

# "I'm Not Crazy, I'm a LARPer."

**An Anthropological Research Paper on  
the Effect of Live Role Play Gaming on  
the Social Skills and Networks of Young Players.**

**Eveline Marian Bulters  
evi.marian@gmail.com  
Drenthe Leeronderzoek, CA/OS  
Universiteit Leiden  
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## **Preface**

The thought behind this rather original and unusual subject is simple really. I could boast about how I am breaking new grounds in social anthropology by studying a subject previously forgotten by leisure

theorists, and sub-culture anthropologists, but the truth is, that is not at all what I wanted to achieve. When I first thought about going to Drenthe for three weeks, I did want to do something original and unexpected, but I had not thought about picking my own hobby as a subject at all. That's when I realized that many of my fellow students were studying elderly people, or uneducated farmers or some other group of people that I would otherwise never consider spending three weeks with. I realized that fieldwork away from home is hard enough as it is, I did not want to complicate it further by spending it amongst a bunch of people I had nothing in common with, so I decided it was best to interview and observe people I might actually enjoy being around. Soon enough I realized that I had the perfect subject for something both original and close to heart, Live Role Play games. Throughout the past year I have learned a lot about the game I have been playing for three years myself, and I have discovered that my hobby is at least as interesting, if not more so, than any other.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Part 1: Sociography</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>Live Role Play</i>	9
<i>LRP Community, Netherlands</i>	11
<i>Groningen, Groningen</i>	12
<i>Zwolle, Overijssel</i>	13
<i>Elsloo, Friesland</i>	14
<b>Part2: 'Research Methodologies'</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>Preparation (November - December)</i>	16
<i>Interviewing In The Field: Drenthe (January)</i>	16
<i>Theoretical Field Methodologies: Experiment Design</i>	17
<i>Theoretical Field Methodologies: The Difficulty With Self Evaluations</i>	18
<i>Actual Field Methodologies: Throwing Plans Out The Window</i>	20
<i>Participant Observation In the Field: Lextalionis (February)</i>	22
<b>Part 3: 'Operationalisation'</b>	<b>24</b>
<i>Research Question</i>	24
<i>Relevant Theories</i>	24
<i>Concept Definitions</i>	26
<b>Part 4: Data Presentation and Analysis</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>What role do LRP games play in young adults lives?</i>	29
<i>How do role play gamers perceive their previous social skills?</i>	31
<i>How do role play gamers perceive their current social skills?</i>	32
<i>Do role play gamers perceive a change in their social skills?</i>	33
<i>Do role play gamers attribute these changes to their involvement in LRP gaming?</i>	35
<i>How do role play gamers perceive their previous networks?</i>	36
<i>How do role play gamers perceive their current networks?</i>	36
<i>Do role play gamers perceive a change in these networks?</i>	37
<i>Do role play gamers attribute these changes to their involvement in LRP gaming?</i>	38
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Appendix:</b>	<b>41</b>
<i>i Dutch Role Play Calendar 2010</i>	41
<i>ii Codebook</i>	42
<i>iii SPSS Figures</i>	43
<i>iv Question List</i>	48
<i>v Semantic Differential</i>	53

**Abstract**

This research project was designed in the hopes of answering the following question:

*What is the perception of young-adult beginning live role play gamers of the effect game-play has had on their social skills, particularly the ability to meet new people, and on their ability to maintain newfound networks?*

The outcome I expected for my research is that role play gaming, although far from mainstream, is a hobby to be taken seriously that has significant positive effects on the social development of teens and young adults. I hoped to break the stereotypes surrounding the hobby, and hope to show that parents need to support their children when choosing this hobby, rather than discourage them from taking on such an unconventional pastime. I predicted that players will perceive their personalities as being more open to new experiences, more able to establish new connections, their social networks as being more extensive and diverse, and their self esteem to have risen since taking on the hobby. I was partially correct. Players have certainly experienced a significant increase in social relationships and an extension of their social network, and do identify the hobby as a main influence, but many also say that they would expect the same results among team sport players, or members of youth organizations. Many identify two almost exclusive groups of social contacts, one of which is their live role play contacts, the other consists of friends made through school, youth organizations or mutual friends. I hoped to formulate a nomothetic theory (Russell-Bernard 2002: 77) that could be applied to predict social growth and confidence for all young people who are exposed to role play gaming and though I will not claim role play gaming contributes more significantly to the social growth of young people than other activities, at least I can definitely argue that it is not a negative influence either.

To achieve my results, as intended, I applied the Campbell and Stanley post-test only design (Russell-Bernard, 2002: 119). Ideally, I would have used the one group pre-test, post-test design and had the players evaluate their personalities when first starting to explore live role play gaming, and once again after a period of 3 to 5 years. Because the Drenthe research assignment did not provide me with such an opportunity, I chose instead, to ask a set of 30 to 40 players who already have 2-5 years experience with live role play gaming to evaluate their personality at both times in one interview. However, finding it difficult to find enough respondents within that category, I ended up interviewing players with a wider range of experience.

The interviews were conducted in a face to face manner. Although some respondents were reluctant to take the time to meet with me and requested interviews via e-mail or phone, I decided that consistency was more important, as my own first impression of their body language and manner of speaking would be vital for a thorough analysis. For the self evaluation of the informants before and after personalities I used semantic differential scaling. This means participants were given "a target item and a list of paired adjectives about the target." (Russell-Bernard, 2002: 316) Though a few participants found it hard to recollect their previous persona, most were able to identify the most major changes over the years. I will elaborate on the methodologies of my research in a later chapter.

This research proposal was written under the guidance of, and evaluated by, Annemarie Samuels.

The Theoretical Background for it was written under the guidance of, and evaluated by, Dr. Liza Nell.

## Introduction

This research project was designed in the hopes of answering the following question:

*What is the perception of young-adult beginning live role play gamers of the effect game-play has had on their social skills, particularly the ability to meet new people, and on their ability to maintain newfound networks?*

I initially asked myself this research question because the idea of taking on a different personality for fun has always struck me as extremely relevant, but as far as I have been able to find, there has been no previous research done concerning the social implications role play gaming culture has on young people that are involved. Although Fine published an ethnography about the tabletop role-play gaming sub-culture in 1983, after his focus shifted to digital role play games as their popularity soared, peaking at the release of *World of Warcraft* which allows thousands of players to interact with each other in-game over the internet. Because digital gaming has become such a core focus of sociologists interested in gaming at all, live role play gaming has faded into the background even though it is still rising in popularity all over the world. An estimated 60,000 young people in the Netherlands alone, participate in large scale (between 100 and 700 participants) live role play events on a regular basis. I think it is a shame that this form of gaming has yet to receive its share of the spotlight considering it is one of the few games played by teenagers and young adults that still revolves around human, face to face interaction. This should be a core focus for any socio-anthropologist interested in the effect gaming has on social interaction.

Though it is still a rather unfamiliar society, role-play is no longer a genre of games that is played by a minority of nerds in their basements. I started playing D&D (Dungeons and Dragons) in my last Junior year of High School, now 6 years ago and have slowly evolved into a player of the Live variety. Live role-

play games (LRPG) vary from D&D not in its concept, its background, players or setting, but in the way it is played. While originally Role Playing games were designed to be played at a table, using pencil and paper and a variety of many sided dice. Live role-play is much more similar to improvisational acting, where the players actually embody their characters and play to an audience, where they themselves are the actors and audience at the same time. Role Play Games are not constructed around an objective, and are not written to be won. That is where Role Playing differs from conventional gaming, as it focuses on the construction of an ongoing story, that never really ends, and that cannot be beaten. Player Characters die, and new ones emerge, and the story is never finished.

The reason I became Sociologically, or even Anthropologically (as the cultures constructed in these games are nothing like our own) interested in the subject lies within my personal experience with the hobby. Since I became more actively involved in the Role Playing world, I have found that I am more confident, more content with life, and socially more capable. Because in these games, players' characters interact with each other in a collectively constructed new cultural setting, and through these characters players explore personality traits they may not possess out of game, I have come to wonder whether participating in such games has a positive impact of the social capabilities of hobbyists. I hope to break through the stereotype that is currently associated with role play gamers, and prove that these games are not "a decisive moral realm through which Satan gains control of individuals and unravels the social fabric of communities"(Fine & Martin 1991: 109), but that these games have a positive impact on the development of the players, creating strong and capable young personalities.

My goal in this research experience was to explore the impact of role play gaming on the building of social capital, acquiring impression management skills and learning to identify with others, thus shining a new light on the hobby as being just as constructive and useful in the development of young gamers as conventional, more widely accepted games. Throughout this paper, I hope to answer many questions

about the hobby, and introduce it as an anthropologically relevant subject to be explored further. Firstly I will try to accurately describe the essence of role-play gaming, as I do not expect the reader to be familiar with the rules and structure of these games. To do this I will use examples from the games that I have personal experience with; Dungeons and Dragons, Mind's Eye Theatre: Laws of the Night (the Live adaptation of Vampire: The Masquerade) and Mind's Eye Theatre: Laws of the Wild (the Live adaptation of Werewolf: the Apocalypse) as well as the settings I encountered during field work. I will outline the research process thoroughly, and explore the concept of Social Capital using theories by Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam to identify how social capital is acquired, and thus how it applies to the subject. I will do the same for Goffman's concept of Impression Management as he presents it in "The Representation of Self in Everyday Life" and with the concepts of identity and identification as these apply to the Fantasy Role Playing world.

## **Part 1: Sociography**

### *Live Action Roleplay*

Firstly, a role playing game is "any game which allows a number of players to assume the roles of imaginary characters and operate with some degree of freedom in an imaginary environment" (Lortz 1979: 36). However, I am restricting my research to Live Role Playing Games only. Live games differ from the conventional table top kind using pen and paper, because players no longer sit behind a table and talk about how their characters interact, they dress up, walk around and act entirely the way their character would. It becomes much more like improvisational acting than gaming. "In many ways, it is not really a game, because it does not have a lot of the trappings of games - such as cards, dice or a playing board. It is also far more concerned with the stories to be told along the way than 'winning'" (Baugh 2001: 11). In his interview on local television, Live Role Play Gamer Kristan Kits identifies it as "improvisational acting without an audience" (Kits 2010). Although personal goals can be achieved, there is no ending associated with these goals. When a goal is achieved, the dynamic of a group may change, but new goals will form, and the story never truly finishes. In these games, players take on another persona and are free to create this character limited only by their own imagination. Because the game is created by players' perceptions of other players' characters, characters must be vivid and expressive. Although a world in which interaction takes place is provided, the players are free to react to the plot whichever way they please and in turn the plot will respond to their choices and actions. The story is not written beforehand, but slowly evolves with and alongside the characters. Aside from the players that embody self-constructed characters, there is always at least one Storyteller. The storyteller is the one who creates the world that the players move through. "She creates a skeletal framework of setting and plot, then turns the characters loose to put flesh on the bones" (Carl 1999: 13). Above that,

the storyteller also acts as an impartial judge, describes the scenes and may even play the parts of antagonists in the plot with whom the characters will interact. These Non-Player Characters (NPCs) can also be played by special NPC-players if more are needed than the Storyteller can embody. The storyteller is responsible for the entertainment of the players, the overseeing of events and making sure everything runs smoothly.

Aside from the technical side of the game, in this particular study it is important to also look at the cultures constructed inside the frameworks provided by the storyteller. For each game, whether it is Vampire: The Masquerade, or any other fantasy world in which characters interact, an entire historical and cultural background is provided by the rulebooks or the storytellers. It is these collectively constructed fantasy cultures that may impact the players' social capabilities for building social capital in the real world as players gain experience with cultural norms and values that can vary enormously from their own. In Vampire: the Masquerade for example, Kindred (the most commonly used term for vampires amongst themselves) find themselves affiliated with Either the Camarilla, the Sabbat, the Anarchs or the Independents. The Camarilla is "a sect of vampires concerned primarily with maintaining the Traditions, particularly the Masquerade" (Carl 1999: 22). The Sabbat are the sect of vampires that believes that they are superior to mortals and therefore believe that the Masquerade is "useless and that vampires should revel in their darker natures" (Carl 1999: 23). An extensive history has been written about the clash between these two sects which provides players with an extensive cultural background in which they can interact. Within these sects, subcultures of vampires with similar interests and convictions form the same way they do in real life cultures. Almost all settings include a similar form of grouping, cliques and antagonists. It is these 'foreign' cultures and subcultures that are of interest in this study as experience with foreign cultures makes people more open to alternative ways. This openness may provide an edge when building social capital as it allows one to network with a wider variety of people, linking in-character social interaction directly to my research question.

### *LARP Community, Netherlands*

Although there has been extensive research into leisure and gaming concerning the development of young people's social skills, (Live) Role Play Games remain mostly unexplored, with the exception of a surge in interest in MMORPGS (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games) since the success of World of Warcraft (WoW) in recent years. I find this strange, as computer variants of role playing games (especially the newer online versions) lay their roots in table top role play as it first emerged in the early 80s. Fantasy Role Play is the first kind of role play gaming and far outages the digital era. Not only should the subject be more widely researched for this reason, but the hobby is also no longer played by an insignificant percentage of the population. In March 1979, an estimated 7,000 copies of Dungeons and Drangons (D&D), the very first role playing game published commercially, were sold and at that time approximately 300,000 individuals played the game. (Fine 1983: 26) By 1983, when Fine published his monography on fantasy Role Play, the estimated number of players in the USA was 1 million, today we can only assume there are many more especially considering D&D is by far no longer the only published platform, as well as the fact that table top play is no longer the only form of role play gaming. Live variants on table top games also emerged long before digital versions. White Wolf published their most successful table top game "Vampire: The Masquerade" in 1998. Only a year later they published the Live Role Play adaptation of the game. Live Role Play is a well established hobby in the Alternative and Fantasy oriented subcultures of today's youth. As can be clearly seen in the included LRP calendar for 2010 (appendix i, p.41), Live Role Play games are much more common than one might expect. With the exception of the winter and summer breaks, it is possible for a player to attend an event almost every weekend throughout the year, in fact, some weekends are double booked. With so many events offered to choose from, the Live Role Play market functions much like any other. There is competition, supply and demand, and a corresponding range of prices. Some smaller events cost only €20, the well established events (such as the Summoning, which attracts 700 players each year) cost up to €70 for a

weekend, and some events include indoor accommodation (like Lextalionis and Emphebion), and are priced accordingly (at roughly €60 and €105 respectively). In game settings are also highly variable. Although most events are simple categorized as Low or High Fantasy, settings can vary from medieval (Ravenskeep), to post-apocalyptic or futuristic (Unity), to wild west (Dead Fox Junction). Because the hobby has grown in popularity, a wider variety can be offered. One exceptionally experienced player told me how they had started Ravenskeep Adventures back in 1996. Before then, the Summoning was the only event available in the country. He and some friends had decided to start their own event, because they thought the Summoning was too expensive, and that it should be possible to organize more efficiently and cheaply. That is how Ravenskeep was born. Evolution Events started Exodus and Lextalionis for similar reasons. They were unhappy with the existing small range of settings, and decided to start something new entirely, offering events with settings unlike what was readily available. In this way, the hobby has grown into a game as variable as any other. For my fieldwork, I interviewed players at three specific locations. Though many of these players also participate in events organized by other national or local organizations, I will outline the events through which I came in contact with them, to further elaborate on the local dynamics of the Live Role Play world.

### *Groningen, Groningen*

Attila, founded in 1996 and based in Groningen, organizes two events named Einheri and Elbaria. Both events are relatively small, counting roughly 20 players and 20 Non-Player Characters (NPC's) per event. Although based in Groningen, and events taking place either there, or in Drenthe, players come from all over the country; I have had contact with players who live as far as Zeeland, and interviewed 2 living in Deventer, more than 2 hours travel from Groningen. Both events take place 6 times a year, roughly every 2 months, costing between 30 and 70 euros. Attila communicates mostly with its players through

email and the website, but also has Hyves and Facebook accounts. They also publish their own newsletter irregularly.

Both events use roughly the same kind of setting. Although storylines and common races may vary, each event takes place in what is called a High-Fantasy setting. This is the most common setting for large LARPs. Here, besides medieval human themes, characters are confronted with fantasy races, demons, good and evil alignments, various (fantasy) religions and magic. In such settings, it is common that two races (such as elves and orcs) are at war, and that the players' characters are on either side, or caught in the middle. Depending on the character they choose to play, interaction among players can involve merchant trading, deception, large battles and religious rituals.

#### *Zwolle, Overijssel*

*De Dwaler*, *Quon*, *Kids-Larp (Zwolle)* and *Het Eiland* are all organized by Games-n-Stuff, a gaming store focused primarily on role-play games and strategy war games. They started organizing events because they noticed a hole in the market, and customers showed an interest in the rise of a local event. Though the store is in Zwolle, the events each take place in Ommen. *De Dwaler*, the event most played by my respondents, takes place twice a year and allows players of twelve years and older. Kids-Larps, for ages 6 and over, are 6 times a year, and *Quon*, also 12 and over, meets twice a year. *Het Eiland* meets once a year and is for 16 and over. At *Games-n-Stuff*, players do not pay a general memberships fee and events are paid for one at a time. All events cost 45 euros, except the kids-larp events, which are 16,50 euros, but Non-Player Characters (NPCs) such as my respondents, play for free. Events average 80 to 100 players, 20 to 30 NPCs, 4 game-leaders and a make-up and costume crew. Communication to players happens using contact at the store, an online forum, a bi-monthly newsletter, and at fantasy fairs such as the Elf Fantasy Fair (the biggest in the country), Castlefest, the Mid-winter fair, and Fanatic.

*Quon* and *Het Eiland* are High Fantasy Setting LARPs much like those organized by Attila, though on a larger scale. *De Dwaler* and the Kids Larp events are defined as Low Fantasy. These types of events are very similar to High Fantasy events as they too are defined by their medieval themes and fantasy races. However, in low fantasy settings players tend to be limited to playing the most common races (often human, elves, orcs) and are unlikely to interact directly with gods, elementals or demons. Also, although not excluded, magic is much less common in these settings, and magic healing or resurrection is much less available (as well as much more expensive) so characters are more likely to suffer the consequences of battle.

#### *Elsloo, Friesland*

Lextalionis is the first Vampire-LARP in the Netherlands. Now organized by Evolution Events, it was originally the brainchild of several members of Cauldron, one of the largest LARP organizations in the country. Because Cauldron acted mostly out of commercial interest, a small group of game leaders left, and started their for themselves what is now known as Evolution Events. The first edition of Lextalionis took place shortly after all this, 5 years ago, and as a biannual event they are now approaching their 10th and final session. Although based in Utrecht, Evolution Events events take place all over the country and costs vary between 55 and 75 euros, depending on the location. Lextalionis counts 60 players, which includes 6 narrators, 3 crewmembers and NPCs. Because the roles NPCs play vary very little from regular player characters, at this event there is no significant categorization. Lextalionis is not much like common Fantasy events as it uses an entirely different setting. In fact, one of the event leaders told me that Lextalionis is the first and only event of its kind. Lextalionis takes place in the World of Darkness, an adaptation of modern day society published by White Wolf. Players embody vampire characters and the Lextalionis series has counted down to the end of vampiric existence, called Gehenna. Although technically classified as a Low-Fantasy setting, unlike the common medieval fantasy

settings, Vampire: the Masquerade (one of many games within the World of Darkness) does not deal with large scale war and interracial interaction, but characters are confronted with the perils of the unlife (brought on by their un-dead, vampire existence); self-preservation, deception, and are never certain where trust and deceit meet. In this setting, players play a much more political game than at conventional LARPs. Mainly for this reason, Vampire: The Masquerade is an acquired taste, an alternative setting, and not all Live Role Players will enjoy this kind of setting. For these reasons I have chosen to examine this setting as a third category, separate from other Low Fantasy settings, as in-game (or In-Character, IC) interaction is key to my research. Evolution Events also started Exodus, another anti-epic alternative setting event that was born shortly after Lextalionis, and is a reaction to all the high-magic epic-heroic LARP settings that were (and still are, in my opinion) most common. Cauldron did end up starting a Vampire event of their own, called Fangs, but this setting is also very fantasy oriented.

## **Part 2: 'Research Methodologies': An Outline of the Chosen Anthropological Methods**

### *Preparation (November - December)*

Long before going into the field, in November I established contact with Drenthe's LRP population through email and forums of local event organizations Larpszolle and Attila Events back in November. Many players responded positively. I responded with gratitude and told each one that I would contact them again towards the beginning of January. I also began testing my questions on members of the local population (Delft), changed some wording, added and scrapped some questions, until I ended up with the final question list. Initially I had not included questions about the types of characters people play. I found that this information was interesting, and highly personal, and decided to add the questions regarding preferred characters. Around this time, I also worked with respondent feedback to finalize and perfect my semantic differential. I found it hard to translate the list into Dutch terms, but with some help from my fellow students and a few lecturers, I managed to produce a list that I found was adequate. Though throughout my fieldwork I was never fully satisfied with the terms, I found that with a little guidance, respondents did not have trouble understanding and reapplying the nuances that were lost in translation.

In the following month I re-established contact with potential respondents, and with a possible key informant. Many emailed me back and set up appointments. I also established better and closer contact with my host-family, specifically Peter: the LRP gamer, mostly through MSN conversations. We seemed to get along well, and I was not worried that I would not have a good time, or feel welcome.

### *Interviewing In The Field: Drenthe (January)*

In the first week, I attempted to gain trust, get acquainted, and 'hang out' with some of the local role play gamers. Unfortunately I found, though they seemed to accept me just fine, I did not feel at all at home there. Most of them were much younger than me, and I found it hard to mingle and find mutual interests or topics of conversation. I had a hard time throughout the week, and wanted more than anything to return home, but decided that the research was more important, and that I wanted to avoid having to redo it more than anything else. I called home a lot, that helped. I hoped to ask the population to participate, and gain respondents. Although ten gave me their email addresses, only two ended up meeting with me for an interview, the other never responded to my emails.

I had some interviews planned already as well, with people I had contacted in November. One cancelled and rescheduled due to illness, two others cancelled last minute and never contacted me again. This too had a big impact on my motivation and confidence. I intended to do some participant observation, and hoped to attend an event. Due to the winter, there were no events until February, at which point I did go. I did however, attend a birthday party where many role play friends got together, and I did observe their behaviour. Because I felt so uncomfortable there, I was unable to do very much participating, and ended up mostly observing. Most notable was the fact that these people talk about all kinds of subjects, often philosophical but that their group activities are often role play related, even outside events.

I spent the second week doing most interviews, but also regaining my confidence and motivation. I contacted my advisor Annemarie Samuels, and as she suggested, I took the time to have some fun, and distract myself from the setbacks. I went shopping in Groningen with Helen, the girl from my host family and also went out in Groningen on Saturday night with a friend I knew from back home. This really gave me back my joy and motivation to succeed.

*Theoretical Field Methodologies: Experiment Design*

As I was testing a change in behaviour, it would make sense if I implemented a pretest-posttest design, or even an interrupted times series design. The pretest-posttest design consists of an observation followed by an intervention, followed by a second observation. If unlimited resources and time had been available to me, I would have conducted interviews with young people considering taking up role play as a hobby, then allowed them to play for a period of time, to then return and interview them again, hopefully establishing a cause and effect relationship between the 'intervention' (the new hobby) and the change in social activity. I might even have considered the option of returning once again, allowing the same amount of time to pass, and test once more to see if the change has developed further. Because the Drenthe assignment did not allow for an interventional interval of more than a week, I instead chose to use the Campbell and Stanley posttest only design. This means that an intervention has still taken place, but the participants were only tested afterwards, not beforehand. Although this eliminates "the possibility of a confound from pretest sensitization" (Russell-Bernard, 2002: 119) it does not allow the most accurate analysis of the pre-interventional behaviour, therefore making it more difficult to prove a cause and effect relationship. Going into the field, I was not aiming to prove cause and effect, but to establish whether players attribute the change to the hobby themselves, and focusing on their perceptions, rather than fact. Participants sometimes found it hard to evaluate their previous personalities because they had been playing for a long time. I did not feel like my questions were too detailed for recollection to be an issue, but I quickly found out that many players, especially the younger ones, had never really thought about their changing social attributes. As I spoke to a few players who had been playing and organizing events for 15 years or more, I realized that it takes time for people to admit changes they have been through, as sometimes they are embarrassed about their past naivety.

*Theoretical Field Methodologies: The Difficulty With Self Evaluations*

I chose to evaluate participants' behaviour and perceptions through a face to face, semi-structured interview. I constructed a list of written questions which was meant to function as an "interview guide ... questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order" (Russell-Bernard, 2002: 205) but the interviews ended up being much more structured than anticipated, because the younger players I encountered in Drenthe (as opposed to the Lextalionis event in Friesland) found it very difficult to speak freely, and gave very little information if I did not specifically ask them for it. Even then, they did not elaborate on yes or no answers unless I asked them "why" or "how". Sometimes I was even forced to give examples of possible behaviour changes, as the least experienced players had trouble understanding what impact taking on a different personality in the game could possibly have on them as a person. I initially chose to use the semi-structured interviewing method, because unstructured interviews have no guarantee of providing the same information, and structured interviews can result in an unnatural, forced environment which I did not find appropriate for my intentions, but I ended up choosing structured-interviewing because respondents had trouble elaborating their answers without guidance. The topic proved even more personal at times than expected and though I anticipated this, I did not expect people to be quite as open about things as they were. Participants responded very well to my interviews, told me none of the questions seemed unnecessary but also that they expected interesting results as my interview was very thorough. To make sure I did not ask purposeless questions, I clearly outlined filter questions and contingencies, so that I did not ask for useless information, or non-existent information which proved smart, as I found that with some people I was forced to skip questions here and there because they answered "no" to the previous question, or because an elaboration on a previous answer, had already provided me with the information to the next, or one much later on in the interview.

To introduce the topic of social personalities and skills, I provided informants with a semantic differential scale of "paired adjectives" intended to evaluate personal interpretations of "inanimate

things ... and intangible concepts" (Russell-Bernard, 2002: 316), in this case: social personality. To accurately and thoroughly evaluate this concept, I included adjectives of potency (introvert-extrovert, ambitious-modest) and adjectives of activity (systematic-chaotic, patient-eager). Although when developing the semantic differential, Osgood and his associates identified a third major kind of adjective; adjectives of evaluation, I chose not to ask whether they would classify their personalities as good-bad as I find this insensitive and inappropriate. For this same reason, I tried to the best of my ability to use adjectives that positively describe either end of the scale, to make sure informants do not feel threatened by truthful responses. I hoped that, this way, I would guide the responses as little as possible, but limit them enough to allow for comparative analysis later on. Despite my own problems translating the adjectives to Dutch, although some respondents asked me to explain what I meant by certain pairs, none responded negatively to any of my word choices. I have included the Dutch-translation of my semantic differential scale as was provided to my respondents in the appendix.

#### *Actual Field Methodologies: Throwing Plans Out The Window*

I intended to do some reflection in the last week, but as I had so much trouble finding enough respondents, I did not get the opportunity for reflection or remission. I spent this week interviewing as many people as possible, and trying to establish new contacts with other groups of players. As I desperately hoped to find the opportunity to attend a Live Role Play event while I was in the field, and experience game play first hand, but no events take place in winter, I was exceptionally excited when I came in contact with Evolution Events while looking for more respondents. I decided to ask them if I would be able to do some participant observation and interviews at their upcoming event, Lextalionis, which would take place just over the Drenthe-Friesland border in February. Although I already had some experience with Live Role Play, insight in the dynamics, settings, and scales of local organizations allows

me to better understand what kind of stimuli my respondents are dealing with when playing these games, thus being better able to analyze their responses.

Naturally, respondents were briefed on the nature of the project before participating, were explained that this is a student project, done for the University of Leiden, and that their participation helped me out greatly. I chose to interview mostly at home as half the respondents were close friends with my guest family, and others I interviewed in a small cafe near the train station. I chose to buy these people a cup of coffee for their trouble. For one set of interviews, I travelled two and a half hours to Deventer because so many participants had cancelled their appointments with me, and I was reluctant to decline opportunities to interviews, as at the end of week two I had only interviewed 4 people. I was thoroughly frustrated and let down with the flaky nature I was experiencing in participants and had not expected so many interviews to be cancelled. I realized later that this was specific to the young group of people in Drenthe, as the slightly older players at Lextalionis were eager to help me out and take an hour to talk to me. Five players even returned to my home in Delft the following week, as they had not had time to speak with me during the event, but really wanted to help out. Perhaps it has something to do with their own experience as students, as the people in Drenthe were all still in high school, had not yet started studying, or were studying at MBO level, which does not involve any research projects. I informed everyone beforehand that their identity would be kept anonymous, and that any background information was for analytical purposes only. When just 'hanging out' or using participant observation, I informed the observed role players beforehand that I am there, first and foremost, to do research, and that having fun comes second, but is not unimportant. I realized soon enough that research and fun were different things, as the first week was almost unbearable for me, reaching its peak at a birthday party which I went to in the hopes of meeting lovely people and gaining participants, which turned out to be the least comfortable situation imaginable for me. I had absolutely no common ground with these kids, had to hold myself back from judging and reacting as I watched a 14 year old boy drink vodka, and

ended up in bed 4 hours earlier than everyone else, desperately trying to call home for reassurance. However, one thing has happened as intended; I did not withhold any information from my respondents, and will allow those interested to review the results of my research after I finish, if the University grants me permission to do so.

*Participant Observation In the Field: Lextalionis (February)*

Although I hoped to make generalizations about Live Role Play Gaming through my research, I did not wish to neglect subtle differences in each setting, each group of players, and each system of rules, so my observations from this event will act solely as personal anecdotes, as most of my participants only have experience with Medieval Fantasy settings, and World of Darkness settings are very different to those. I do not think it would be appropriate to generalize what I witnessed at Lextalionis for all Live Role Players, as it is a very specific setting, and I know from experience that it is not everyone's preferred setting. I assumed beforehand that playing a high-political setting such as Vampire: the Masquerade has a different impact on social skills than a combat oriented game like Werewolf: the Apocalypse, or certain war-oriented Fantasy settings. For this reason, I intended to participate in at least one event, and note my personal experiences and observations about character interactions, as well as player interactions. Part of this involved "hanging out" (Russell-Bernard, 2002: 346) in players' natural environments and becoming part of the group before attending the event. At Lextalionis, I found it particularly easy to do this. In Drenthe I felt like a complete outcast, mostly because everyone I came in contact with was at least 3 years younger than me, sometimes 6. Lextalionis consists of a much older, more experienced group of players, most of whom started out playing Fantasy settings, and got bored with them, and they found World of Darkness was a nice change of setting to try something new. Because Lextalionis has a Vampire setting, unlike most events, they play only at night allowing for a lot of downtime interaction between players. It is for this reason that I fitted well within the group as they spend an unusual amount

of time playing board games, watching movies, etc. during day time, and role-playing only at night. This allows for a much more social setting than most events, which I was told sometimes run 24 hours a day the whole weekend long, not allowing for much out-of-character interaction. Initially, I assumed that because Role Play Gaming can be viewed as a sub culture, and I am part of this culture, participant observation in this case can be classified as "indigenous research" meaning I would have to be exceptionally careful to remain objective and not to take certain aspects of interaction for granted, but have the advantage of "speaking the language" (game terms and slang) and am less likely to suffer from culture shock. (Russell-Bernard, 2002: 350-351)I found that being objective was not as difficult as expected, because I was very focused on getting my research information as I was only able to observe one night of playing, and I could not get the Saturday morning off from work. For this reason, I was exceptionally determined to first get my information, and then enjoy the game, which worked well for me. Saturday afternoon I simply interviewed, and observed who interacted with whom, Saturday night I observed game play, Sunday I interviewed and observed, and only Sunday night I allowed myself to swim in the pool and relax in the sauna along with the players who had told me the greatest thing about this particular location was the sauna, and I had to make sure not to miss my chance.

### **Part 3: 'Operationalisation' : Processing the Research Question into a Series of Questions Appropriate for Interviews**

#### *Research Question*

Originally, after reading into the subject, I was looking to examine the effect of game play on the impression management skills, with application to building social capital, of live role play gamers. Because impression management skills and social capital are both terms taken from the anthropological discipline, and would require extensive explanation in the field, I opted for a simplified version of the same question, that would be more manageable along the way, ending up with the following research question;

*How do young adult role play gamers perceive LRP gaming has affected their social skills and networks?*

However, the theoretical background was not forgotten or ignored throughout the process, and all choices made in the field as well as during analysis were made with these theories in mind.

#### *Relevant Theories*

The concept of Social Capital has been defined in many different ways over time and is constantly changing and added to. In his introduction and overview of the subject, John Field provides us with the following definition, "Social Capital are the resources, that are social networks, that allow us to achieve more than we could on our own." (Field, 2003). The most influential Sociologist concerned with Social Capital, Robert D. Putnam describes it as "the features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and

networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Field 2003: 4). Much earlier than Putnam however, Durkheim stated that " Society does not become a jumble of juxtaposed atoms... rather the members are united by ties which extend deeper and far beyond the short moments during which exchange is made"(Field 2003: 11), which already gave insight to the fact that relationships are built through, and exist outside of, moments of direct interaction between people. Another well known name in sociology is also concerned with the subject. Bourdieu lengthily described the "capital of social relationships" back in 1977, which according to him "will provide, if necessary, useful 'supports': a capital of honourability and respectability which is often indispensable if one desires to attract clients in socially important positions, and which may serve as currency for instance in a political career" (Field 2003: 14). Here, he extends Durkheim's claim that social significance does not end at interaction, but stretches beyond that. Bourdieu elaborates by claiming these relationships that are built through repetitive interactions are meaningful, and perhaps more importantly useful, in achieving personal social goals and desires. He later adapts his definition to say that Social Capital is "the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Field, 2003: 15). Here he has added that these relationships need to be mutually recognized and maintained to be valuable. Lastly, one more name that cannot be excluded when looking at social capital, Coleman describes in plenty of detail that Social Capital is

*the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person. These resources differ for different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital. (Field 2003: 24)*

It is here, in this definition that we find a specific link to role-play gaming. Coleman accounts for the development of social skills and advantages by children and young persons. It is this aspect of Social Capital that I hoped to research, how young people build and acquire new social networks and contacts and how these are useful in their personal development. In my personal experience before this study, I had noticed that through their interaction in Live Role Play games, players come into contact with people they might otherwise never meet. The Live Role Play groups that I am personally involved in consist of young players, older players, university students, working individuals, etc. Role Play has become a place where we not only play a game together, but where we meet new and interesting people that have access to resources, opportunities and otherwise out of reach networks. Multiple players at Bluepelt Werewolf in Delft have built new relationships through the game that have led to job interviews at more prestigious corporations, or more indirectly in contact with LRP groups across the country, which then in turn lead to mutually useful friendships and acquaintances that are a part of extensive social networks. Clearly the game has an impact on its players beyond leisure and provides them with expanded networks that allow for a wider, more extensive reach in social opportunities. Of course, these networks are not built without effort. Being able to influence or even manipulate the reactions people have on your attempts to impress them is a useful tool in building and expanding networks.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman extensively describes what he refers to as impression management. This involves the (un)intentional expression of oneself so that others will be impressed. Goffman explains that all people have an interest in controlling responsive treatment, in other words, how people react to their behaviour. It is useful, he states, to be able to act in a thoroughly calculated manner to achieve this manipulation of responding actors. He explains however that most people are better at piercing the impression management attempts of others, than manipulating their own behaviour. To make sure that one's performance is not discredited by another, it

is useful to develop strong impression management skills and to gain confidence as confidence gives one control of the situation and experience gives one the upper hand in any interaction. Lastly, it is also useful to become proficient with 'defensive practices' which are used as a corrective measure to compensate for discrediting occurrences. To ensure that a positive reaction will be given, performances will often "incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does [an individual's] behavior as a whole" (Goffman 1956: 35). To make sure one pleases their audience, performers, as Goffman refers to all people that interact, will express a rejuvenation of reaffirmation of the moral values of the community. Goffman also describes that exercising systematic modesty or downplaying less ideal personality traits are commonly applied tactics to appear to better fit an ideal type (Goffman 1956: 38). More so, concealing inappropriate pleasures and economies. hidden agendas or possibilities for personal gain over the collective best interest, is useful to ensure a positive response from the others involved in an interaction. Conclusively, there is an extensive collection of impression management skills that allow any actor to more effectively influence the response of their audience. Being able to gain a positive response in almost any situation, from almost any kind of audience with a variety of statuses, allows an individual to build networks and trustworthiness needed to maintain these networks.

### *Concept Definitions*

#### Personality:

Personal traits that are associated with and/or influenced by social interaction. To evaluate the respondent's perception of their personalities, a set list of paired adjectives will be provided to ensure the same traits are evaluated and the concept is not too broad, so that it can be used in analysis.

#### Perception:

The respondent's personal view and evaluation of a situation.

#### Live Role Play:

Role Playing Games played in such a way, that a significant level of physical acting is involved besides voice acting, including costumes and use of body language.

Young Adult:

Initially defined as individuals between the ages of 18 and 25, changed to 16 - 30 due to a lack of respondents.

Networks:

Social connections established and maintained through social contacts through internet, phone, and face to face meetings.

#### **Part 4: Data Presentation and Analysis**

When reading existing work in preparation for this research paper, I came across only a single ethnography on the subject of role play gaming. Written in 1983, shortly after the release of the first ever published role play game, Fine's ethnography was probably the first on the subject of role play gaming and covers the structure, players, framework, and collective fantasies that are associated with fantasy Role Play. He explored the worlds of three different Role Play games, including Dungeons and Dragons. In his ethnography he describes how he uses participant observation to explore the collectively created fantasy worlds by fully participating as a player himself. He too, applies Goffman's description of actors in the theatre to describe the players of Role Play games. He quotes that they "animate a make believe person... project entities of another realm status: a historical personage, a goddess, a zombie, a vampire, a fleshy mechanical woman" (Goffman, 1974: 523). Furthermore, he explains that there is a strong sense of identification with these characters as they are often magnifications of players' characteristics that they wish to explore or improve. Especially less experienced players admit to playing themselves (Fine 1983). Because of this strong sense of identification, players will try to avoid, and if avoidance proves futile, not enjoy their characters dying. On top of the identification theories that Fine presents, he also points out that role players have a desire to develop and experience new and unique cultural systems, and that role-play has provided a new insight into the sociology of fantasy and games. Whereas previous to Fine's research fantasy was considered personal, role-players construct a world imbued with meaning by players, and share a collective fantasy, which becomes a new, important, and real 'social world'. Sociology of gaming was affected, as role-play games are the first kind that are not first and foremost concerned with winning, but with constructing a story. Although characters can have personal goals that they strive to achieve, once they reach these goals the game is not finished, and if characters die the story continues on, and new characters are introduced. Lastly, Fine argues that role-

play gaming can be defined as a subculture as it meets all the requirements for the definition. There is an opportunity for interaction among sub-society members, shared ideas, identification and recognition by those outside of the community. Since Fine published his experiences with role play as a sociologist, there have been a few articles written dismissing concerns that role-play games brought players in contact with Satan (Fine & Martin, 1991), but other than that, the hobby has remained much untouched by the sociological field. Only recently has more interest been taken into the role play world through new virtual breakthroughs like MMORPGs, but I am not interested in researching games played in isolation behind a computer. My results did not conflict with Fine's original findings. Fine already pointed out many relevant aspects of role play gaming back in 1983, however, what I have researched builds on that because Fine did not research Live games, but Table-Top games. The interaction that comes with the physical embodiment of characters is even more directly linked to Goffman's theory on Impression management that Fine already pointed out. Furthermore, Live Role Play games bring together much larger groups of people than the table top kind, and therefore they also impact social capital. Elaborating on Fine's ethnography, I have found that Live Role Play games are an excellent way to better understand, and even improve and extend, one's social skills and networks.

In all, I interviewed 16 players, 13 male and 3 female. 5 were players at Lextalionis, 5 were players from Atilla, and 6 were players at LarpZwolle. At Lextalionis, I observed 55 players and 5 storytellers in both IC and OC interaction over the course of 3 days. I also interviewed two people who organize events, one from Ravenskeep and one from Atilla. These interviews were used for background information, and were not included in the analysis below.

*What role do LRP games play in young adults lives?*

Most respondents identified Live Role Play Games as a main hobby or interest that they invest time in. Participation and preparation for events varied among respondents from daily to bi-monthly. For many

respondents, LRP is also a big part of their social life, though a pair of respondents admitted that they had never really considered the social side of the hobby. One 26 year old female player said that she mostly interacts with other players In Character (IC) and therefore does not get to know the players behind the characters. Her 22 year old boyfriend on the other hand, chose not to interact socially with other players because he already has a very active social life, and uses LRP to escape from that. Even when players choose not to expand their social capital, they admit the opportunities are abundant. At Lextalionis, these differences were easily observable. Because of the nature of the setting, Lextalionis only plays at night; from sundown till sunrise. This gives players an unusual amount of Out of Character (OC) time to interact socially. Most players interacted socially during the daytime, playing video games, watching cult movies, playing role play board games, and just hanging out. Players who know each other from back home, do not really tend to form cliques, instead, in the common room everybody interacts with everybody. There is no discernable significant separation between age groups. Only a small group of people disappear during the day, catching up on sleep, or secluding themselves with their roommates.

For almost all my respondents, LRP is a way to escape the routine of everyday life. For these people, the hobby functions much like a long weekend camping trip, or a music festival would for me; pure relaxation, no computers, no phones, no obligations. Many respondents also add that, though already familiar with role play games, the step to live role playing was taken out of curiosity, never necessity. A few respondents identified other interests as their initial reason for playing, such as the middle ages, or acting, though most do discover new layers of game play over time. One specific respondent, who was also referred to by other players as someone they look up to, admitted that he started playing out of curiosity, but over time found most of his enjoyment in trying out different kinds of personalities, and observing peoples' responses. The hobby, for him, become a social experiment over time. This 24 year old is a particularly good example of how role play can improve impression management skills. By trying

out different social personalities, he is able to explore different ways of interacting which allow him to "act in a calculative manner ... to give the kind of impression ... that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain" (Goffman, 1959: 6). Players also make their own costumes or even build props and attributes. The Northern Raiders group from Assen, Drenthe for example, was working on building a new set of towers and an enormous trebuchet bearing their IC logo, to take with them to events. But players do not only invest time, they also invest a lot of money in their hobby. The young player I was staying with during fieldwork, also a member of this group, had just spent close to a thousand euro on a leather body armor. Live Role Play, though not by definition so, tends to become a much larger part of players lives than a simple weekend event, it becomes part of their daily routine, even their financial planning.

#### *How do role play gamers perceive their previous social skills?*

Most respondents identified their pre-LRP personalities either as shy and insecure, or as chaotic and without direction. As can be seen in (fig. 1.1), the second dimension from the first data set is primarily defined by two variables; pride, ambition, and leadership. Respondents who scored themselves as ambitious, also scored as themselves as proud leaders. Here too, we can see a close connection between a lack of ambition and a lack of persistence and these traits are also related to emotion. As the scores for these three variables are the most prominent discriminators, they are likely to have the highest frequencies. We can therefore conclude that most people who start playing these games, lack ambition and are highly driven by emotion. From what I have witnessed in the field, role play gamers often do come from a background of teasing and seclusion, so these traits may indeed be common among new players.

In the first data set correlations appear between extroversion and age, and between extroversion and the number of events attended. This means that the older the participants were when they started, the

more extroverted they already were, and the more events they chose to participate in. Younger starting players tend to stick to familiar environments, and tend to participate in fewer events. This compliments what respondents told me. The calmer types said they prefer to play in a familiar environment with their friends, whereas the more confident and experienced gamers admitted that they attend new and different events out of a sense of adventure and curiosity. Also, there is a very strong correlation between enthusiasm and number of friends in the same data set. This shows us that players who already had an enthusiastic personality were much more likely to have more close friends than players with calmer personalities. Changes in personality therefore, have a significant role in the building of social capital in the future. As personalities become more open, more expressive, or perhaps more careful and calculative, players will become more likely to establish specific types of relationships associated with that kind of personality, changing their social capital as they gain role playing experience.

#### *How do role play gamers perceive their current social skills?*

All participants have a positive perception of their current social identities. They identified themselves as more open to new situations, less hesitant to meet new people or try new things, and overall as more well rounded individuals. In (fig. 2.1) the second data set, chaotic and restless people are also the least trusting and most reflective. Here too, it becomes clear that the first dimension primarily defines a close relationship between ambition, extroversion, acting on impulse, exuberance, persistence, and talkativeness. We might expect this relationship in any population, showing us that experienced role play gamers are 'normal' members of society, whether they were to begin with or not.

As players gain experience, the correlation between age and extroversion remains strong (even increases), but the correlation between extroversion and number of events experiences a significant drop. The more experienced respondents told me that after a while, they get bored with the familiar,

and look for new challenges. Also, the correlation between enthusiasm and number of close friends drops, showing us that within the LRP communities, quiet personalities are just as likely to find close friends as any other.

### *Do role play gamers perceive a change in their social skills?*

As illustrated by (fig.1.2), the third dimension from the first data set shows a strong relationship between a lack of trust and high scores on criticism. In the second data set, (fig. 2.2) this lack of trust becomes much more closely linked to personalities driven by logic rather than emotion instead of critical personalities. From this, I can theorize that people have become more reflective and open minded as they gain experience with live role play gaming, and analyze social situations before making judgments about others. I would consider this a positive change in social behaviour, and so would the respondents. Many identified the biggest change in their personalities as their increased trust in others. Changes in perceived behaviour can, of course, be influenced by a variety of background variables and personal characteristics. When labeling the object points by the background variables however, no such influence was apparent. Gender, location, age, diversity of characters played, and number of events participated in all showed no groupings within the entire population. This means that any conclusions made from this data set, are applicable to a wider population, and not skewed by localization or other background variables. During fieldwork, I did not notice a huge difference between men and women but I did notice a significant difference between the players at Lextalionis compared to the LarpZwolle and Attila groups. Players at Lextalionis admitted that they enjoy vampire because it is nothing like other settings, and because they enjoy the anti-epic story lines where victory and survival are not guaranteed. Players at respective events will build social capital in different ways as some play to be a hero (looking for confirmation from their peers) and others play to explore aspects of life where no one can be trusted, building on self sufficiency and investigative skills in the process. because of these key

differences, choice of setting has a significant impact on both impression management skills and social capital in young players.

In the first data set (BEFORE), most participants scored low on extroversion (50% scored 3 or lower) and scored high on optimism (87.6% scored 4 or higher). In the second data set, we see a significant change in these frequencies. The same is true for all the other personality trait variables. Taking into account the possibility of spuriousness of data (Russell-Bernard, 58), which I will elaborate on later, this effectively provides us with proof, that although most Live Role Play gamers start out with similar, and extreme personalities (in either direction), the population becomes much more socially diverse as they gain experience. This shows us that Live Role Play has a positive influence on the social development of players, and that it does not cause all players to develop a similar social personality. In fact, the population might even prove much more diverse than many other youth sub-cultures. Social diversity, in turn creates an arena for extensive social capital, as players will interact with, become friends with and exchange ideas with an enormous variety of people.

Not only does the data show a perceived change, all respondents were able to identify this change. Many identified that they had become more open and confident, and some admitted they had become more peaceful and grounded, but change was always perceived positively. One young respondent said that the positive response he gets in game, helped him build confidence to start conversations out of game and start conversations with strangers. Another, older, more experienced respondent admitted that the hobby helped him become more reflective, and gave him insight in other people's motivations. Both are easily relatable to impression management skills. For one, LRP creates the opportunity to practice building new relationships, for another, LRP provides insight into the motivation of other personalities in impression manipulation, resulting in a better intuition when meeting new people.

*Do role play gamers attribute these changes to their involvement in LRP gaming?*

Almost all participants identified Live Role Play as one of the influences on the changes in their social skills. Many respondents said that LRP helped them feel accepted in new groups and feel safe in new environments. One respondent identified the Live Role Play environment as a safe place to try new things. He said, when behaving a certain way IC, the response is always directed at your character, not at you, so it is much safer to act like a complete jerk and see how people respond, because the you behind the character can never get rejected; he was not the only respondent that admitted he likes to try out new approaches to social situations during LRPs in order to analyze what works best for future reference.

There is however a strong correlation between the attribution of change to LRP and the fact that players like to play characters that are very unlike themselves. Less experienced respondents tend to play characters that are perversions or extravagations of themselves and therefore do not behave in fundamentally different ways in game and out of game. These players tend to attribute less of their social change to LRP, because LRP has not provided them with enough social challenge. Also, some older players choose to play characters that are based on their own personalities in order to explore themselves and gain a better understanding of who they are. These players do not change significantly due to involvement in LRP, but they do admit that it has provided them with more reflective skills and a better understanding of who they are.

Other influences on change can be youth organizations, other social hobbies, or simply growing up. A few male respondents said that ballroom dancing classes played a big role in their confidence, especially with beautiful women. They said that women who dance salsa or tango are by definition gorgeous, and dancing with them made it much more normal for them to be close with beautiful women, therefore eliminating any nerves when interacting with beautiful women in other situations. Many respondents

however added that despite the influence hobbies may or may not have on social change, getting older, surviving puberty (and accepting who we are), and the transition from high school to college have all made lasting impressions on their personalities.

*How do role play gamers perceive their previous networks?*

With the exception of three, all respondents said they had 2 or 3 close friends before they started Live Role Play. The other three said they had between ten and fifteen close friends, but because they were not provided with any criteria for closeness, these players may evaluate relationships differently, or simply be social by nature. More striking is the fact that only a single respondent had friends that significantly varied from his own age group, but he did add that this was due to his volunteer work with elderly people. The majority (8 respondents) had a maximum deviation of five years between friends, and the rest (6 respondents) identified a deviation between six and ten years between their eldest and the youngest friends. Also, respondents admitted that the majority of their friends were male, even the female respondents, only two people estimated the gender ratio as fifty-fifty. All respondents met up with friends at least once a week, but more than half (ten respondents) spent time with their friends at least every other day. When seeing their friends, respondents would go out for drinks, sit at home and relax, play games or just hang out and talk. Social networks and capital were well established and maintained, but not particularly extensive or variable.

*How do role play gamers perceive their current networks?*

Only three respondents still have only two or three close friends, the rest now has between five and fifteen "best" friends, what is more notable is that their networks of friends outside these close groups have grown significantly. Whereas before, networks did not extend far beyond close friends, now almost every respondent admits to having very many low maintenance friendships. All respondents have friends that vary ten years or more in age, often more than twenty years between their youngest friend,

and their oldest friend, but most friends are significantly older than the respondents, not much younger. This could be due to the fact that there is a minimum age set at sixteen for most Live Role Play events. The players that play at LarpZwolle (the only organization that has 12+ events) were also those who had the youngest range of friends, starting at 14. Respondents from the other organizations did not identify any friends under 16. Although respondents still tend to have more male friends, one third identifies the ratio as 60/40 or 50/50. All but one respondent had a ratio of 70/30 or more equal. Although all respondents still go out for drinks, sit at home and relax, play games or just hang out and talk with their friends, 80% now also identifies Role Play Games as a regular activity with close friends. It is certain that the social networks and capitals of players have expanded, at least minimally. Though the change may have gone unnoticed as it was slow and gradual, players did realize there was change after answering both sets of questions which in turn led them to think more carefully on the subject of networks and social skills.

*Do role play gamers perceive a change in these networks?*

Although respondents do not notice a significant change in their social activities they do admit that Role Play has become a new frequent activity. Other than that they still do roughly the same kinds of things with their friends just as often. Though not all respondents identify a change, specifically respondents who used to spend a lot of time with friends at home, now spend significantly more time going out, to parties and clubs, or other activities like the cinema, paintball or go-karting. Respondents did however, identify a significant change in the diversity of their friends. Whereas they used to have a small group of friends consisting of "alternative types", everyone has noticed an expansion of personalities and backgrounds or "more categories of the general population". Many respondents also identify a wide range of political views amongst their friends, a wide range of marital statuses, artsy types. Most striking to me was the fact that all respondents now have friends who live in a variety of locations, further away, throughout the whole country, rather than just around the corner. Particularly this change points to the

involvement of national Live Role Play events in the expansion of networks. Friends people meet through school, hobbies, and clubbing tend to live in the same area.

*Do role play gamers attribute these changes to their involvement in LRP gaming?*

Yes. Most respondents say that Role Play is a good environment for meeting new people as there are fewer inhibitions, and Role Play gamers tend to be "more accepting and open to new people" and "see everyone as equal". All respondents have met someone special who has made a significant impact on their lives through Role Play; some met their significant others there, some met players who are so committed to their roles that they become role models for young insecure players. Other than that, respondents admitted to meeting many "likeminded" people at events, "people that really understand, that I can talk to". I also noticed that the majority of respondents from Atilla, identified another respondent from the same group as one of the most influential people they have met through Role Play. Among the LarpZwolle players, there were also multiple respondents who identified the same person as significant. Respondents also admitted, that there are fewer inhibitions at Live Role Play events, and that this allows people to more easily establish and maintain new contacts. In addition, meeting these new contacts under unusual circumstances, allows people to gain interest in new kinds of hobbies, new types of music and end up at places they would otherwise never visit, through recommendations by newfound friends.

## **Conclusion**

Using my previous knowledge of the subject, gained from personal experience and reading relevant theoretical publications, I came up with several hypothetical outcomes. I expected Role Play Gamers might be able to more effectively construct social networks, as the game provides them with a framework for interaction and identification with more diverse types of people and cultures, thus allowing for more networks based on more diverse common interests or values. In this, I have found that I was correct. All respondents said that Role Play has provided them with the opportunity to meet people, through both its atmosphere and its way of bringing people from all over the country together in one location. Also, I thought that perhaps Role Play Gamers would have a better sense of self as they spend time exploring the depths and reaches (extremes) of their own personality traits through characters that are an extension or magnification of their own personalities. Here too I have found reasonable amounts of supporting evidence. Many respondents admitted they tend to play characters that are either an extension of themselves, an enlarged version of their own characteristics, or a personality so far from their own that they were able to gain a better understanding of themselves and others in social interactions. Furthermore, I thought I might find that Role Play Gamers would prove more efficient at managing the impressions they make on others as they have more thoroughly explored their personal range of performance and expression, and are more likely to be able to downplay undesirable traits and they learn to distance themselves from these traits in order to convey a character more believably. Throughout my fieldwork, especially during participant observation, I quickly realized that almost every aspect of Role Play requires and revolves around impression management skills. In fact, the whole game consists of the application of impression management skills like front, identified by "insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex; age; and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like" (Goffman, 1959: 24), all of which are included

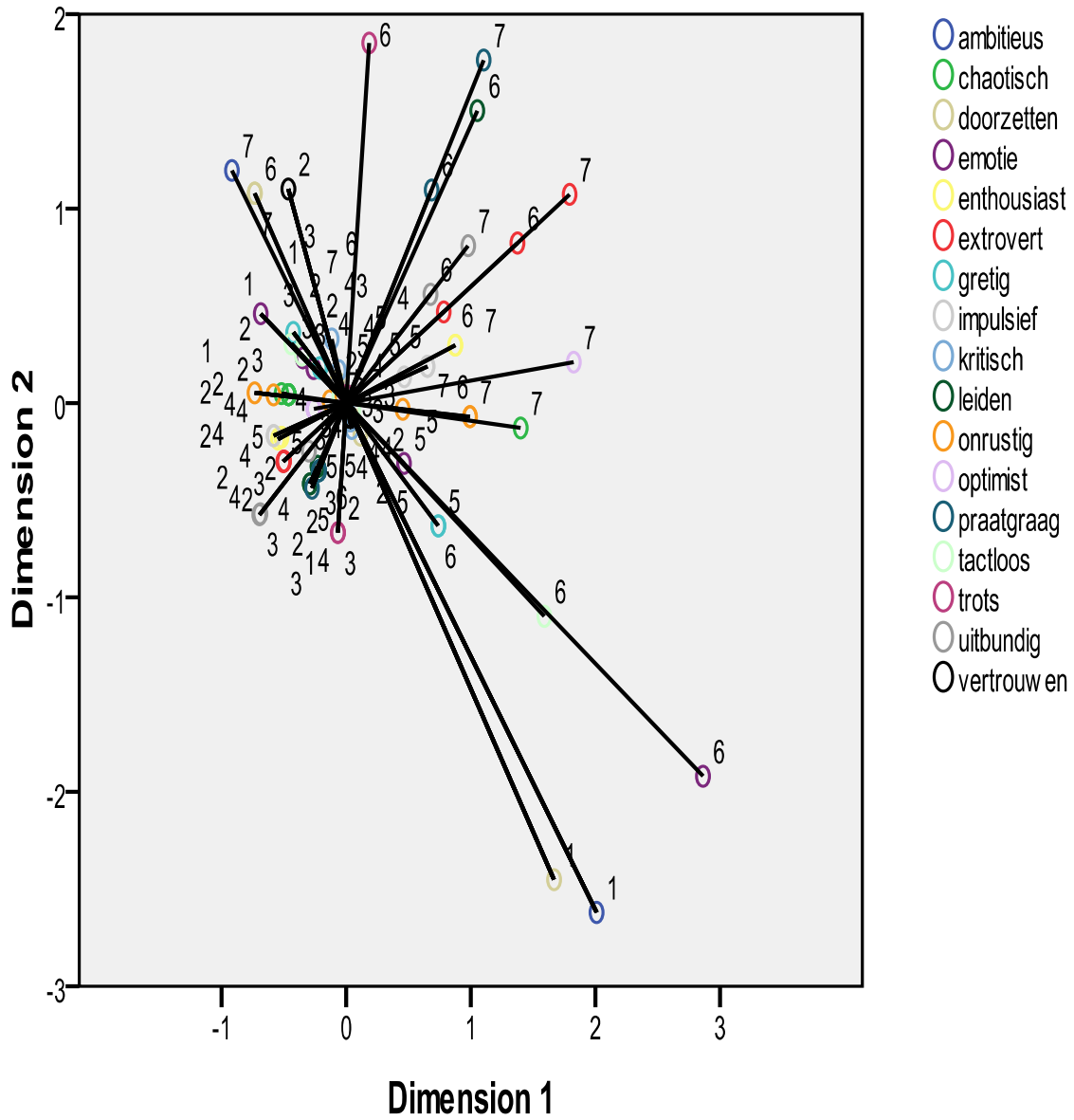
in the game, and all of which differ in OC and IC situations. The mere fact that players 'perform' a part during game play, makes the hobby more than ideal for studying the presentation of self in everyday life through impression management skills. Looking to another theory however, taking into account that the competitive aspect of games concerned with winning is missing in these 'story' games, thus never teaching healthy competition skills, I expected Role Play Gamers could very well be less likely to construct social networks, despite this increase in impression management skills. I found however, that I was wrong. Social Capital is built effectively with or without stimuli of competition within game play, and in fact, Role Play games are not entirely without competition at all. Although the game itself is not concerned with winning, players create friendly competition between themselves by attempting to portray a character to the best of their ability, and by gaining admiration for their commitment to these roles. The fact that almost all respondents labeled people they had met through Live Role Play as influential solely because of this commitment to the role, as well as their ability to play characters believably and creatively, points to a healthy level of competition between players. Just because you cannot win the game, does not mean you cannot be good at it, and exactly for this reason Role Play gamers have no lack of competitive skills. All in all, although not all players may realize it when they take up the hobby ,Live Role Play games, although unconventional, provide an excellent framework for social interaction and personal development. On top of that, they are also a lot of fun.

**Appendix i: Dutch Role Play Calendar 2010**

bla bla

## Appendix ii: Codebook

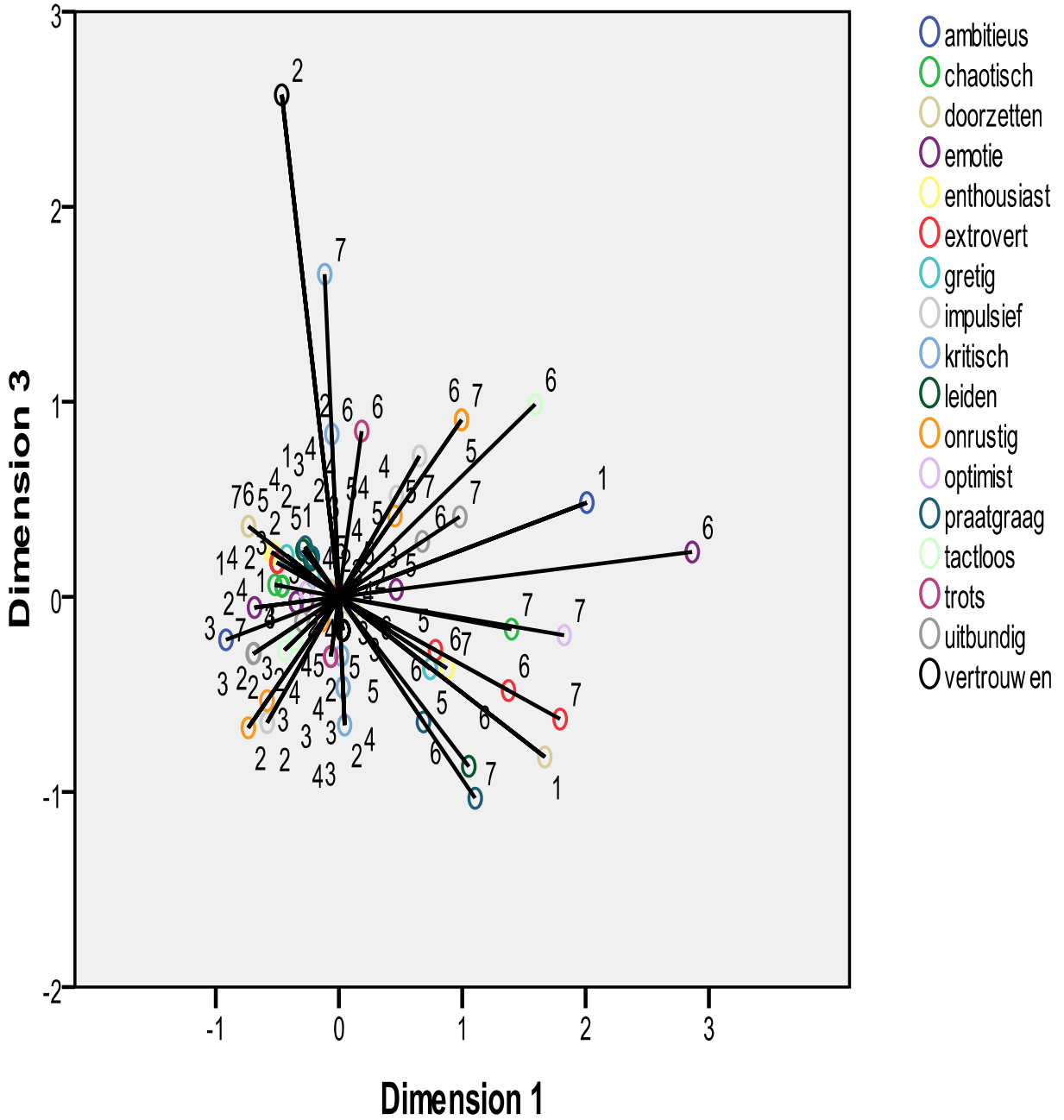
### Joint Plot of Category Points



Variable Principal Normalization.

Fig 1.1: Joint Plot of Category Points (BEFORE 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension)

## Joint Plot of Category Points



Variable Principal Normalization.

Fig 1.2: Joint Plot of Category Points (BEFORE 3<sup>rd</sup> dimension)

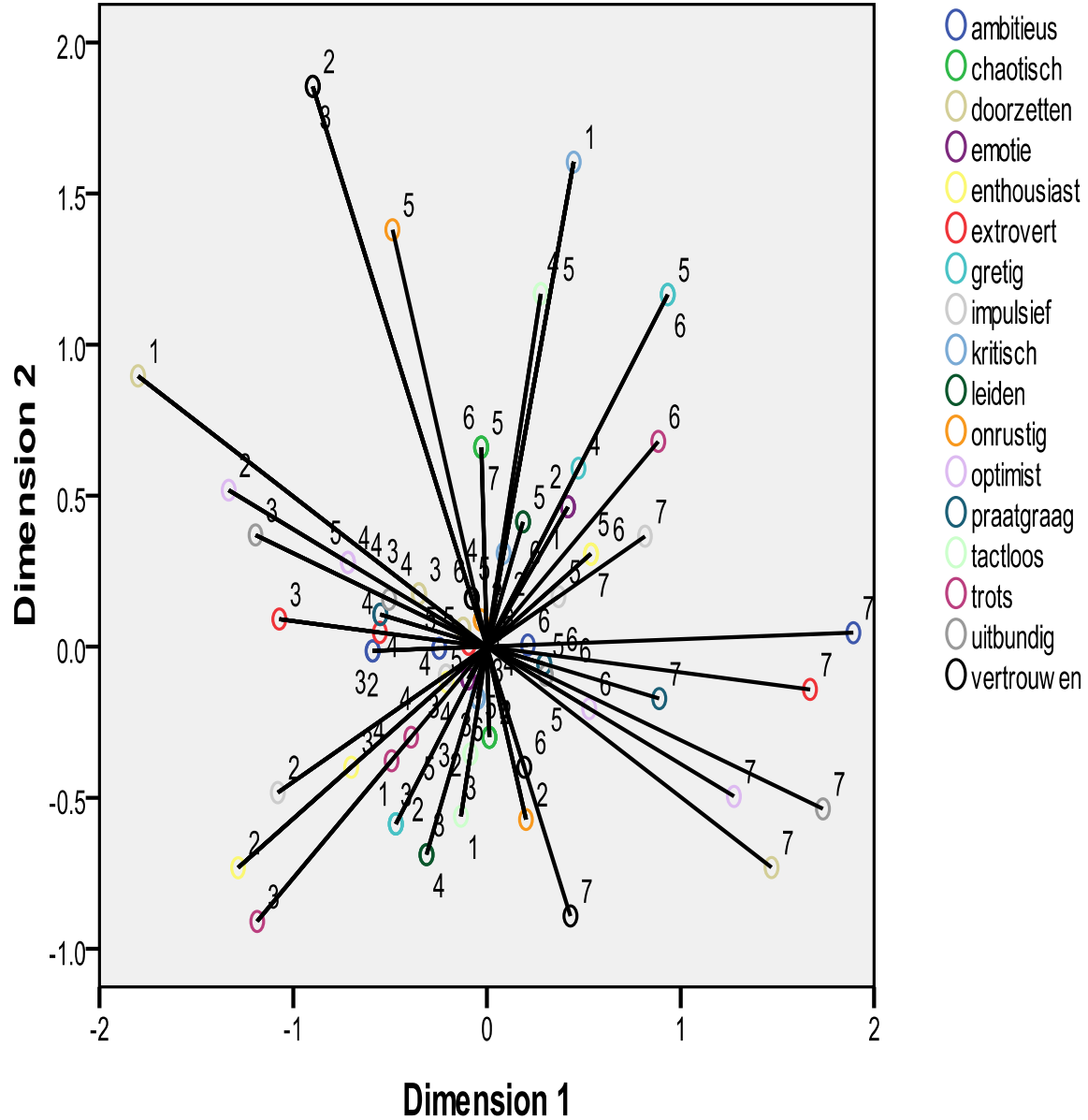
**Fig.1.3: Symmetric Measures: Evenementen x Extrovert (BEFORE)**

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	1.528	.053
	Cramer's V	.683	.053
N of Valid Cases		16	

**Fig.1.4: Frequencies (extrovert) (BEFORE)**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 2	4	25.0	25.0	25.0
3	4	25.0	25.0	50.0
4	3	18.8	18.8	68.8
5	3	18.8	18.8	87.5
6	1	6.3	6.3	93.8
7	1	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	16	100.0	100.0	

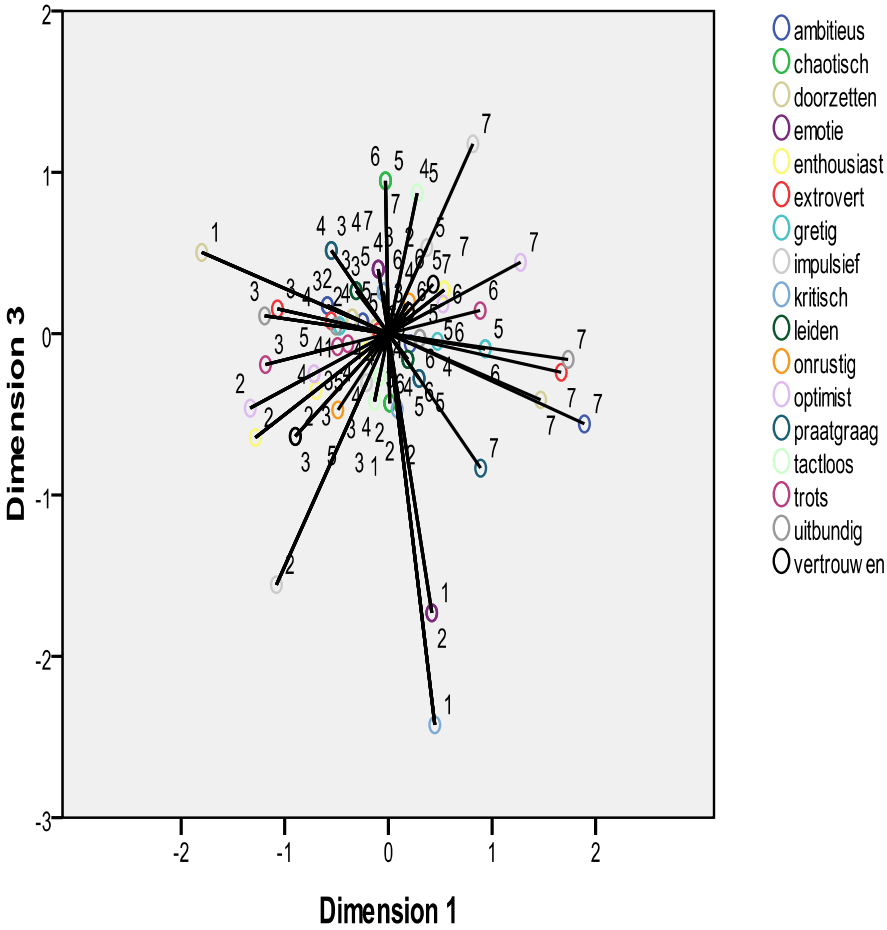
## Joint Plot of Category Points



Variable Principal Normalization.

Fig 2.1: Joint Plot of Category Points (AFTER 2<sup>nd</sup> dimension)

### Joint Plot of Category Points



Variable Principal Normalization.

Fig 2.2: Joint Plot of Category Points (AFTER 3<sup>rd</sup> dimension)

Fig.2.3: Frequencies (extrovert) (AFTER)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	2	12.5	12.5	12.5
	4	4	25.0	25.0	37.5
	5	2	12.5	12.5	50.0
	6	5	31.3	31.3	81.3
	7	3	18.8	18.8	100.0
	Total	16	100.0	100.0	

## **Appendix iv: Question List**

*Naam?*

*Leeftijd?*

*Gender?*

*Jaren LRP ervaring?*

*Samenstelling huishouden? (broers/zussen)*

*Beroep?*

*Opleidingsniveau?*

*Religie?*

*Woonplaats/nationaliteit?*

*Woonsituatie?*

1. *Hoe oud was je toen je begon met Live Role Play?*
2. *Hoe leerde je de hobby kennen?*
3. *Speelde bekenden van je al Live Role Play spellen?*
4. *Wat trok je aan tot deze hobby?*
5. *Wat voor voldoening haal je er nu uit?*
  - a. *Was dit ook de reden dat je er mee bent begonnen?*
6. *Wat was je eerste evenement?*
  - a. *Hoeveel spelers waren daar aanwezig?*
  - b. *Waarom koos je voor dat evenement?*
  - c. *Wat was de setting?*
7. *Ging je later/ga je nu ook naar andere evenementen?*
  - a. *Welke evenementen?*
    - i. *Wat is daar de setting?*
    - ii. *Hoeveel spelers zijn daar aanwezig?*

*iii. Waarom koos je voor dat evenement?*

8. *Hoe vaak ben je nu met role play bezig?*
9. *Hoeveel van je vrienden delen de hobby?*
10. *Zijn dat er door de tijd heen meer geworden?*
  
11. *Semantic Differential on pre-LRP personality*
12. *Open questions to elaborate on choices (especially extreme scores)*
13. *Welke eigenschappen vond je toen het belangrijkste?*
  - a. *Waarom?*
14. *Leerde je vaak nieuwe mensen kennen?*
15. *Sprak je snel iemand aan die je nog niet kende?*
  - a. *Verschilde dat per situatie?*
    - i. *Wanneer wel/niet?*
  
16. *Semantic Differential on post-LRP personality*
17. *Open questions to elaborate on choices (especially extreme scores)*
  
18. *Welke eigenschappen vind je nu het belangrijkste?*
  - a. *Waarom?*
19. *Leer je vaak nieuwe mensen kennen?*
20. *Spreek je snel iemand aan die je nog niet kent?*
  - a. *Verschilt dat per situatie?*
    - i. *Wanneer wel/niet?*
  
21. *Merk je een verandering in je sociale houding?*

- a. *Wat is het meest veranderd?*
  - b. *Welke veranderingen vind je positief?*
    - i. *Welke Negatief?*
      - 1. *Waarom?*
22. *Wanneer begon je deze veranderingen voor het eerst te zien?*
23. *Denk je dat LRP een invloed heeft gehad op je sociale vaardigheden?*
- a. *Waarom wel/niet?*
24. *Denk je dat LRP de grootste invloed was op deze veranderingen?*
- a. *Welke wel/niet?*
  - b. *Welke andere invloeden waren er?*
25. *Leer je door het aannemen van een andere persoonlijkheid (IC) anderen beter waarderen?*
- a. *Kan je je nu ook beter inleven in hoe zij zich gedragen?*
  - b. *Heeft het je geleerd bepaalde eigenschappen beter te onderdrukken?*
  - c. *Heeft het je inzicht gegeven in je eigen sociale vaardigheden?*
    - i. *Wat viel je op?*
    - ii. *Ben je bewuster geworden van negatieve eigenschappen?*
      - 1. *Positieve eigenschappen?*
26. *Speel je vaak personages die veel afwijken van je eigen persoonlijkheid?*
- a. *Waarom wel/niet?*
  - b. *Wat speel je het liefst?*
  - c. *Wat wil je ooit graag nog een keer spelen?*
27. *Denk je dat LRP je sneller heeft doen opgroeien?*
- a. *Heeft het je meer volwassen gemaakt?*
  - b. *Zelfstandiger?*

28. *Is dat een van de redenen dat je het nog steeds speelt?*
- a. *Welke andere redenen?*
29. *Wat vinden je ouders van LARP?*
30. *Wat vinden je vrienden ervan die het zelf niet spelen?*
- a. *En vrouwen/mannen waar je geïnteresseerd in bent?*
31. *Hoe zijn de reacties als je het vertelt?*
- a. *Hebben mensen er begrip voor?*
  - b. *Vinden ze het een rare hobby?*
32. *Hoeveel goede vrienden had je ... jaar geleden? (afhankelijk van LRP ervaring)*
33. *Kende je buiten je vrienden kring veel mensen?*
34. *Wat was de variatie in leeftijd bij deze bekenden?*
35. *Wat was de man/vrouw verhouding?*
36. *Hoe vaak zag je je vrienden buiten school/werk?*
- a. *Wat gingen jullie dan doen?*
37. *Hoeveel goede vrienden heb je nu?*
38. *Ken je buiten je vrienden kring veel mensen?*
39. *Wat is de variatie in leeftijd bij deze bekenden?*
40. *Wat is de man/vrouw verhouding?*
41. *Hoe vaak zie je nu je vrienden buiten school/werk?*
- a. *Wat gaan jullie dan doen?*
42. *Zie je een verschil in de diversiteit van je vrienden groep?*
- a. *Wat valt je op?*

43. *Zien jullie elkaar nu vaker?*

- a. *Is er een verschil in activiteiten die jullie samen doen?*
- b. *Zijn jullie voornamelijk bij iemand thuis of gaan jullie ook vaak uit?*
- c. *Is dat veranderd?*

44. *Zijn er bijzondere mensen die je via LRP hebt ontmoet?*

- a. *Wie?*
- b. *Wat maakt ze bijzonder?*

45. *Heb je veel van je huidige vrienden via LRP ontmoet?*

- a. *En minder goede vrienden?*

46. *Denk je dat LRP een belangrijke rol speelt in het leggen van contacten?*

- a. *En het behouden van contacten?*

47. *Denk je dat LRP een grote rol heeft gespeeld in de verandering in je sociale netwerken?*

- a. *Zo ja, Hoe?*

48. *Heb je zelf nog iets toe te voegen?*

**Appendix v: Semantic Differential**

introvert									
politiek	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>		
enthousiast	__	__	__	__	__	__	__		
impulsief	__	__	__	__	__	__	__		
doorzetten	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	extrovert	
ambitieu	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	tactloos	
vertrouwen	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	rustig	
uitbundig	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	voorzichtig	
optimist	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	twijfelen	
reflectief	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	bescheiden	
stil	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	verdenken	
nederig	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	terug-houdend	
relaxed	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	skeptisch	
geduldig	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	kritisch	
systematisch	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	praat-graag	
emotie	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	trots	
leiden	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	onrustig	
	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	gretig	
	__	__	__	__	__	__	__	chaotisch	
								logica	
								volgen	

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