

GAMES FOR HEALTH EUROPE

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BEYOND THE HYPE

EMOTIONAL REGULATION THROUGH THE LENS OF **MMORPG RAIDING**: HOW THE PLAYER'S EXPERIENCES MATTER



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LOGGING IN: MMORPG RAIDING AS A CONTEXT FOR EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplay Games (MMORPGs)

One of the most popular forms of online gaming (Internet World Stats, 2022)

Raiding

An end game goal/ activity where a large group of players team up together with the common goal of defeating an environment generated monster (**boss**)

(Chang & Lin, 2014)



LOGGING IN: MMORPG RAIDING AS A CONTEXT FOR EMOTIONAL REGULATION

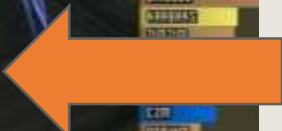
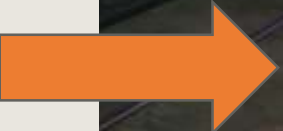
High End Raiding

- **End game** progression-based group content
- Encounters require repeated practice and coordination
- Fixed roles with strict performance expectations
- Failure has immediate, visible consequences for the group (Chang & Lin, 2014)



A RAID EXAMPLE FROM WORLD OF WARCRAFT

BOSS



PLAYER

RESEARCH PROBLEM: WHY STUDY EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN MMORPGS?

Research on MMORPGS has largely emphasized **negative** psychological outcomes (Ryan et al.,2006)

➤ Less attention has been paid to **emotional regulation** (ER) in cooperative, high pressure gameplay

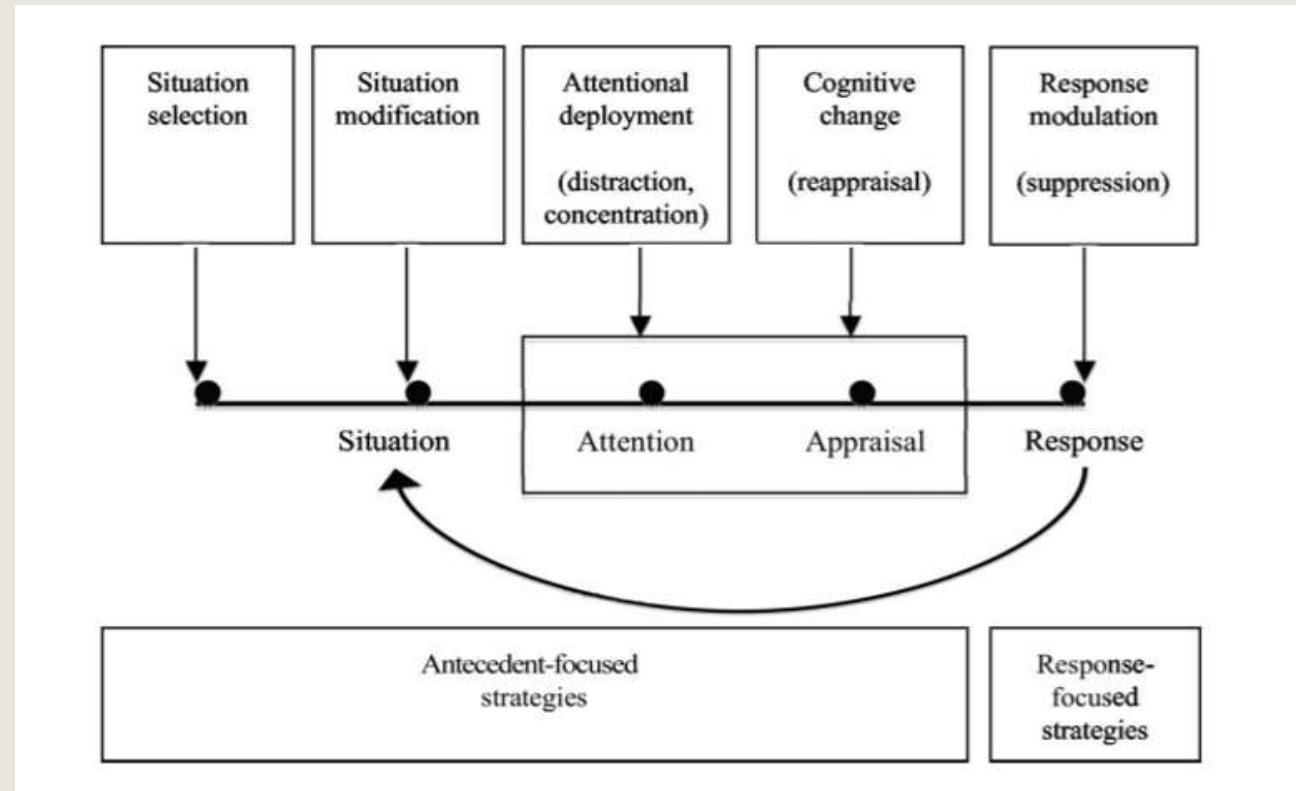
- High-end raiding remains an **underexplored context** for examining emotional regulation in action



RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative, interview-based study

- Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
 - In tandem with Gross's 5 emotional regulation strategies
- Focus on the lived experiences of emotional regulation in high end raiding
- Moderate expert sample of seasoned MMORPG raiders



DATA COLLECTION

Recruitment of Participants

9 participants in total

- Participants were recruited from **three popular** MMORPGs
 - **World of Warcraft Retail** (WOW Retail)
 - **World of Warcraft Classic** (WOW Classic)
 - **Final Fantasy Fourteen** (FFXIV)
- In text communication or the online chat platform Discord (Discord, 2014)

Inclusive Criteria

- Legal adults (18+)
- Sufficient experience in higher end raiding (2 years+)
- Efforts for gender diversity across all three games (inclusion of female participants)



DATA COLLECTION

Interview Procedure

Informed consent was provided prior to participation; debriefing was provided following the conclusion of the interview

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) (Gross & John, 2003)

- Participants completed the ERQ while reflecting on a **challenging raiding experience**
- ERQ responses were used to **contextualize** and **support** thematic interpretation

Semi structured interviews

- Conducted via Discord Voice Call
- Approximately 30 minutes in duration (maximum)
- Questions focusing on emotional experiences and regulation during high end raiding

We would like to ask you some questions about your emotional life, in particular, how you control (that is, regulate and manage) your emotions. The questions below involve two distinct aspects of your emotional life. One is your emotional experience, or what you feel like inside. The other is your emotional expression, or how you show your emotions in the way you talk, gesture, or behave. Although some of the following questions may seem similar to one another, they differ in important ways. For each item, please answer using the following scale:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|-------------------|---|---|---------|---|---|----------------|
| strongly disagree | | | neutral | | | strongly agree |

1. ___ When I want to feel more *positive* emotion (such as joy or amusement), I *change what I'm thinking about*.
2. ___ I keep my emotions to myself.
3. ___ When I want to feel less *negative* emotion (such as sadness or anger), I *change what I'm thinking about*.
4. ___ When I am feeling *positive* emotions, I am careful not to express them.



DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH

Interviews were transcribed verbatim

- Responses were examined to understand how players made sense of their emotional experiences while raiding
- Patterns in how players managed their emotions were identified
- These patterns were grouped into shared themes across participants

Quality and Reflexivity

- Coding and theme development discussed with three academic experts
- Reflexive awareness of researcher's insider position as a high-end raider
- Careful alignment maintained between data, themes, and interpretation



RESULTS: KEY FINDINGS

Thematic Overview

Theme I: Diving into High End Raiding

- Pursuing mastery
- Integrating into a team under pressure

Theme II: Quantifiable Competitiveness

- Performance metrics as motivation
- Balancing self- improvement and team goals

Theme III: Managing Tension During Raids

- Handling mistakes and failures
- Regulating emotions for team morale

Theme IV: A Virtual Microsociety

- Group size, accountability and performance anxiety

Theme V: All For One and One For All

- Trust collaboration and enduring social bonds



RESULTS: KEY FINDINGS

Emotional Regulation Across Themes

Players Consistently engaged in:

- **Attention deployment** (refocusing on the task or team goal)
- **Cognitive change** helped reframe failure and pressure
- Regulation was often **interpersonal** not just individual

High pressure cooperation **reinforced** adaptive ER strategies



APPLICATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Why these findings matter?

- High-end MMORPG raiding operates as a **naturalistic, high pressure team environment**
- Emotional regulation is practiced in **real time**, with immediate social consequences
- Regulation is reinforced through:
 - **Shared goals**
 - **Feedback**
 - **Accountability**



APPLICATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Education & Team Based Contexts

- Highlights how ER develops in **collaborative, performance-based settings**
- Relevant for:
 - **Group projects/team training**
 - **Leadership development (the concept of raid leaders)**
- Emphasizes the role of **shared responsibility** in sustaining regulation under pressure



APPLICATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Clinical & Conceptual Implications

- Challenges deficit-based stereotypes of gamers
- Distinguishes engaged **skill-based** play from problematic or avoidant gaming

Encourages clinicians to:

- Rethink “**healthy**” vs “**problematic**” play
- Understand the players’ points of view
- Contextualize the games (e.g. who is playing them, with whom, under what circumstances)



CONCLUSION

High-end MMORPG raiding supports the fostering of emotional regulation skills under pressure

- ER skills are practiced **in real time** within cooperative, performance-based teams
- **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis** enabled detailed exploration of lived emotional experience

Limitations & potential future directions

- Gender experiences of ER warrant **further investigation**
- Findings are based on a **small, expert sample**; future research should examine broader samples and real-world transferability



THANKYOU!

QUESTIONS?

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