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A case study of Restorative Nostalgia: World of Warcraft Classic

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Nostalgia and Restoration

Defining nostalgia

Let's first decompose the word "Nostalgia". We have "Nostos", which is a theme used in Ancient Greek Literature[1] that can be used to mean "Homecoming", or "Returning home". Then, we have "Algia", which is a suffix used to signify the word "Pain", which we can find even in afflictions of the body as "Fibromyalgia". Thus nostalgia could be duly translated as "The pain you feel when you're unable to return home". Today, we would more elegantly say that it's a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed (Boym, 2002, page 13).

Nostalgia has almost always been a weird sentiment to have towards reality, for me. I haven't had a very bright social life as a kid or a teenager, which made it hard for me to relate to feelings of nostalgia towards real life situations. My fondest memories are about media: video games, music, TV shows, etc.. I don't feel longing when seeing an old run down coffee shop I used to go to as a kid, but I am immediately transported back when Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets on Game Boy Color is mentioned. There is magic in remembering our old perception of certain media, as if you were recovering for a fleeting instant a piece of your childhood wonder. In a sense, media can feel like a home, a place where you feel it is most safe for you to get comfortable. The experience of video games, especially, is for me the home I long to return to, but can't because of my new perception of them.

Contra (1986), 8-bit game

Media evolves as fast as we find new ways to create them thanks to new technology. Forty years ago, we were in the 8-bit era of gaming with games such as Pac-man, Tetris, or Contra. Games from such a specific era aren't only defined by their aesthetics, but also by their gameplay.

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[1] https://www.lexico.com/definition/nostos

Since then, machines are now able to provide graphics that are almost convincingly photorealistic. Also, sound quality has come a long way now that we have recordings that are played-back throughout the game, instead of using a MIDI format.

Unreal Engine 5, Tech. Demo

So from an aesthetic point of view, there is already a clear departure. Gameplay-wise, we have also developed more game design theory thanks to the number of games that came out since and marked the collective consciousness of gamers and designers. With the expansion of game size, it is now possible to create more intricate games with bigger levels, complex gameplay, and an arbitrary amount of additional features like Online Multiplayer, or the dreaded Microtransactions.

Now that we have defined nostalgia, we will be able to understand the things we create in media to cope with the feeling.

"Restorative" nostalgia?

While we grow alongside the gaming industry, we sometimes find ourselves feeling displaced from earlier experiences. Nostalgia is very real in the game industry and we have created ways to ease the feelings of pain and malaise that come with it. We can pinpoint two notable ways in which we manifest these efforts.

Loop Hero (2021)

The first one being "Reflective" nostalgia (Garda, 2013, page 4), a practice that's referative and that creates something new from the collective memories about a period. This brand new experience might reference ideas, gameplay, and aesthetics as if it were released back in that period. Some examples are Loop Hero[2], a rogue-lite game with pixelated graphics reminiscent of cartridge games as an artistic choice. Splitgate[3] is an FPS with very similar gameplay to Unreal Tournament, although graphics are more modern.

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[2] https://store.steampowered.com/app/1282730/Loop_Hero/
[3] https://www.splitgate.com/

The other kind of nostalgia is "Restorative" nostalgia (Garda, 2013, page 2), born from the retro-gaming phenomenon. Retro-gaming is a subculture of gaming where people play games that were typically released from the 70s to the 90s. Restorative nostalgia is a renovation of the subject, an effort to preserve it from the damage, the "digital decay" (Swalwell, 2007, page 268) due to hardware and software failure, and its disappearance. This form of preservation is particularly aimed towards physical copies, which aren't necessarily accessible to everybody. Groups of people, including companies, try to create "ports", which consists in adapting old software on hardware they weren't designed to function on. This is how we can easily play games that are essentially the same as the original on newer consoles. Restorative Nostalgia, in that form, is all about porting those games, playing them, and talking with other people who love them.

SNES games

Now that we understand what restorative nostalgia is, we can explore a few examples and then we can start to see the pitfalls of restoration.

Examples and true restoration

Nintendo's target audience is the same as 30 years ago in a quite literal way. Kids who used to play The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past are still playing Nintendo games today. To capitalize on this audience, Nintendo released a growing list of games from the NES, SNES and N64 with the Nintendo Switch Online subscription system. This is all thanks to emulation, a technique used to imitate a game console on the emulating hardware. There are emulators for pretty much every single generation of consoles. A huge community on the internet creates new emulators and game "ROMs" that can be read by the emulator. Thanks to this restorative technology, it's possible for someone to play The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past without having to buy the original hardware.

SNES9X, an emulator for the Super NES

If we want to see the limits of porting, and therefore, of Restorative Nostalgia, Sonic the Hedgehog is a good case study. Sonic the Hedgehog has been ported dozens of times throughout the years. The first ports had some changes due to the significant differences in hardware not powerful enough to imitate the original. Some of those changes are game-length, graphics, and even the

speed. This is due to technology not being advanced enough, so let's see current ports. Today, even phones can emulate Sonic The Hedgehog with a staggering fidelity to the core game. Although the game itself is restored, when you compare the experience of playing the game on a phone with playing it on the original Sega Genesis in 1991, you can spot glaring differences. A phone's display is much different than a screen you'd play on in 1991, both in color and in the sharpness. Another difference would be the controls, you are using a kind of user interaction that is not even remotely close to the one in 1991. Or even features offered by hardware, like for example save-states in most emulators that let you restore the game state instantly where you saved. These aren't part of the Sonic 1 experience, and yet, we have reached an outstanding degree of fidelity in reproducing the original code. "Each of these newer iterations purports not merely to capture the essence of the experience of Sonic 1 [...] but rather to faithfully reproduce the original [...] by running the original code."

(Newman, 2012, page 127). The important word here is "experience". How successful would Restorative Nostalgia be to restore the experience if we, paradoxically, changed the original game when porting it?

Sonic the Hedgehog, modern screen on the left, CRT display on the right

By being aware of some of restorative nostalgia's shortcomings, we can now have an idea of what to look out for when doing an indepth case study.

World of Warcraft: An MMO that breeds nostalgia

A game that evolves

World of Warcraft (WoW) was released in 2004 by Blizzard Entertainment. WoW is an MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role playing game), a genre that gathers large groups of players to make a fictional world come to life. Here's a rudimentary explanation of the original WoW game that we'll call WoW Vanilla.

One of the original covers for World of Warcraft

Players create their characters with a specified race and class that will determine their starting point on a lore (story) point of view and on a practical point of view (fighting). Depending on the chosen race, the character will belong to one of the two factions: the Alliance or the Horde. Players will have to fight through a hostile world with an intricate story, and sometimes, their individual efforts aren't enough to take down certain foes.

In fact, players will be interacting with others on a regular basis. They can message each other, exchange items, duel, create groups and guilds, and much more. The most popular activities are Dungeons, Raids and PVP (player versus player), the first two being considered PVE (player versus environment).

Dungeons are locations that require five players due to their difficulty. Players make groups where each individual has a different role between DPS (damage dealer), Healer, and Tank (who's supposed to receive the damage from foes). Dungeons give equipment and items with more value than usual. Raids are longer dungeons that can require up to forty players. Due to the number of players and the length, raids demand better organization compared to dungeons. The reward on the other hand is much more desirable, including unique weapons and equipment.

Certain guilds are created by the players in order to organize raids.

A player in a World of Warcraft dungeon

Just as PVE, PVP manifests in many ways: Duels, World PVP, Arena PVP, and Battlegrounds. A player can duel another player if they accept their duel request. If the player is in a PVP realm (server) they can be attacked by players from the opposite faction. Players can also register for Arena PVP, which will set them in arenas against other players, generally in teams of two, three or five. Battlegrounds is the same, but in larger maps and with a number of players ranging from ten to forty. PVP will provide players with special rewards only obtainable by playing these game modes.

When trying to get certain equipment, players can also craft them with resources they gather and refine. In order to do this, they can get a profession which lets them interact with world elements. Skinning dead monsters, harvesting rare plants for potions, refining copper for blacksmithing, this can make a player self-sufficient for some aspects, but will depend on others for their blind spots. For those who aren't able to loot (gather) or craft the equipment and items they need, there are ways to buy or sell items. This can be done through NPCs (Non Player Characters), having a fixed buying point and a fixed set of items they sell, or it can be done with other players. The latter can be done thanks to the auction house where people can list their items for sale. Players can bid for an item they're interested in, then the highest bidder, at the end of the auction, will automatically transfer their gold to the seller and then receive the item. This creates an economy fully managed by the players which can lead the dynamics in all other aspects of the game.

The auction house

Since 2004, several expansions for the game have been released, each one adding new content. Two new races were added in The Burning Crusade, Draenei and Blood elves. Then, Wrath of the Lich King brought a new class: The Death Knight. The other expansions followed suit with new races and classes, and every single time there was an addition of new story elements, new zones to explore, and new raids, dungeons, and battlegrounds.

Sometimes, major gameplay elements like talent trees, better quality of life systems, or new ways to monetize the game can be added. These dramatically change the game and its perception. It's always in those moments that we get the biggest shifts in the community's behavior towards the game.
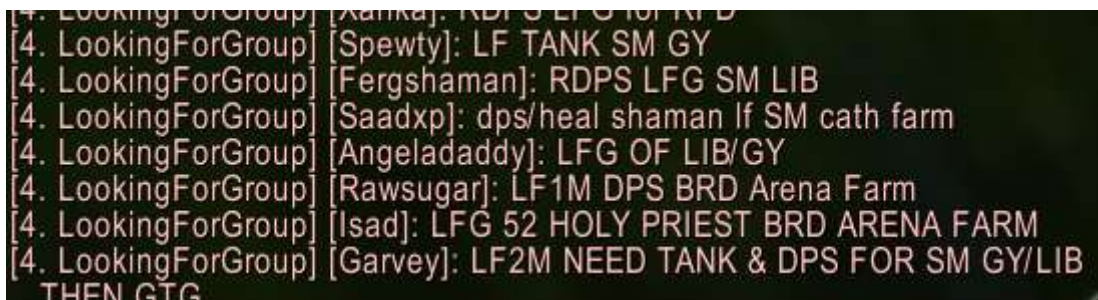

Every version of WoW released to this day

Now that we've described the game along with the different aspects where the community and players can interact with the game, we will go into detail with the behaviors within the community, along with their evolution. This will give us the portrait of an evolving and ever-changing context around the game.

Massively Multiplayer Online Communities

Reaching a peak popularity of 12 Million (BBC, 2019), World of Warcraft was a social ecosystem since the beginning. This ecosystem was shaped by technological progress throughout the years. In fact, outside of the in-game chat, there were few ways to effectively communicate. Social media weren't as big, voice channels were difficult to use due to bad bandwidth, and videos about the game were hard to come by. Outside of guilds, which are large groups of players that form a sub-community inside the game, people would bond on an in-game proximity basis. A few tools were used for players to form groups, for example the LookingForGroup chat[4], which was a channel dedicated to players who are looking for a group. This channel would share this message only to players who are in the same map, so other players who are in other zones with the same level wouldn't be able to see the message. You could also add people to your friendlist, which created a register where you could see the online status of potentially interested people you added. LookingForGroup became global later on[4].

LookingForGroup chat

The first big change is the release of Dungeon Finder[4] with the release of The Burning Crusade expansion. This tool let's players join a queue where it automatically matches them with other players, and also gives them the possibility to teleport in and out the dungeon. This added quality of life for finding dungeons, but removed a layer of communication since it replaced the LookingForGroup channel.

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[4] https://wowpedia.fandom.com/wiki/Dungeon_Finder

The Raid finder was added later in the Cataclysm expansion[5], making guilds less of a necessity for finding a raid group.


Dungeon and Raid finder

Another transforming element is the growing popularity of social media like reddit, platforms like youtube and twitch, and the technological advancements in communication technology and software (better bandwidth, Discord, Teamspeak). People are now more connected than ever outside of the game, which makes creating in-game relationships not necessarily an in-game experience.

The technological limitations of Blizzard's servers were pushed, which led to the possibility of having bigger servers with larger populations, along with server transfer, a purchasable way to transfer a character from a server to another.

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[5] https://wowpedia.fandom.com/wiki/Raid_Finder

With the influence of social media and content creators, players started congregating on "mega-servers" (esports.net, 2022) with larger populations in order to belong to a certain in-group.

Smaller populations means that your reputation carries importance[6], if you are considered to be a player with toxic behavior (Massively Overpowered, 2021, July 9), word would quickly spread about it. This would amount to other players avoiding playing with them, and therefore an inability to join dungeons, guilds, and raids. The catalyst for a change in this trend is the game's population growing, and the appearance of quality of life features like Dungeon finder and Raid finder. Quicker and more convenient creation of groups, along with the tiny possibility to cross paths with players you already know (unless you're in the same in-group) made reputation virtually unimportant. This led to a rise of toxic behavior in the community.
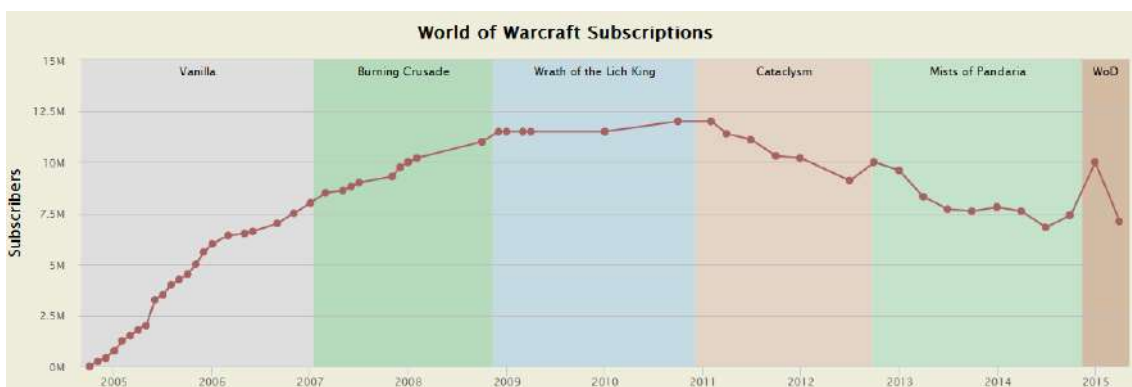
Number of players over the course of WoW's history and expansions
(found in imgur, no source)

A growing population with a growing array of tools also means the expansion of collective knowledge. Knowledge about WoW can take form in many ways, the most popular examples are Wikis (Wowpedia) and Guides. Interactive tools were also created to follow in-game dynamics, like the economy, from the comfort of an internet browser. With the advent of player-created private WoW servers, whose goal is to recreate the experience of a particular point in time,

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https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/wow/en/wow/t/why-are-gamers-becoming-so-toxic/1182185/3

19

players kept documenting older versions of the game with new information and guides. Growing population, encyclopedias, new tools, the willpower to become better at the game, and better communication are all elements that lead to the creation of a meta-game. The meta-game (Dot esports, 2018) or "meta" is the player-determined best way to deal with the game's combat. The meta will require a certain set of equipment, certain spells, and certain behaviors against a given boss. With new updates, the meta might change because of some numbers being tweaked, new items being added, or enemy behaviors changed. When involved with the meta, some people might go the extra mile and do "min-maxing". Min-maxing is the practice of optimizing the game to have the best performance possible with the ideal character, items, equipment, etc.
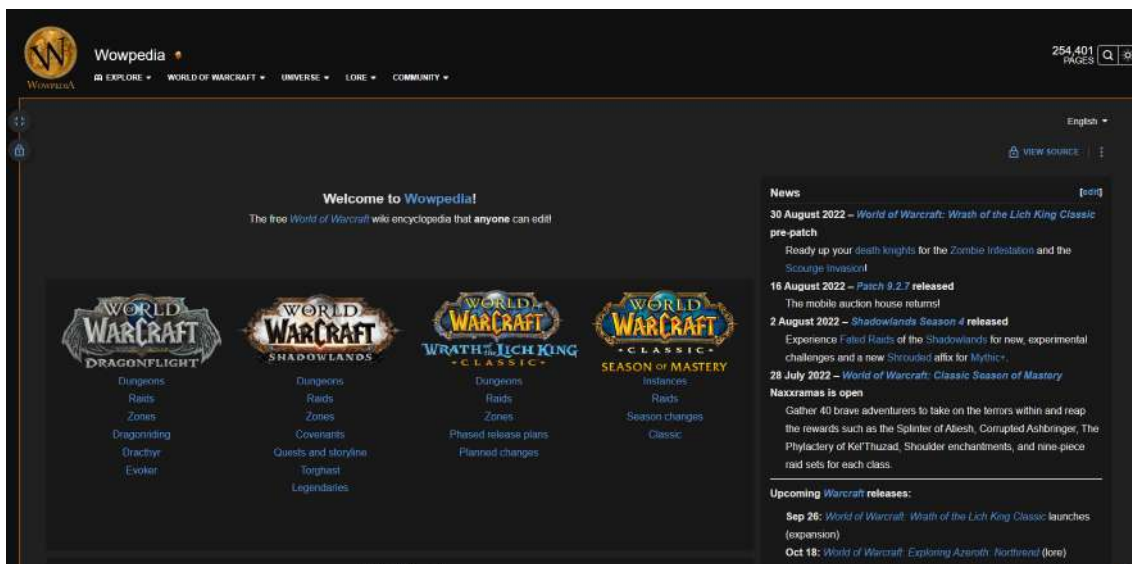
Wowpedia, a Wiki for WoW Players

The game allows the usage of player-created add-ons, within a limited frame[7]. It was heavily frowned upon to use them back in the day. Add-ons are a way to add quality of life elements that the game doesn't feature. They slowly became more and more accepted as the drive to min-max games persisted and the add-ons' quality kept climbing.

With this information, we can have a holistic view of the game. We also have an idea of the community's role in creating a volatile context around the game. We

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[7] https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/wow/t/whats-an-illegal-addon/1245912/20

will be able to see how this context can affect the experience of playing a re-release of WoW Vanilla.

World of Warcraft Classic

The community said: #nochanges

WoW Classic was announced for 2019 by Blizzard. It's an official re-release of the earliest version of the game, the one we called Vanilla. The announcement excited many people, and created a movement asking that "#nochanges"[8] be made to the game. This movement is purely based on restorative nostalgia and Blizzard announced (Blizzard, 2018) that very few things would be changed from Vanilla, wanting to give players the "original experience".

Since the engine is different from the 2004 version (Blizzard, 2018), WoW Classic has to be based on the latest development environment. Because of structural differences and lost textures, a few models from Vanilla were also remade, along with the animations, in order to get the authentic look.

Interestingly enough, changes were made to the game's structure because the new hardware makes some things feel "smoother". In fact, a resource for fighting, used by rogues, called "energy" recharges on the server's update rate. Back in the day, it would recharge in "chunks", 20 energy in every two seconds, today it updates every tenth of a second which changes the rhythm in combat quite drastically. Blizzard decided to program WoW classic so it recharged the same way it did in Vanilla.

I tried creating a (non exhaustive) list of the intentional changes Blizzard made to WoW Classic compared to Vanilla. I have separated them in four categories:

Balance	Tuning of numbers and efficiency of an entity's fighting ability. A buff is an improvement. A drop is an item a monster drops when defeated.
Exploit fix	Fixing of a bug or loophole that lets players do things they aren't intended to do.

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[8] https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/wow/t/nochanges/403799

Quality of life	Adding elements that improve the player's quality of life while playing.
Technical	Everything intrinsic to the server's state and the new code.

Balance	Buffing neutral guards
Balance	Drop rate alterations (anecdotal)
Balance	Neutering the leash/kite characteristics of mobs
Balance	Neutering Warlock Infernal summon
Balance	Respawn time alterations (anecdotal)
Exploit Fix	Neutering the XP gain from mobs tagged by you but killed by other players
Exploit Fix	Various changes to AV (auto-raid creation, forced loot settings)[9]
Exploit Fix	Pool Party exploit fixed[10]
Quality of life	"show number on cooldown" on the Action Bar list
Quality of life	Auto looting
Quality of life	Gear comparison
Quality of life	leave the flightpath early
Quality of life	Sending more than one item in the mail
Quality of life	Shifting characters on the character list
Quality of life	Turning add ons off or on ingame
Quality of life	Unlock/move character portrait
Technical	Changes in the release timing of content
Technical	Changing the functionality of the "report AFK" feature
Technical	Instanced zones (ie, each zone in the open world operates as an instance)

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[9]

https://www.wowhead.com/news/upcoming-wow-classic-alterac-valley-changes-309664#:~:text
=Blizzard%20has%20announced%20some%20upcoming,the%20battleground%20screen%20a
nd%20more

[10] https://eu.forums.blizzard.com/en/wow/t/pvp-rank-pools-hotfix-coming-14-october/190083

Technical	Layering[11]
Technical	Server size

Therefore we have an initiative of restorative nostalgia where the original experience is trying to be achieved by changing the original product itself. Despite this, WoW Classic will be a much different experience than expected, with an aspect that changed massively since 2004: the context. In the next chapter, we will explain how elements outside of the game itself can create a heavily different experience.

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[11] https://eu.forums.blizzard.com/fr/wow/t/euhhh-cest-quoi-le-layering/22393

Is it actually #notasplanned?

Despite Blizzard wanting to recreate the experience as closely as possible with small amounts of changes, the experience, in some aspects, was very different from the original. The leeway system[12] used in Vanilla for low bandwidth is now over-tuned due to the better internet quality.

We will use the data collected from a survey (Addendum 1) created for Vanilla players who also played Classic. In this chapter, the questions have to be answered with a number between 0 and 5, with 0 being "Strongly disagree" to 5 being "Strongly agree". The ordinate represents the number of responses.

Let's consider returning players. Having played the game before, there's already a sense of discovery that's lost[13]. In the survey, more than half of people said that Vanilla was more enjoyable because the game was still unknown. "New" is one of the most recurring words in these responses.

A word cloud of people who enjoyed Vanilla more than Classic

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12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3GH5cWPFOE
13 https://www.reddit.com/r/classicwow/comments/xfuv9w/comment/iopxz83/

About more than half the people who talked about "newness" also spoke about the lack of knowledge about and around the game. This is apparent since every question about game and meta difficulty tended towards Vanilla being more difficult. 90,1% feel that it was more difficult to do successful raids in Vanilla. More evidently, 97,2% feel that it was harder to understand the meta back then, while 76% think that Vanilla had a wider diversity in builds[14]. Also, 88,7% felt like leveling up a character was harder in Vanilla. This all makes sense with the absence of the guides, tools, meta, and encyclopedias during Vanilla. This is interestingly associated with a better experience according to comments on why the game was more enjoyable back then.

It was easier to do successful raids on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic
71 réponses
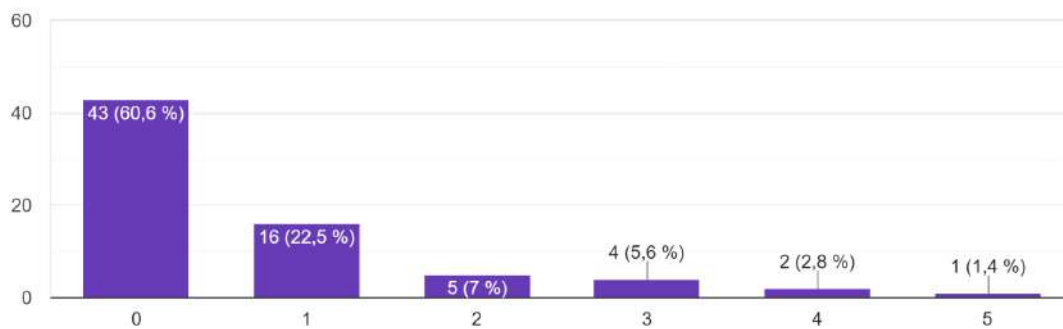
It was easier to understand the (PVP/PVE) meta on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic
71 réponses
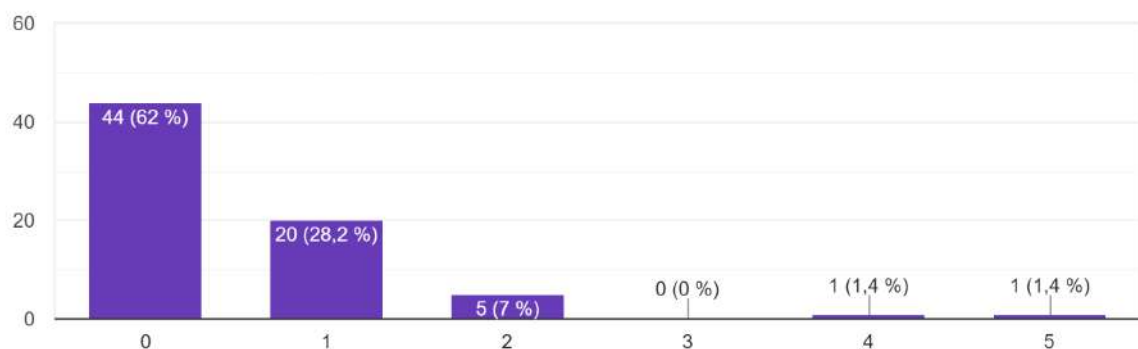
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[14] https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=build

The (PVP/PVE) build diversity was more diverse on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic
71 réponses
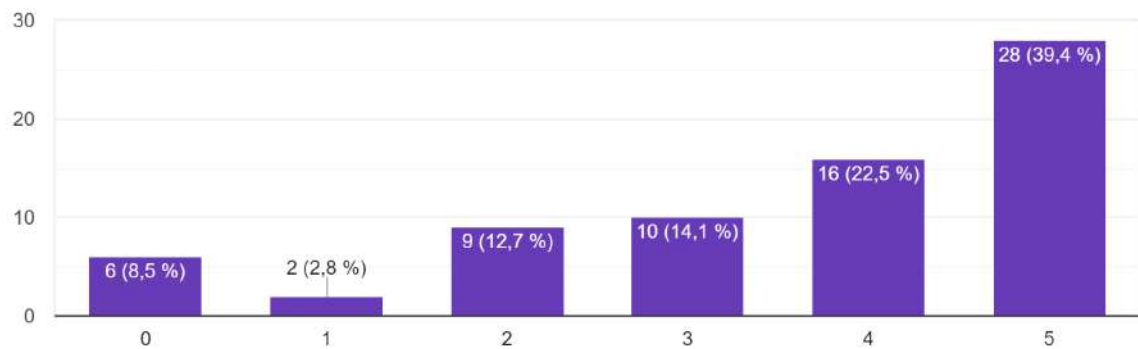
It was easier to level up on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic
71 réponses
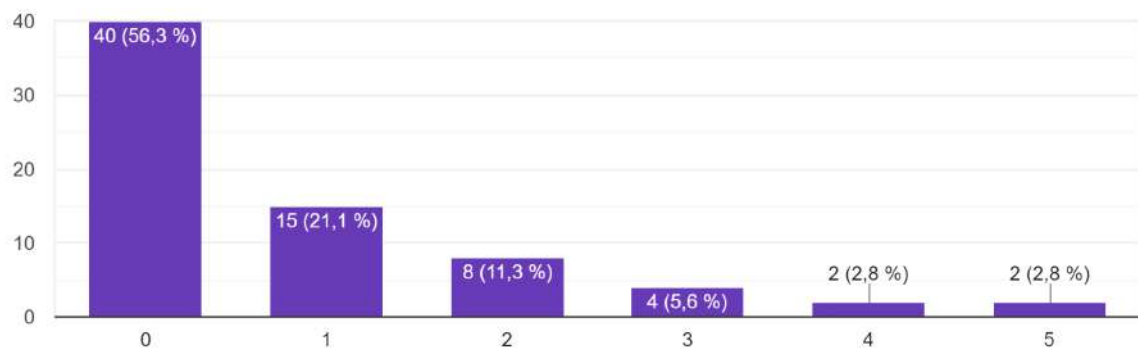
With a bigger population also comes a larger amount of toxicity, which is also reported by players when they compare Vanilla to Classic. About 76% of people think that the PvP environment, an infamously hostile one[15], was less toxic in Vanilla. We can assume that it extends to PvE activities as well, since comments saying that Vanilla was more enjoyable reminisce about a less toxic game. This would make sense since toxic behaviors paired with a tendency for high-level content to revolve around meta can result in a very hostile environment.

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[15] https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/wow/t/pvp-community-is-so-toxic/1172408

The PVP environment was less toxic on WoW Vanilla than in WoW Classic
71 réponses
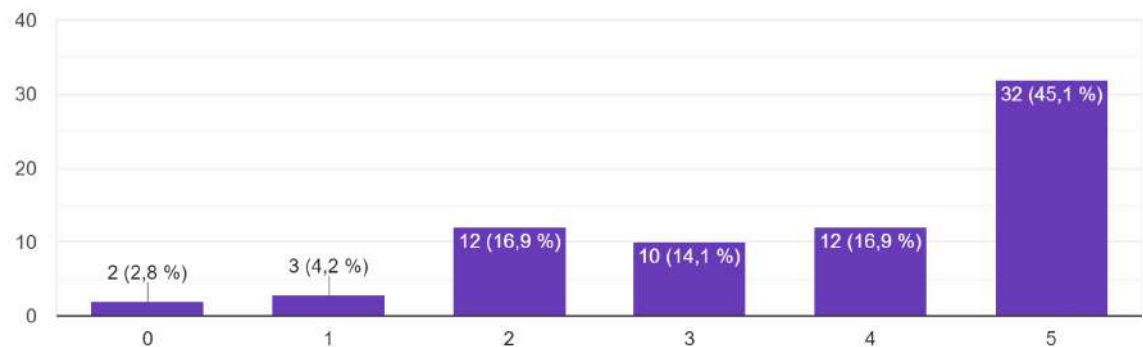
With a less toxic environment and more opportunities for players to communicate in-game rather than on social media, I had assumed that players would make friends more easily on Vanilla. It turns out that "It was easier to make friends on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic" is one of the only statements with fewer strong opinions and more nuance. One comment says "Discord availability made it easier to socialize and coordinate with others in classic. It strengthened bonds and created a tighter community to have fun with." which opens a discussion about player preferences when it comes to communication.

It was easier to make friends on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic
71 réponses
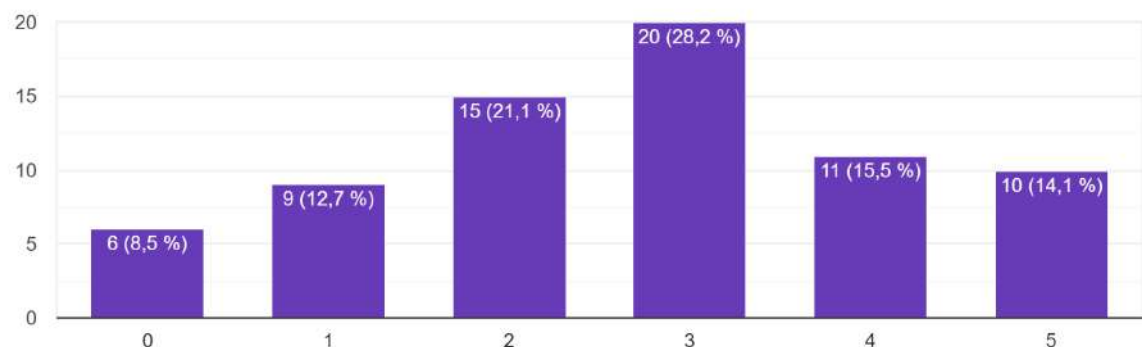
Thanks to the possibility of server transfer, social media, and voice chat, players congregated more easily with their in-groups towards their prefered servers. In

general, larger servers were more attractive since they would encounter more players and activities. Another common reason for transferring to another server is because the player's faction (Horde or Alliance) is getting outnumbered. People would prefer to join servers where their faction is the majority. According to the survey, in fact, 74,7% of players think that Classic has worse faction balance. The consequences are disastrous for the faction outnumbered: deserted cities, empty auction houses, and long matchmaking in some game modes (Massively Overpowered, 2021, July 22).

It was easier for realms to have good faction balance on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic
71 réponses
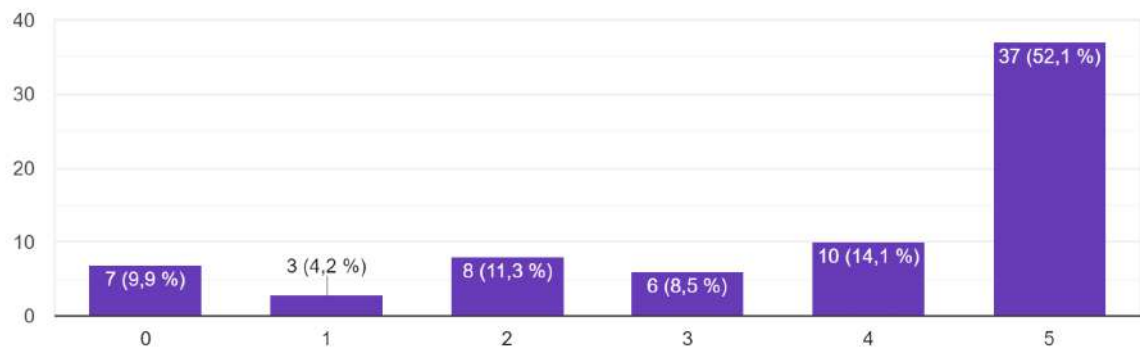
With the advent of streamers, people have been seeking to join their servers so they can belong to an in-group. This has been a contributing factor in the creation of "mega-servers" while others stay relatively unpopulated. These in-groups tend to be larger in scale, with behaviors that players might perceive as off-putting. 74,6% of players think that the impact of some streamers, and therefore their communities, is a negative one. Although this doesn't confirm that they're entirely the cause of toxicity, we can be certain that the presence of a dynamic between a streamer and their audience has an impact on the player's perception of the game's community.

Streamers have affected the community in a positive way

71 réponses
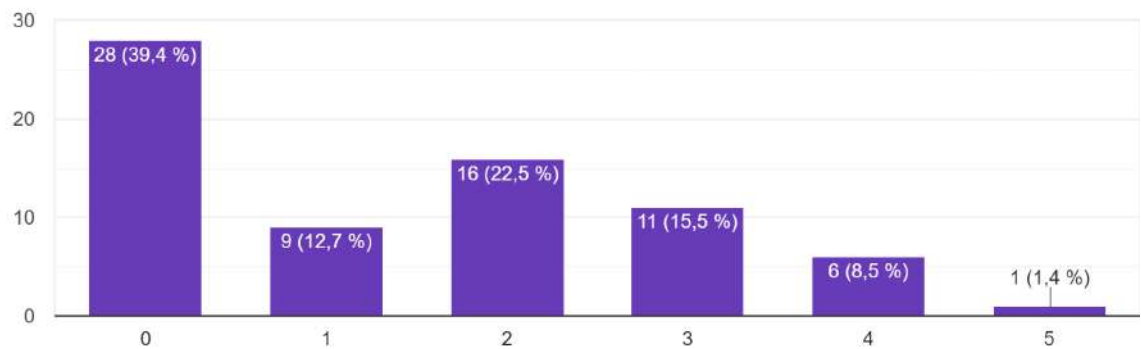
Elements that seemed to have a positive tendency towards Classic were about technical elements and add-ons. 80,3% of players think that Classic has a more smooth and stable experience, which is consistent with the progress of telecommunication and data storage throughout the years. Also, with the passing of time, it is also logical to see 91,6% of players prefer the current quality of add-ons with the improvements in software development and knowledge about the game.

It was easier to have a technically smooth and stable experience on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic
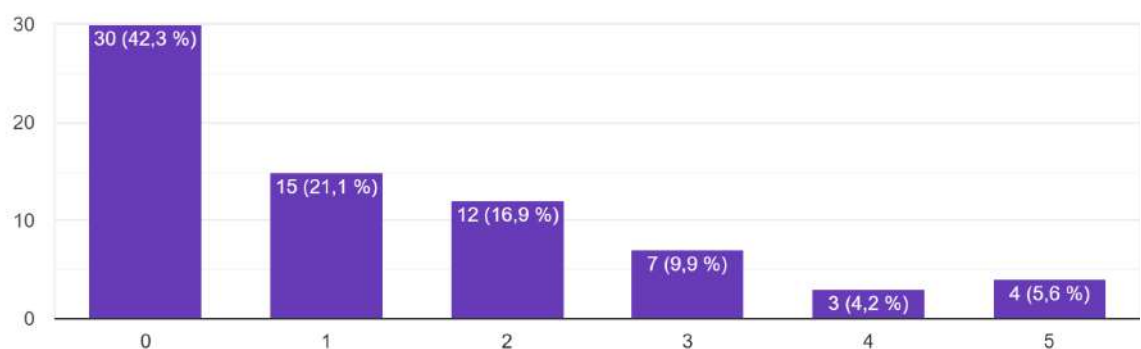
71 réponses

Add-ons were better on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic
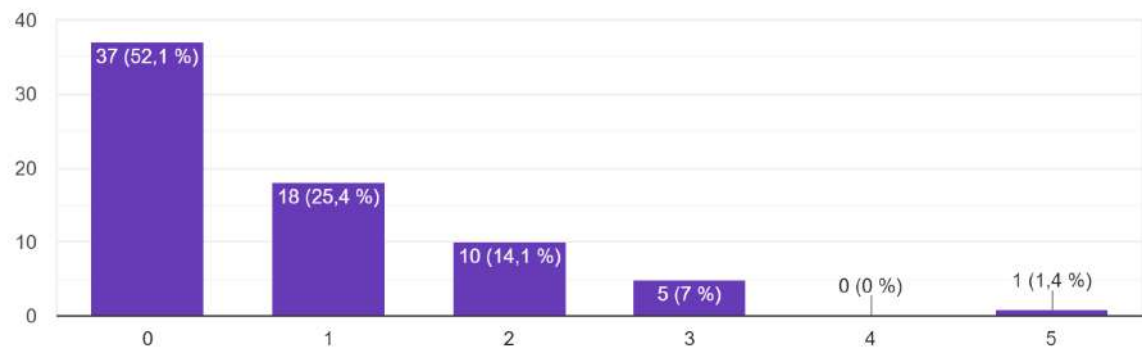
71 réponses

Most importantly, I asked the players if it was easier for them to have fun on Vanilla or on Classic. 69% had more fun on the former.

It was easier to have fun on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic

71 réponses
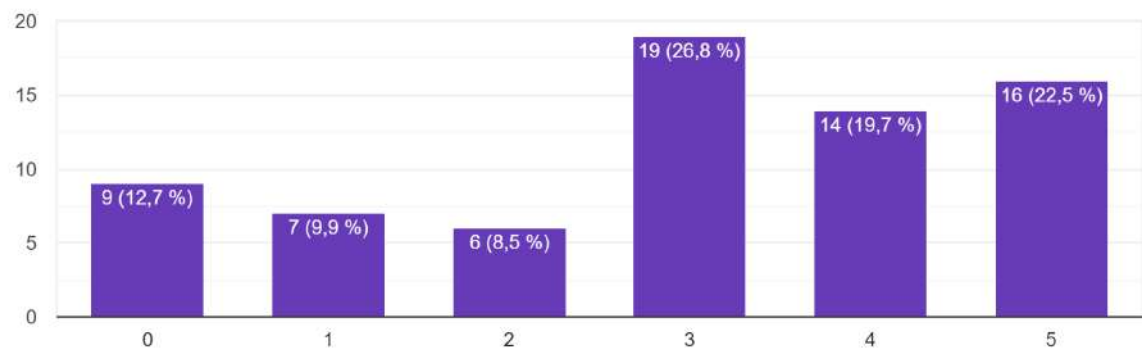
Now that we have compared the main aspects of the game between Vanilla and Classic, we can analyze player perception when it comes to specific changes made to the game.

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Good changes, bad changes

The survey also considered the player's opinion about specific changes, which can give us insight into why the Classic experience is so different. We will also take into account elements that the players don't want to see changed or, on the contrary, want Blizzard to change.

Legend

■ I'm happy with the change

■ Shouldn't have been changed

-

■ Shouldn't change

■ Should've been changed

Firstly, Blizzard fixed multiple exploits, which prevented players and guilds from skipping high level content and getting rare equipment easily. For three different exploits, the disapproval for the exploit fixes stayed at a low 5,6%, which shows how popular these fixes are. Players don't want other players to bypass progress by finding flaws in the code. Another act that increases gains while altering the game experience is Multiboxing[16]. While authorized and not an exploit, players seem to mostly dislike its presence in the game, 42,3% wanting the practice to be prohibited. This is interesting since people couldn't do multiboxing because of the poor performance of old computers, compared to today's. The leeway system is another one that's controversial. 43,7% think it shouldn't change while 23,9% think that it should. It's important to consider that a sizable amount of players are not happy with the different feel of the game in PvP battles due to outdated and overtuned leeway.
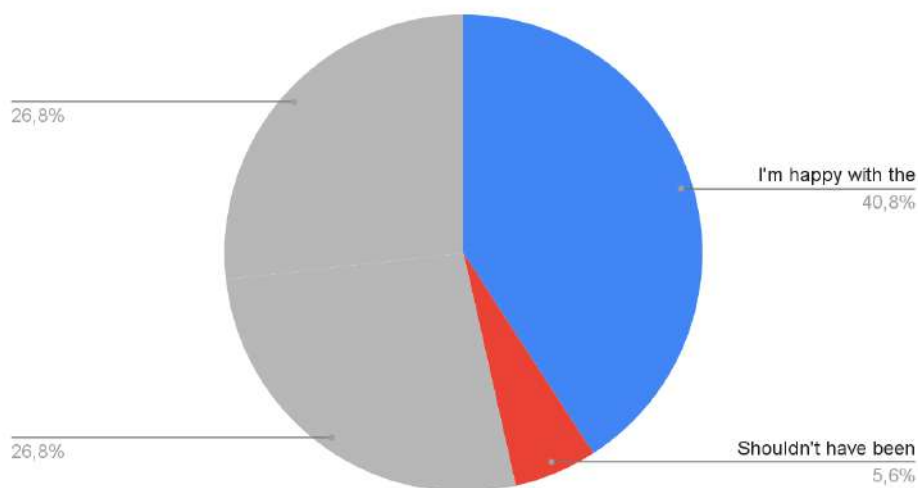
---

[16] https://wowwiki-archive.fandom.com/wiki/Multiboxing#:~:text=Multiboxing%20is%20a%20term%20used,Mac%20at%20the%20same%20time.
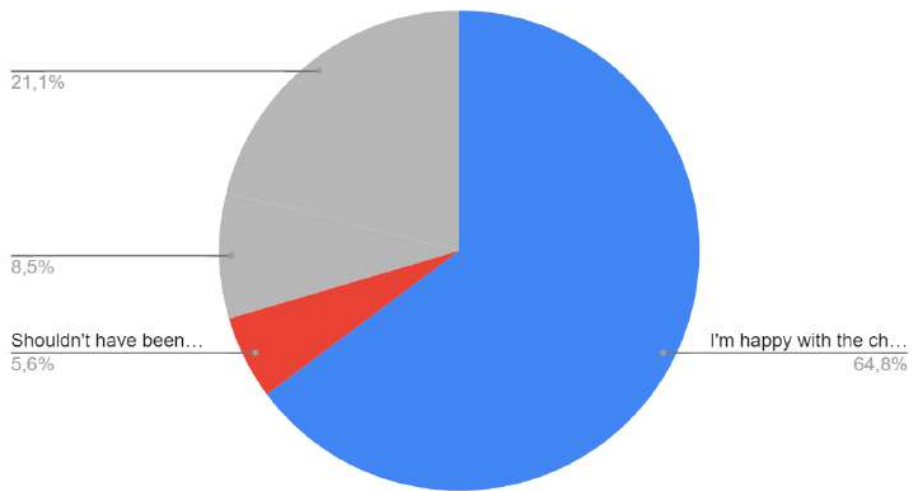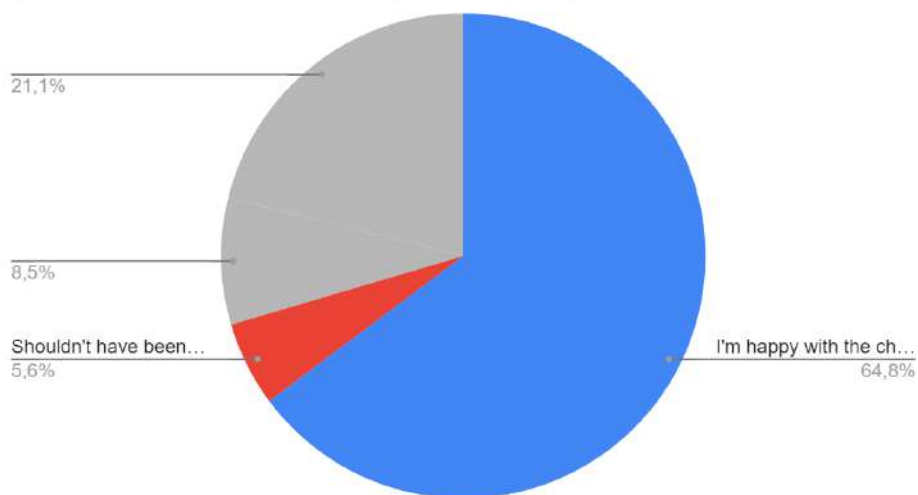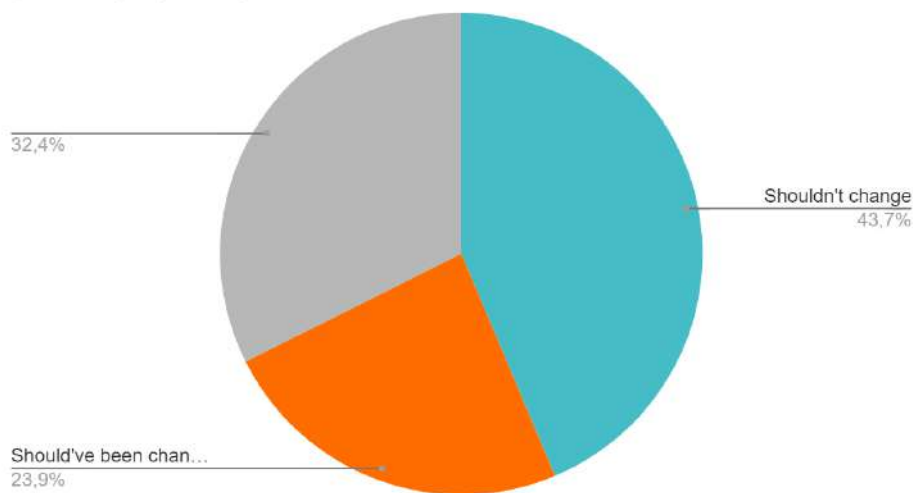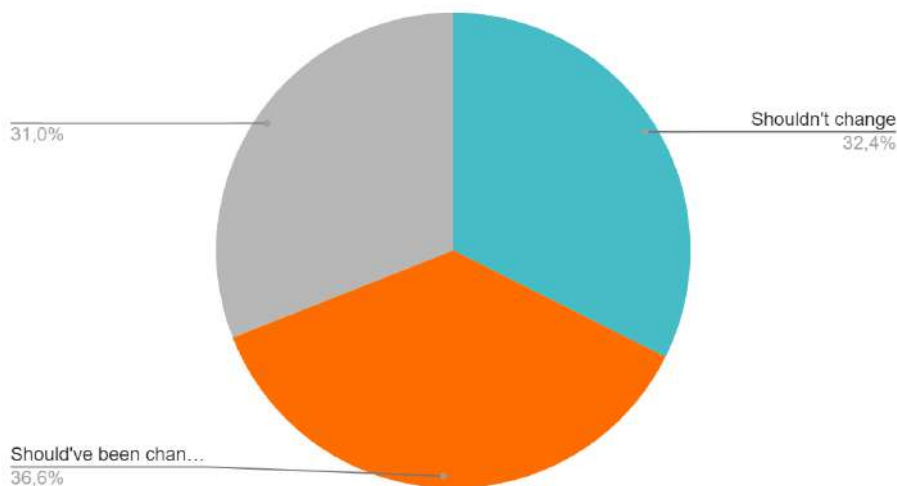
[Fixed the additional talent point exploit]

21,1%

8,5%

Shouldn't have been…
5,6%

I'm happy with the ch…
64,8%

[Fixed the Pool Party exploit]

26,8%

I'm happy with the
40,8%

26,8%

Shouldn't have been
5,6%

[Fixed the additional talent point exploit]

21,1%

8,5%

Shouldn't have been…
5,6%

I'm happy with the ch…
64,8%

34

[Leeway system]

Shouldn't change
43,7%

32,4%

Should've been chan...
23,9%

[Release of Warsong Gulch after Phase 2]

Shouldn't change
32,4%

31,0%

Should've been chan...
36,6%

Balancing is a subject that's at the center of the game's difficulty. Starting at patch 1.12 impacted a noticeable amount of players, 18,3% think that it shouldn't have been the starting point when it comes to balancing. More polarized opinions can be found in the elements that haven't been changed though: 29,6% of players think that races and classes should've been balanced differently than how they were balanced in Vanilla (versus 52,1% who don't). Having put on the table multiple ways to make the game more difficult, one of them is particularly popular. A whopping 63,4% of people think that World Buffs[17] and the meta that transpired from them (Priest with a cause, 2021)

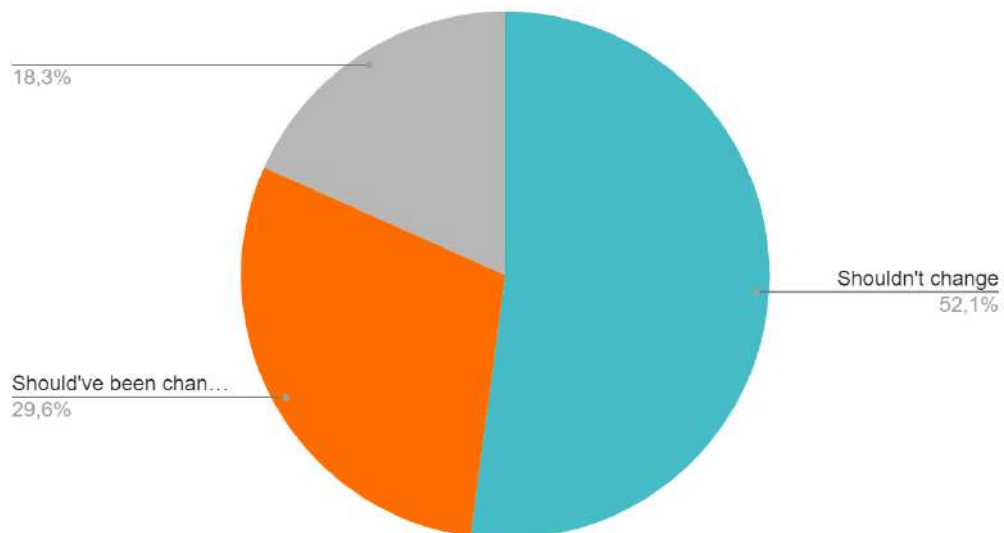[17] https://classic.wowhead.com/guides/classic-world-buff-consumables

should have been changed. It's assumed, with the meta's reputation, that people wish for it to be tuned down. It seems that balancing is the subject that more people seem to be comfortable with being changed. We can't be certain of the player's intentions about patch 1.12, if they wished for a start exactly as in the first version of Vanilla (before 1.12) or if they wished for another version as a start.
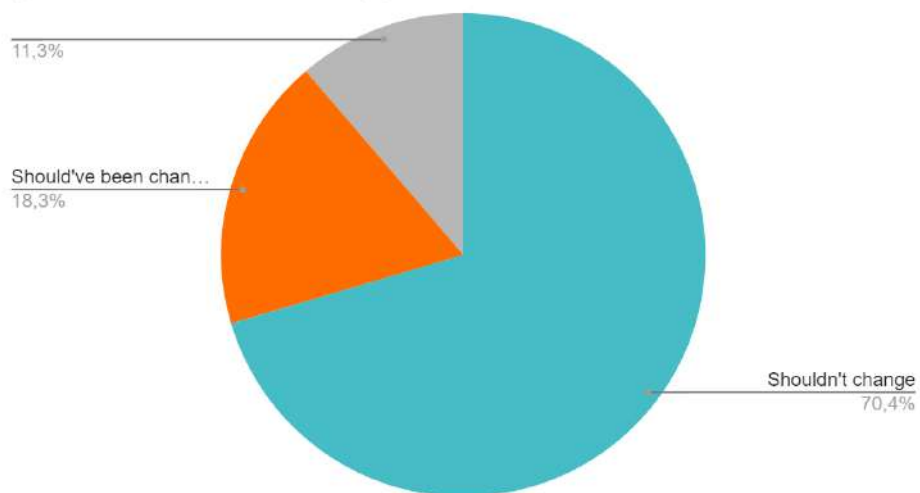
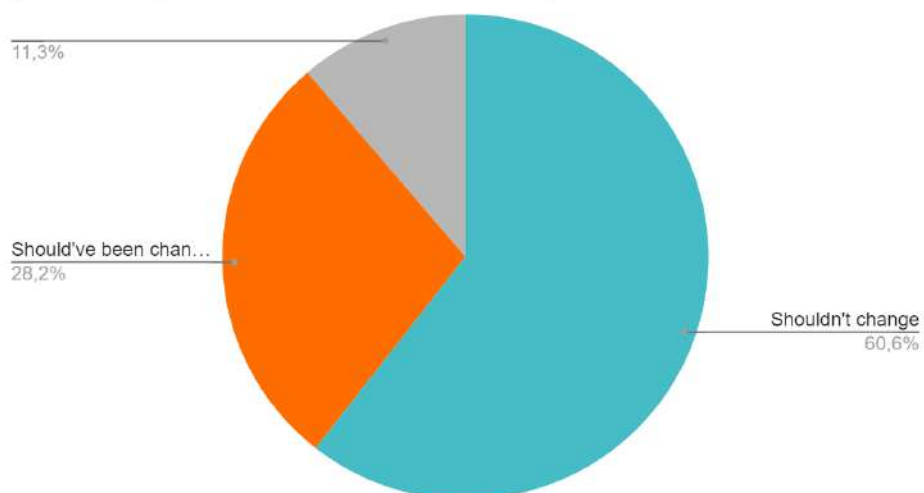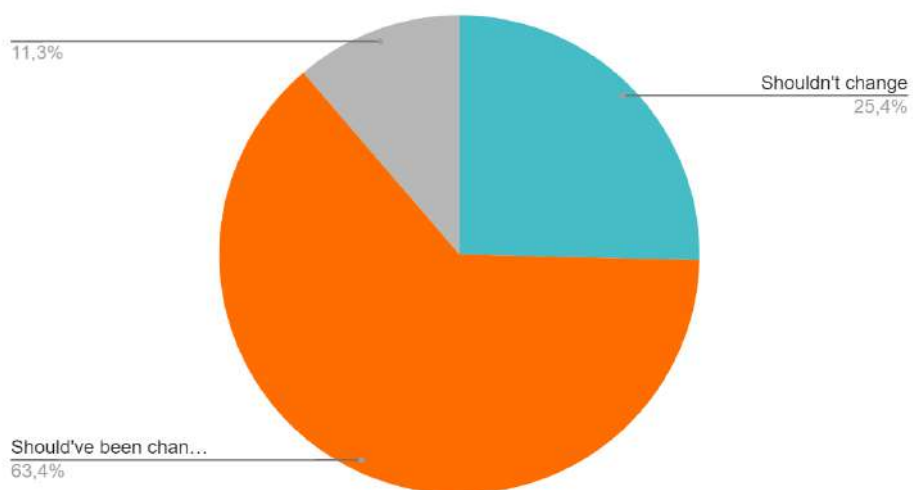[Patch 1.12 being the initial balance state of the game]
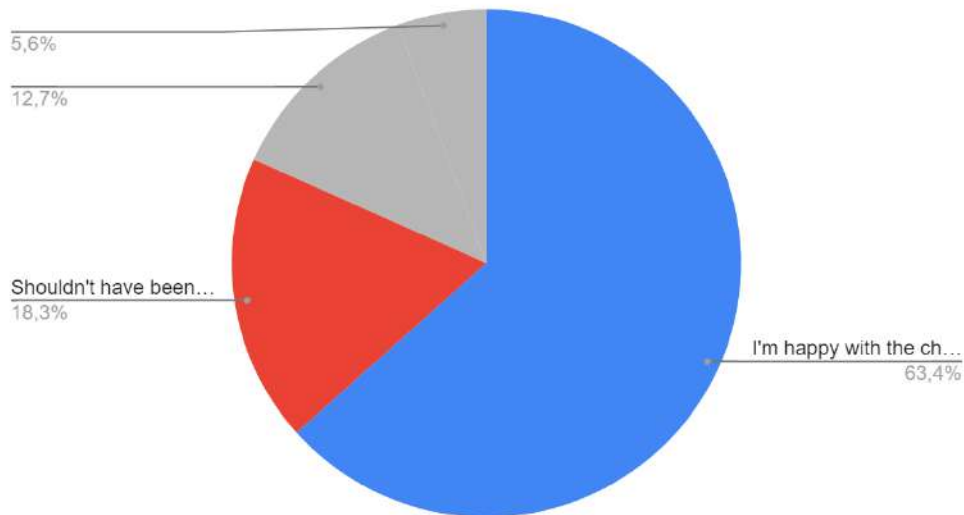
5,6%

12,7%

Shouldn't have been...
18,3%

I'm happy with the ch...
63,4%

[Race/Class Balance]

18,3%

Should've been chan...
29,6%

Shouldn't change
52,1%

[Amount of XP to level up]

11,3%

Should've been chan…
18,3%

Shouldn't change
70,4%

[Raid/Dungeon monster and boss HP]

11,3%

Should've been chan…
28,2%

Shouldn't change
60,6%

[World-buff balancing]

11,3%

Shouldn't change
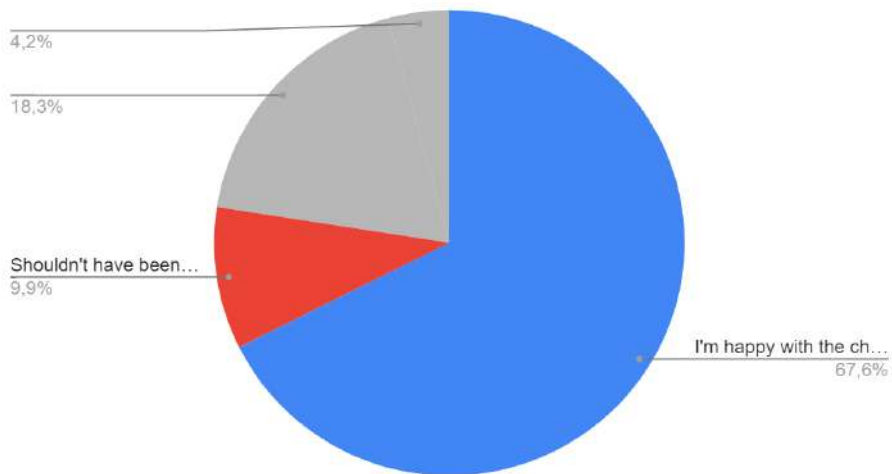25,4%

Should've been chan…
63,4%

37

Blizzard included a bunch of QOL (quality of life) changes to Classic that weren't in Vanilla. All of them had an overwhelmingly good response, with a minimum of 67,6% for Gear comparison, and an average of 83,4% approval for the rest of QOL changes. These changes tend to make tedious tasks (Looting, leaving the flightpath[18] early, sending more than one item through mail, managing add-ons) easier and quicker. In contrast, the addition of Dungeon finder is very controversial. With an approval rate of 35,2% and a disapproval rate of 25,4%, this shows that changes that affect social interactions aren't necessarily well received by the community.
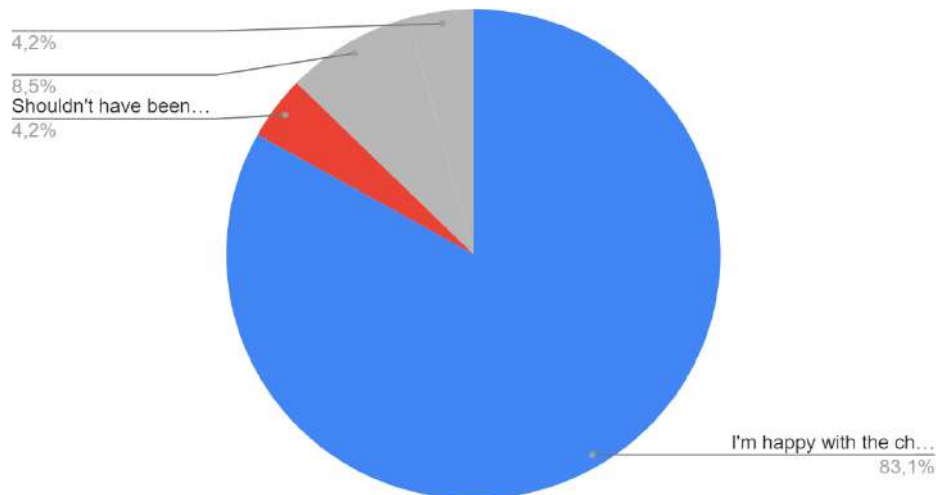

[Added Auto-looting]

2,8%
7,0%
9,9%

I'm happy with the ch...
80,3%

---
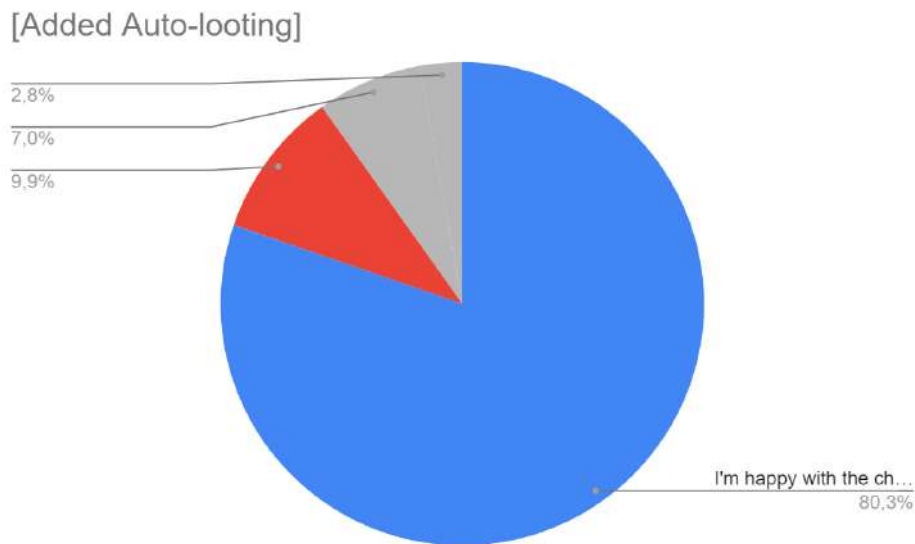
[18] They are a transportation link between two fixed geographical points via fixed paths on faction-exclusive aerial mounts. (Wowpedia)

[Added Gear comparison]
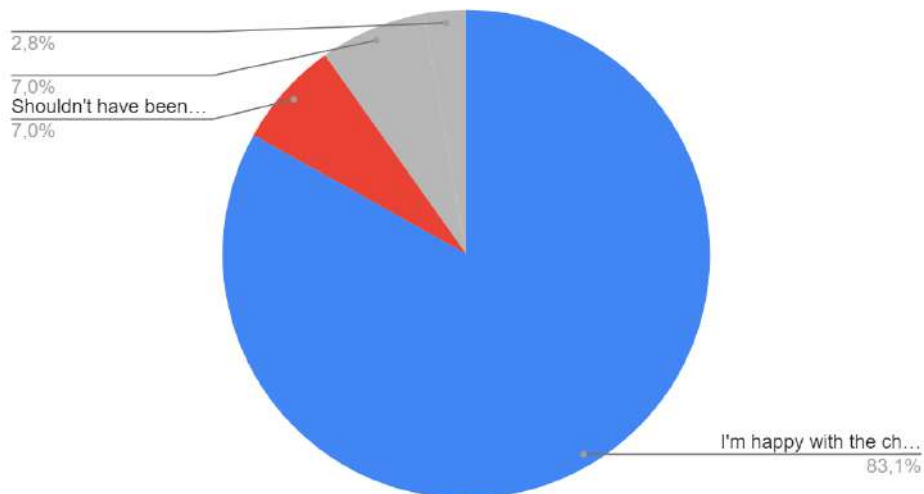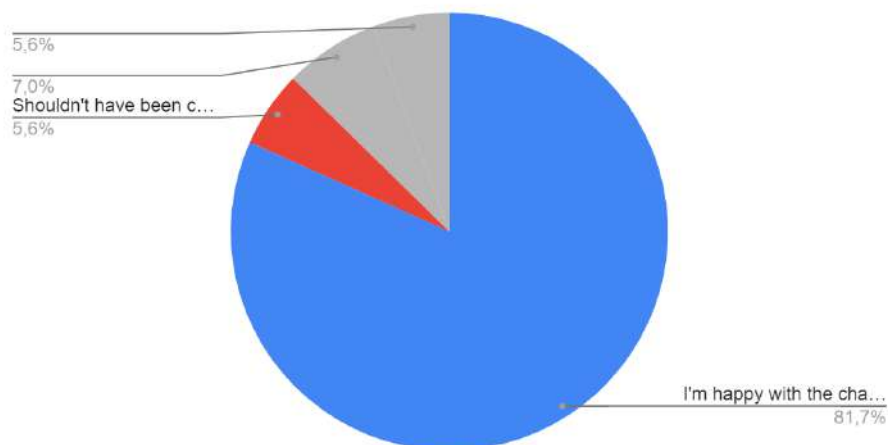
4,2%

18,3%

Shouldn't have been…
9,9%

I'm happy with the ch…
67,6%

[Added Leaving the flightpath early]

4,2%

8,5%
Shouldn't have been…
4,2%

I'm happy with the ch…
83,1%

[Added Ingame add-on managmeent]

2,8%

7,0%
Shouldn't have been…
7,0%

I'm happy with the ch…
83,1%

39

[Added modern UI features (moving portrait, show cooldown numbers...)]

5,6%

7,0%
Shouldn't have been c...
5,6%

I'm happy with the cha...
81,7%

[Added Sending more than one item in the mail]

4,2%

1,4%
Shouldn't have been...
5,6%

I'm happy with the ch...
88,7%

[Added Dungeon Finder]

11,3%

28,2%

I'm happy with the ch...
35,2%

Shouldn't have been...
25,4%

40
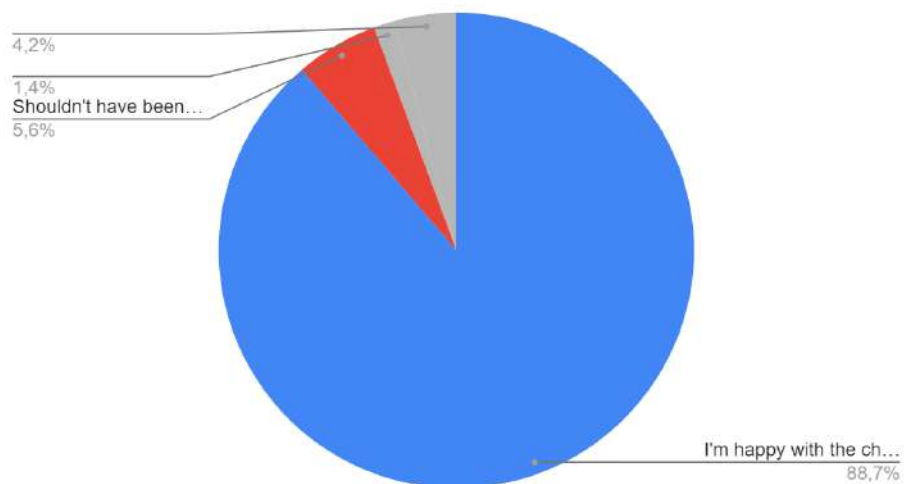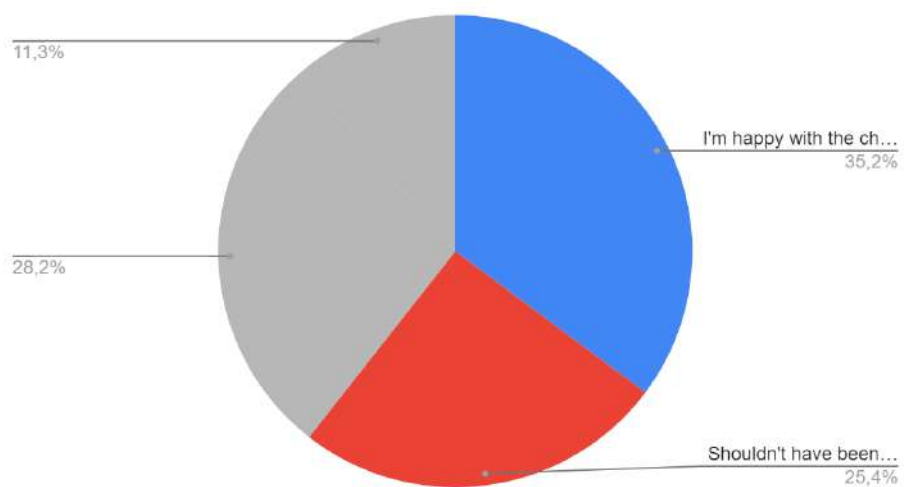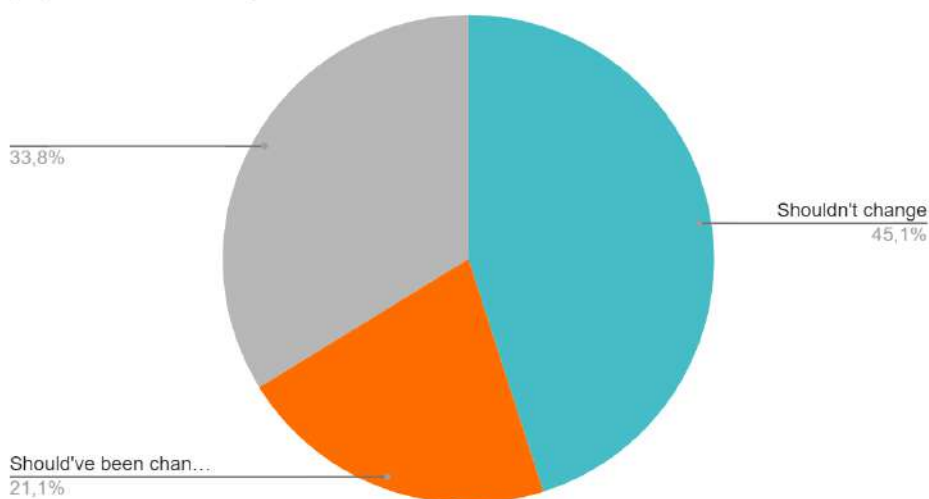
When it comes to the roll-out of big updates, Blizzard decided to provide the same ones with the same timeline as in Vanilla. For example, Phase 2 (PvP Honor system, World bosses) would still come after Phase 1 with the same amount of content. This choice is pretty controversial amongst the players with 21,1% wishing it had changed. This can be seen in a question concerning Warsong Gulch (WG), a battlefield where players could do PvP on a large scale and gain honor points. 36,6% of players wish that WG was released at a different time (versus 32,4% that are happy with the change). The start of Phase 2 without WG was a very criticized period of time[19]. PvP combat in PvP servers would spiral out of control due to the implementation of the honor points without any alternative for farming[20] the points (like a battlefield). We can assume that those who wanted to change the release of WG wanted it to be released along with Phase 2.
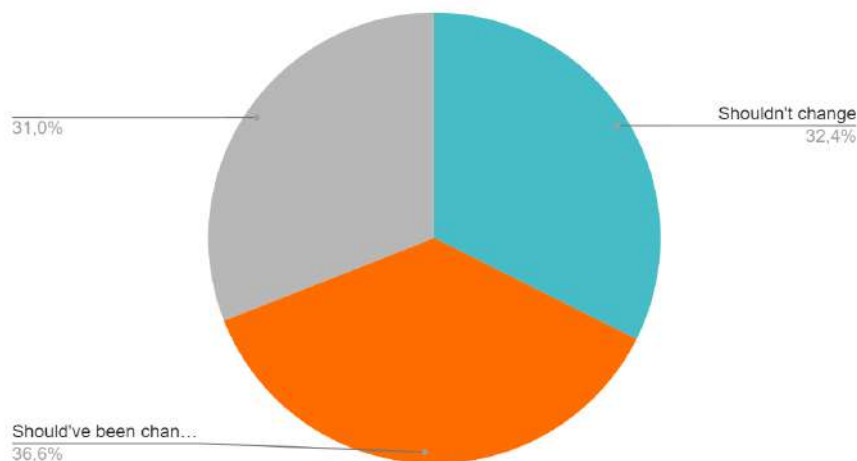
[Updates roll-out]

[19] https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/wow/t/phase-2-is-not-normal-pvp/365746
[20]
https://www.techopedia.com/definition/19278/farming#:~:text=Techopedia%20Explains%20Farming-,What%20Does%20Farming%20Mean%3F,form%20of%20in%2Dgame%20currency.
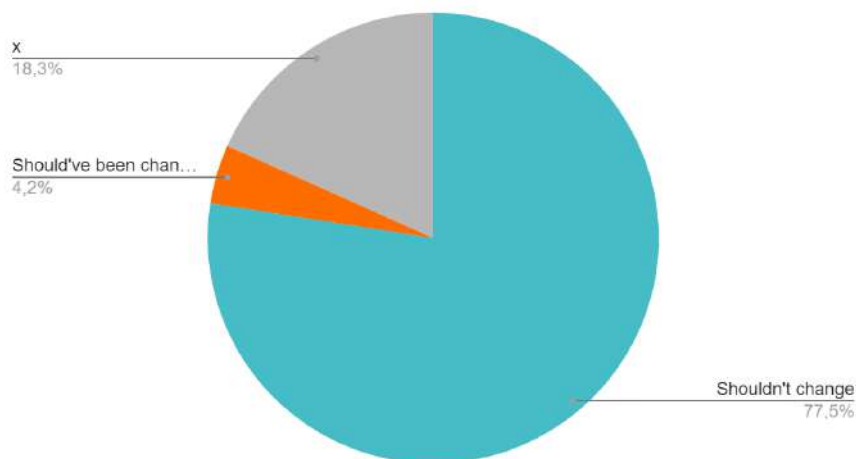
[Release of Warsong Gulch after Phase 2]

31,0%

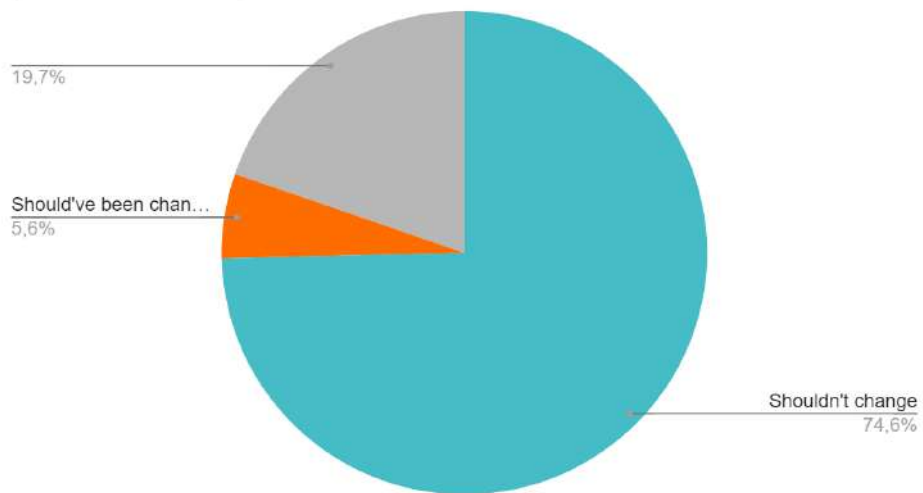Shouldn't change
32,4%

Should've been chan...
36,6%

Amongst all elements that haven't been changed, a few of them were about essential elements to the game, whether aesthetic, contextual, or gameplay-related. Available classes, races, questline, story, lore along with spell training and combat gameplay were all popular elements that less than 10% of players want to change.

This is expected since changing one of these elements could heavily impact the experience and deviate from a restorative nostalgia initiative.
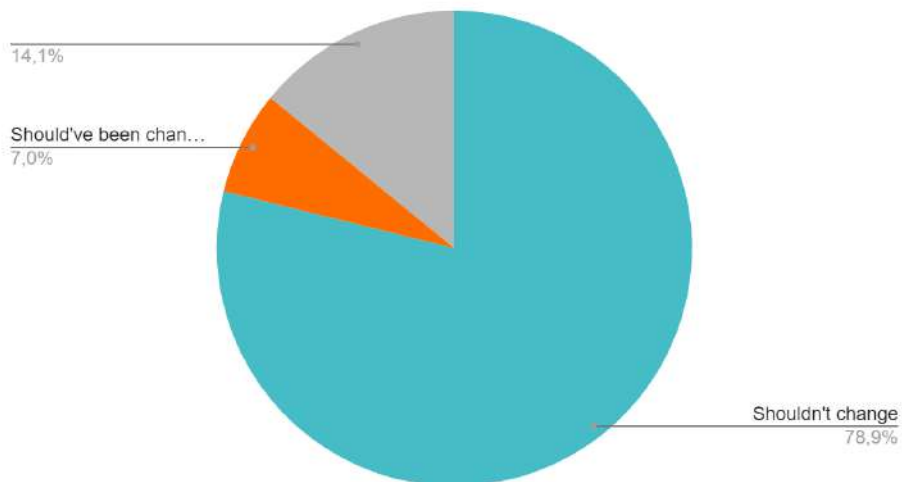
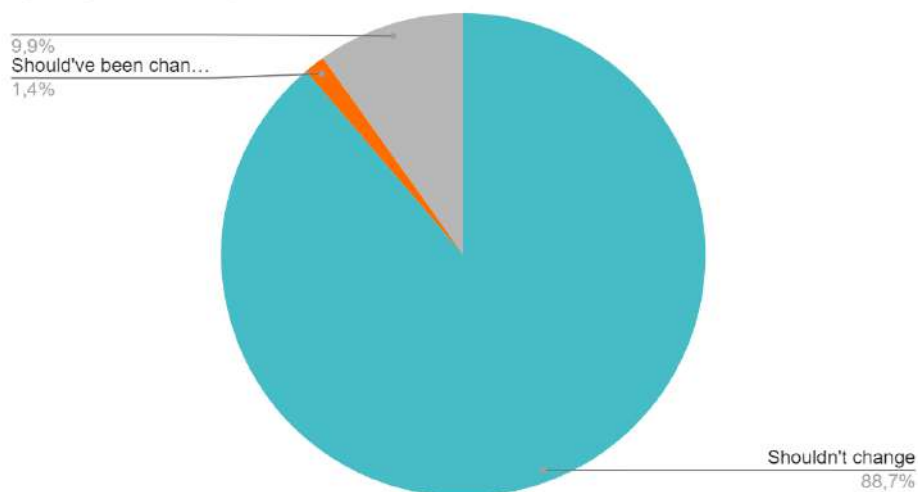[Available classes (eg. adding newer classes)]

x
18,3%

Should've been chan...
4,2%

Shouldn't change
77,5%

[Available races]

19,7%

Should've been chan...
5,6%

Shouldn't change
74,6%

[Combat gameplay]

14,1%

Should've been chan...
7,0%

Shouldn't change
78,9%

[Story and lore]

9,9%
Should've been chan...
1,4%

Shouldn't change
88,7%

43
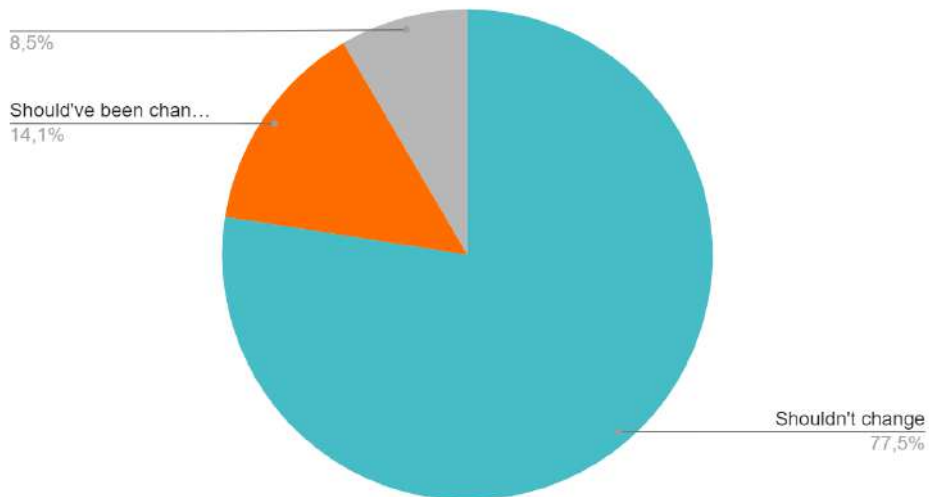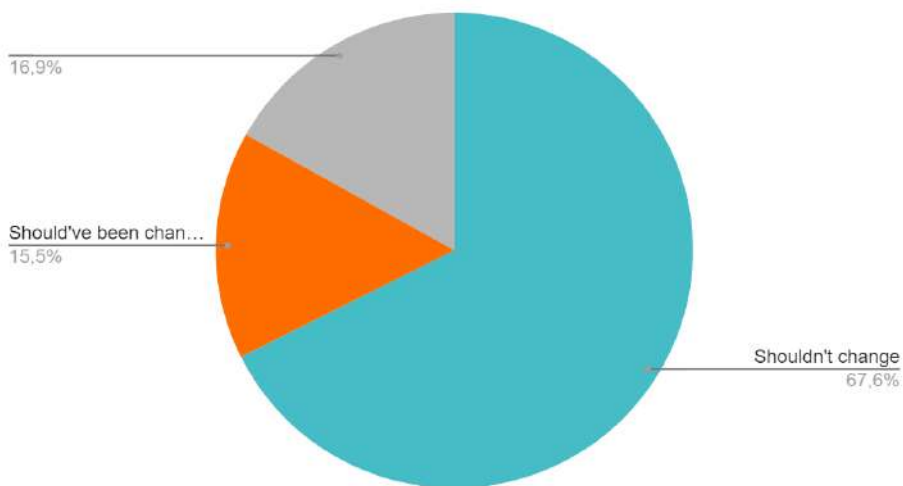
More people wanted talent trees, Boss battles and their patterns, and the structure of raids to change, respectively 14,1%, 15,5%, and 14,1%. We can associate these elements with balancing which explains why we see higher percentages for them to change.
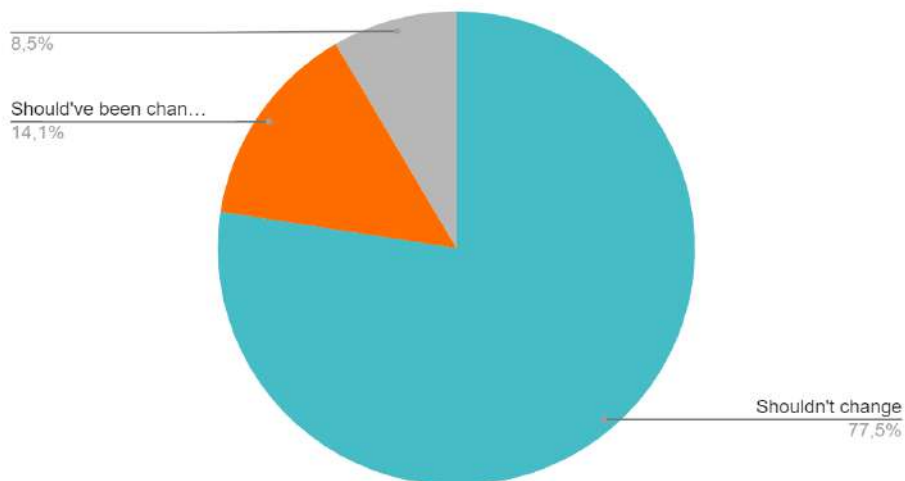
[Talent tree system]

8,5%

Should've been chan…
14,1%

Shouldn't change
77,5%

[Boss attack patterns]

16,9%

Should've been chan…
15,5%

Shouldn't change
67,6%

[Raid/Dungeon structure]

8,5%

Should've been chan...
14,1%

Shouldn't change
77,5%

Graphics also had notable results. 54,9% of players don't want them to change while 23,9% would have prefered a change. It's unclear whether players want the 3D models and textures to be as polished as in current World of Warcraft, but it's interesting to see how many are ready to see WoW Classic having different graphics.

[Graphics (models, textures)]

21,1%

Should've been chan...
23,9%

Shouldn't change
54,9%
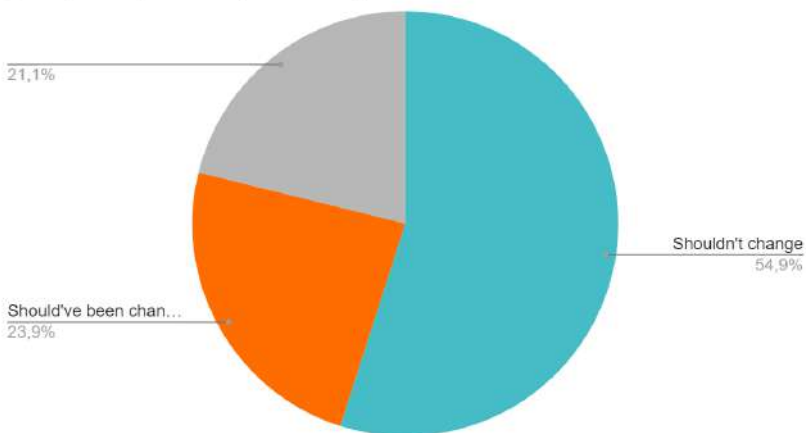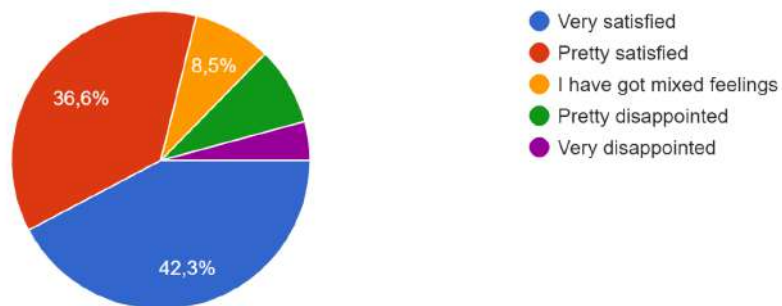
In the end, it's important to note that almost a quarter of players (21,2%) have either mixed feelings, or are disappointed with Classic compared to their expectations. This also means that 78,8% of players are satisfied with classic, despite having 77,5% of players thinking that their experience is different from the original
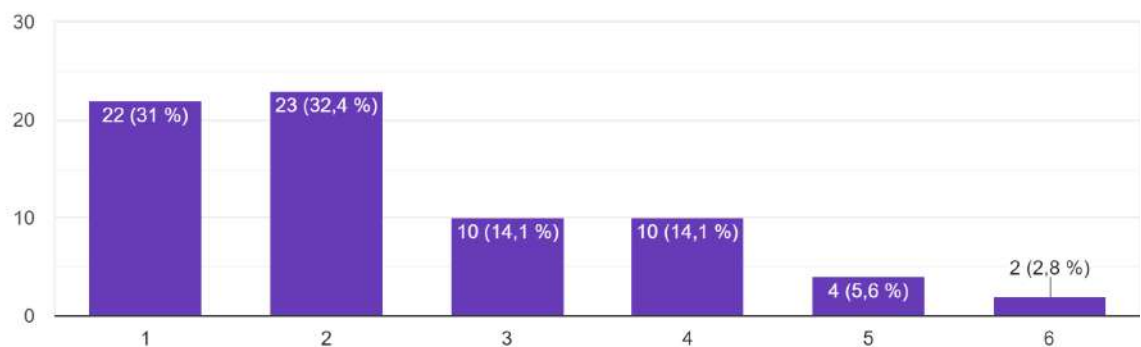
45

How satisfied were you with WoW Classic compared to your expectations.
71 réponses

- ● Very satisfied
- ● Pretty satisfied
- ● I have got mixed feelings
- ● Pretty disappointed
- ● Very disappointed

How similar was your experience playing WoW Classic compared to your experience playing WoW Vanilla?
71 réponses

This tells us that players are mostly satisfied with the game although their experience with the original media, Vanilla, is very different.

We have now gathered data and created information about player perception of Classic compared to Vanilla, along with their perception of each one of the changes and the elements that could have been changed. We can reach a conclusion about the challenges of restorative nostalgia in online gaming.

Conclusion - A difficult task

For individuals and communities that regularly go through the motions of nostalgia, one of the most common ways to cope is to partake in restorative nostalgia. To capitalize on this, companies take part in it and try to recreate products that are subject to the community's nostalgia.

In media, especially in video games, it's impossible to recreate a game without taking into account the experience. The game could be, on a technical level, recreated perfectly, but many variables around the game could have changed, which can severely alter the experience. MMORPGs are a great example. One of the most important facts is "You can't unplay a game". Removing the sense of discovery seems to impact the experience irreparably, although it would be sensible to think this as a quirk about restorative nostalgia in general. More specifically to MMORPGs, the community is a vital part to the experience, affecting almost every aspect of the game, while being extremely volatile.

By studying the case of World of Warcraft Classic, we see that changes in the community's behavior, number, and knowledge drastically affect the experience. From a wider understanding of the meta and the game, to the more toxic community, Classic is anchored in the evolution of online gaming culture. Technical prowesses, another element that can't be controlled by Blizzard without reducing the quality of the product, alter the experience greatly. Bigger servers, the possibility to transfer to another server, but also better stability and consistency deviate from the Vanilla experience, for better and for worse.

We have learned that the kind of changes to the game that are tolerated are exploit and bug fixes, along with small QOL improvements. These QOL improvements become controversial once they affect social interactions. Players also seem to be more comfortable with balance changes, although there are some changes that would be more popular than others.

Problematic and infamous patches, like the start of Phase 2, are also controversial and good candidates for tuning and changes in order to improve the player's experience.

More essential elements of gameplay and (in-game) context, like lore, combat, or questlines, are considered by most players as immovable. This draws a clear line of what could make or break a restorative nostalgia initiative.

Despite the fact that people seem to have a very different experience from Vanilla, the majority of players (78,9%) who have played both Vanilla and Classic were satisfied with the latter.

This case study shows us that in a game with such a volatile context, the community is ready to tolerate a certain amount of changes to the re-release. These tolerated changes bring a level of polish that improves the initial experience without making it too convenient, or altering major aspects like combat mechanics, or social interactions to an extent.

True restoration does not seem possible for MMORPGs, but experimenting with small changes is worth it since players have a warm reception to some of those changes. This is an opportunity for Blizzard to test the waters when they're releasing expansions for Classic.

In fact, the re-release of The Burning Crusade (TBC) expansion came out, and it would be interesting to see which other changes they've done to the game when compared to the original TBC. Another interesting controversy from this expansion is the addition of flying mounts, which has been an essential part of the game since its release in 2007 with TBC. This would be another opportunity to deepen our understanding of the community's expectations when it comes to re-releases.

Blizzard has also planned to open "fresh servers"[21] with pre-expansion content, repeating the Classic cycle. Will they add changes according to the community's needs? Or will they change the game's original structure even more to make it feel closer to the original experience? Will each iteration of a "fresh server" have new changes with each iteration? Which versions of WoW are considered to be nostalgic enough to get immortalized in a server? After all the nostalgic expansions are released, will we see Classic Mists of Pandaria and Classic Warlords of Draenor even though these versions aren't as nostalgic as the previous ones?

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[21]
https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/wow/t/new-fresh-start-realms-available-with-pre-expansion-patch/1317186

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Addendum

Addendum 1 - World of Warcraft : Classic vs Vanilla

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! This should take you no more than 10 minutes. The results with give me the opportunity to understand what went right and what went wrong with WoW Classic. The data will be used in an academic paper about what it takes to re-release a game and satisfy a community.

WoW Classic is the 2019 remake.
WoW Vanilla is the 2004 original game.

*Obligatoire

1. Have you played World of Warcraft Vanilla back in the day? *

   Une seule réponse possible.

   ◯ Yes

   ◯ No

Playtime and characters	You won't take into account Classic The Burning Crusade or Classic Wrath of the Lich King.

2. Which class was your main character? (on Vanilla) *

   Une seule réponse possible.

   ◯ Druid

   ◯ Hunter

   ◯ Mage

   ◯ Paladin

   ◯ Priest

   ◯ Rogue

   ◯ Shaman

   ◯ Warlock

   ◯ Warrior

3.   Which race was your main character? (on Vanilla) *

Une seule réponse possible.

    ◯ Human

    ◯ Dwarf

    ◯ Night Elf

    ◯ Gnome

    ◯ Orc

    ◯ Undead

    ◯ Tauren

    ◯ Troll

4.   About how many hours did you play per **week**? (on Vanilla) *

Une seule réponse possible.

    ◯ less than 10

    ◯ 10 - 20

    ◯ 21 - 30

    ◯ 31 - 40

    ◯ 41 - 50

    ◯ 51 - 60

    ◯ 61 - 70

    ◯ 71 - 80

    ◯ 81 - 90

    ◯ 100 - 130

    ◯ 130 - 160

5.   Which race was your main character? (on Classic) *

Une seule réponse possible.

- ◯ Human
- ◯ Dwarf
- ◯ Night Elf
- ◯ Gnome
- ◯ Orc
- ◯ Undead
- ◯ Tauren
- ◯ Troll

6.   Which class was your main character? (on Classic) *

Une seule réponse possible.

- ◯ Druid
- ◯ Hunter
- ◯ Mage
- ◯ Paladin
- ◯ Priest
- ◯ Rogue
- ◯ Shaman
- ◯ Warlock
- ◯ Warrior

7.   About how many hours did you play per **week**? (on classic) *

Une seule réponse possible.

( ) less than 10

( ) 10 - 20

( ) 21 - 30

( ) 31 - 40

( ) 41 - 50

( ) 51 - 60

( ) 61 - 70

( ) 71 - 80

( ) 81 - 90

( ) 100 - 130

( ) 130 - 160

Opinion and point of view	Please answer these questions with your own point of view and opinions only. You are not making a statement about the whole community, your answers must only be about your experience playing the game. You won't take into account WoW Classic : The Burning Crusade or Wrath of The Lich King.

From 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), please rate each one of these statements.

8.   It was easier to make friends on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic *

Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

9.   The PVP environment was less toxic on WoW Vanilla than in WoW Classic *

Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5

10.   Streamers have affected the community in a positive way *

Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5

11.   It was easier to do successful raids on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic *

Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5

12.   It was easier to understand the (PVP/PVE) meta on WoW Vanilla than on   *
       WoW Classic

Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5

13. The (PVP/PVE) build diversity was more diverse on WoW Vanilla than on   *
     WoW Classic

     Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

14. It was easier to create a successful build on WoW Vanilla than on WoW   *
     Classic

     Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

15. It was easier for realms to have good faction balance on WoW Vanilla than on   *
     WoW Classic

     Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

16. It was easier to have a technically smooth and stable experience on WoW   *
     Vanilla than on WoW Classic

     Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

17.   Add-ons were better on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic *

Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

18.   It was easier to level up on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic *

Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

19.   The game's economy was healthier on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic *

Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

20.   It was easier to understand Blizzard's intentions with the game on WoW Vanilla *
than on WoW Classic

Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

21.   It was easier to have fun on WoW Vanilla than on WoW Classic *

Une seule réponse possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

22.   Write in your answer from the previous question. Why was it easier/harder to   *
have fun on WoW Vanilla than in WoW Classic?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

23. These different aspects were changed for WoW Classic, are you happy with   *
     these changes? Answer Don't know if you're not aware of the change or if you
     can't remember the feauture being removed or changed.

     Pool parties explanation

     Une seule réponse possible par ligne.

	Shouldn't have been changed/added	I'm happy with the change	Don't care about the change	Don't know/Can't remember
Changed user interface (hotbars, menu)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Buffing neutral guards	◯	◯	◯	◯
Patch 1.12 being the initial balance state of the game	◯	◯	◯	◯
Fixed the Pool Party exploit	◯	◯	◯	◯
Fixed raid boss exploits (eg. Ragnaros' Lava Burst disabled after a wipe)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Added Dungeon Finder	◯	◯	◯	◯
Added Auto-looting	◯	◯	◯	◯
Added Gear comparison	◯	◯	◯	◯

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Added Leaving the flightpath early	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Added Ingame add-on managmeent	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Added modern UI features (moving portrait, show cooldown numbers...)	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Added Sending more than one item in the mail	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Fixed the additional talent point exploit	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

24. These different aspects were NOT changed for WoW Classic, would you have *
     prefered if they were changed?

[Leeway system explanation](#)

Une seule réponse possible par ligne.

	Should've been changed	Shouldn't change	Don't care about it changing or not
Available classes (eg. adding newer classes)	○	○	○
Available races	○	○	○
Race/Class Balance	○	○	○
Combat gameplay	○	○	○
Talent tree system	○	○	○
Graphics (models, textures)	○	○	○
Story and lore	○	○	○
Questlines	○	○	○
Leeway system	○	○	○
Amount of XP to level up	○	○	○
World-buff balancing	○	○	○
Release of Warsong Gulch after Phase 2	○	○	○
Updates roll-out	○	○	○
	○	○	○

Spell training

Rules about manual multiboxing (still authorized)	◯	◯	◯
Boss attack patterns	◯	◯	◯
Raid/Dungeon loot table and drop chances	◯	◯	◯
Raid/Dungeon structure	◯	◯	◯
Raid/Dungeon monster and boss HP	◯	◯	◯

25. How similar was your experience playing WoW Classic compared to your experience playing WoW Vanilla? *

Une seule réponse possible.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very different	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very similar

26. How satisfied were you with WoW Classic compared to your expectations. *

Une seule réponse possible.

◯ Very satisfied
◯ Pretty satisfied
◯ I have got mixed feelings
◯ Pretty disappointed
◯ Very disappointed

Ce contenu n'est ni rédigé, ni cautionné par Google.

Google Forms

Addendum 2 - Survey Results

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1x4exnOnYRJ56a0N5iSz62NKSIF3XbfEy7WDWCWb2vFg/edit?usp=sharing