point, the assumption that I made based on Plant's assertion is worth considering for this different level of boundary collapse in two countries. As the players have more chances to expose to and be tempted by the enviroment of cyberspace, their boundaries might become more vague as Plant asserted. However, since the subject nationalities of this survey were from only two countries, a further study that covers more nationalities will be needed to make the relation between boundary collapse and the internet industry clearer.

Matrix, where man does not achieve pure consciousness

Up to now we have looked at how the identity of male participants in cyberspace could be configured through cyberfeminist theories and empirical studies on MMORPG players. This paper has shown that Plant's assertion on the temptation of the fulfillment of the patriarchal dream in cyberspace is reinterpreted as the motivation of playing, which is achievement, in empirical studies of Yee and Williams. Therefore, Plant's argument on how men are tempted to explore cyberspace, and the use of empirical studies on the motivation of players, both complement each other by sharing common ground. However, a problem emerges afterward. Plant asserts that men lose their identity in the exchange of the patriarchal dream in the matrix of cyberspace but the empirical studies hardly mention this possible loss of identity. To see how the loss of male identity in cyberspace could be possible, this paper has relied on the feminist concepts of the cyborg and the nomad. By suggesting that male players reside in the cyberspace of MMORPGs in the form of the cyborg and the nomad, this paper has argued that Plant's assertion on the loss of male identity can be sufficiently convincing.

The results of the survey conducted for this paper have showed that, as Plant asserts, boundary collapse actually takes place in the cyberspace of MMORPGs. Interestingly, this boundary collapse appears at a much higher level in the Korean player group than in the Filipino group. To explain this phenomenon, this paper made an assumption that the more chances to be exposed to cyberspace, the more chances for players to lose their identity based on Plant's assertion. To see these chances of exposure, this paper has looked at the internet industries of both countries and found that the Korean internet industry provides more chances of exposure to its users. This relation between boundary collapse and the internet industry is still vague and out of

the range that the survey results can answer, but at least this paper has helped prove that Plant's assertion is useful enough in explaining this phenomenon.

Based on these arguments and survey results, it seems Plant's assertion on male identity in cyberspace is being realized in contemporary online cyberspace. No matter what their economic situations are, most of the countries in the world will eventually expand their internet infrastructures and boost their respective online industries, and these attempts will provide more chances for people to be exposed to the cyberspace environment. If this situation promotes the boundary collapse of man in the matrix, where one does not achieve pure consciousness as Plant asserted, it is indeed the return of the repressed, the return of the feminine, perhaps even the revenge of nature (Plant, 1993).

However, I would like to look at this issue with another point of view. If any boundaries actually collapse in cyberspace, such boundaries would not be confined just to gender issues. Rather, these would also include other categories of identity such as race, nation, culture and religion. Once all these boundaries have collapsed in cyberspace, it would be a new venue for people to explore and experience beyond the real-world boundaries they once had, and it would constitute a huge benefit for people, rather than the vengeance that Plant warned about.

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