CYBERBULLYING IN WORLD OF WARCRAFT'S LOOKING FOR RAID FUNCTION

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

Heather Rebecca Brinkman

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Program:
Anthropology

April 2015

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

Cyberbullying In World of Warcraft's Looking For Raid Function

By

Heather Rebecca Brinkman

The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with North

Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Jeffery T. Clark

Co-Chair

Edward Avery-Natale

Co-Chair

Kevin Brooks

Approved:

May 21, 2015   Jeffery T. Clark

Date   Department Chair

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the effects that othering or cyberbullying within the Looking for Raid (LFR) function is having on the *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) community in terms of their identity creation. I will look at the three separate classes that I have identified (elite raider, casual raider, and casual gamer) in the community and to see how each of these groups has been affected by the creation of the LFR function and the conflict that it has created. I will explore the hegemonic process that led to the creation of the LFR function and the coopting of the vital symbolic resource, the screen shot, by the casual gamer. While the relationship between cyberbullying and bullying in the physical world is not yet apparent, it is important that the phenomenon be adequately understood and defined first.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to start by acknowledging the academics that have inspired and helped me through this long journey. First and foremost, I want to thank Dr. James Jordan, my undergraduate advisor. You started me on my path in Anthropology and have been my shoulder from afar. No matter what happened, you have always been so very supportive and encouraging. Next, I need to thank Dr. Edward Avery-Natale, my advisor on this long and winding path we call a Master's program. Your support, understanding, and the ability to make my pages bleed more than Tom Riddle's diary when it was stabbed with the basilisk's tooth, has been a great help! You believed in me when no one else here did. Dr. Tim Laundry, you pushed me to a breaking point and then helped me find an inner strength that I did not even know I had. Thank you for believing in me. Dr. Jeffery Clark, thank you for giving me a second chance and believing that I could do it. Dr. George Triplett, you are my inspiration for going back to school and my greatest cheerleader! (Thanks Daddy!) Thank you all so very much. I could not have done this without you!

I would also like to show my deepest gratitude to the rest of my family. My mother, Linda Leong, for her support and being my editor. Thanks mom! My stepparents, Sheree Triplett and Wayne Leong, you two have been nothing but supportive and I cannot thank you enough for that. My two little brothers, Michael Triplett and Daniel Leong, you two have not only supported me but also reminded me that I always told you I that I was the smartest sibling, so I needed to at least get the same level of education as you two had gotten. Thank you baby brothers! Lastly, but certainly not least, my husband, Rand Brinkman Jr, who not only believed

in me but put up with my crying, screaming, crabbiness, and inability to get out of my own head.

Thank you for being my rock and my sanity!

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my two wonderful daughters, Celeste Egwene and Sydney

Morgan. Everything I do is to prove to you that you CAN make anything happen and to never

give up on your dreams! You two have accepted the fact that I have weird hours, and sometimes

go off on anthropological tangents that have nothing to do with what we are talking about.

Thank you for being understanding and coming with me on this wonderful journey!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Abilities..................................Abilities are the skills that the character will be able to use in combat.

Adds ....Adds, or additional mobs, are creatures which are added into the fight by the boss.

Add-ons................................Add-ons are game modifications that can be added to help with a number of different aspects within the game such as allowing on to see another players gear score.

Afk ....Away from keyboard.

Alts.......................................Alternative characters.

AOE ....Short for area of effect which refers to character abilities that are able to hit any targets that are within an area specified by the ability.

Avatar(s) ....Another word for character.

Blizzard Entertainment ....Is the company that created and hosts *WoW*.

Class(es)...............................The play style through which a player will interact with the world. The choice of class will determine what type of abilities, spells, armor, and powers the character will have. The list of classes are: Priest, Mage, Hunter, Paladin, Warrior, Warlock, Druid, Rogue, Monk, Death Knight, and Shaman.

Boss......................................A boss is a high level non-player character which is in control of a selected area, according to the storyline set forth by Blizzard Entertainment, within an instance and/or raid.

Buff ....A spell placed upon a character that enhances their stats.

Dps (er) ....Damage dealers (one who deals damage to opponents) are also known as "dpsers" as dps, stands for damage per second. While each of the classes is capable of dealing damage, the dpsers are specifically created in order to do the most damage to mobs.

Dungeons ....Dungeons are small instances in which five players form a group in order to complete a part of the story line.

Non-player character.............These are characters within the world that are controlled by Blizzard's programming. Players interact with them in order to buy supplies, further the storyline, store items, receive help, and repair their gear.

Noobs ....A derogatory term meaning a new player.

Othering ....The separation between oneself and the other to an extent that the other is deemed as lesser or intrinsically different from a group or person.

Player ....The person who is controlling the in game character.

Race......................................The mythical origins of the character. The choices are: Night Elf, Gnome, Human, Dwarf, Draenei, Worgen, Panderen, Tauren, Orc, Troll, Goblin, Undead, or Blood Elf.

Raid......................................Is a large instance through which 10, 25, or 40 players get together in order to defeat and/or overthrow the mobs that have taken over the area.

Raid Boss ....The bosses that are in the raid.

Realms..................................Separate servers on which the game can be played in different ways with a different group of people. Each realm has the same storyline and content, but the way that players interact with each other is different. Players can choose between player versus player, player versus the environment, roleplaying, or roleplaying with player versus players as the different ways through which they want to interact with other players.

Rezes ....Resurrections, a way of bringing a character back to life.

SoO ....Siege of Orgrimmar, a raid within *WoW*.

Tanking ....When a player focuses the mob(s) on himself, so that others within the raid do not take damage.

Trade chat.............................A typed chat function within the game that allows players within the capital cities to communicate with others within their faction and sell their wares.

Trash mobs............................Monsters that give little, if any, loot.

Trolling ....When someone intentionally is being negative and attempting to upset the people that they are interacting with.

Wipe......................................When all the characters that are attempting the raid die.

WoW......................................*World of Warcraft*

Queing (que) ....Queing up is when a person sets herself/himself within a que to be added to a team of players who wish to attempt a LFR.

Questing ....A type of game play through which a player has their character go kill something and/or retrieve an item for a non-player character in order to further the storyline.

CHAPTER ONE. CREATION SCREEN

In an era when people are able to do everything online, from ordering groceries to paying their bills, even socializing, the need for face-to-face contact with other human beings is minimal. It is no wonder, then, that online societies are forming. Video games, such as *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*), are just one of the ways that people are finding their social niches through this massive online environment. A video game, you say? And it's a social outlet? Yes, every aspect of this type of video game (known as a massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG)) is set up to encourage social interaction, from the different text boxes to the need to team up to complete achievements.

As with any large group of humans, there is the good and the bad that comes with social interaction online. Bullying, which I equate with a process of *othering*, has invaded the cyber realm with full force and is no longer confined simply to our school yards. Othering can be defined as the separation between oneself and the other to an extent that the other is deemed as lesser or intrinsically different from a group or person. As Jean-François Staszak puts it, "otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ('Us', 'the Self') constructs one or many dominated out-groups ('Them', 'Other') by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination" (2008:2). Or, in the hegemonic discourse theories of Ernesto Laclau, Judith Butler, and others, the *other* constitutes that which is outside of the in-group, or that which cannot be incorporated within the in-group and, as such, maintains the boundary between "in" and "out," "us" and "them." In other words, through othering, the person or group that is being othered is looked at as distinct from and inferior to the in-group and can be used to separate the

"in-group" from the "undesirables" while also redefining the identity of the group doing the othering. Individuals' identities are intricately linked to the social groups with which they interact, as the self can only be constructed with the gaze toward the other. For the purposes of this research project, the term othering is linked to cyberbullying as well as theories of class difference. I will be looking at the cyberbullying that is done in the Looking for Raid (LFR) function as it pertains to the different classes, or levels of player, within *WoW* and how it affects identity creation. The LFR function allows players to be able to enter into a raid with 24 other random people. A raid is when 10, 25, or 40 people come together to go into an instance (or separate server based just on conquering the enemies set forth) in order to kill off the enemies and loot their treasures. (*WoW* players refer to any items that they get from a kill as loot.) LFR is random only in the fact that the people that are selected must first show their interest in participating in one of the LFRs by what is called queing up, which is when a person sets themself within a que to be added to a team of players who wish to attempt a LFR. Ultimately, cyberbullying is a form of othering, and like all othering, it works to create hierarchical differences between subjects, which can be understood as similar to classes. Cyberbullying is a major social issue that is plaguing not only the *WoW* community but the greater cyber community at large. According to ChildLine charity, the number of cases of cyberbullying and suicidal ideations because of it almost doubled from just the years 2011-2013 (www.bbc.com:2014).

To understand the importance of this, we must remember that identity is about more than the mere self. Identity is a way through which one is able to interact with one's community and is always socially constituted. For the purpose of this study, the term describes how the players identify and classify themselves. In the research described below, I look at the narratives used

by many players to describe the type of gamers that they identify as, at how the LFR function has affected their identities, and if there has been any identification changes because of this function. I further examine how the LFR function has changed identity creation for the *WoW* community as well as explanations for the level of othering that takes place within the game. Simply stated, my main research question is: *How has the LFR function changed the identity creation of the gamers within the WoW community based on the othering that is occurring?* I will also address ancillary questions: *How have the social structures within WoW changed? Can a study of cyberbullying in a gaming context contribute to the discussion of bullying in other contexts?*

It is important to study this phenomenon because, with the growing use of the Internet, understanding these communities has become vital to understanding new trends in social construction and identity creation. People no longer have to rely on those people within their local communities to help redefine or reify social norms. This is because, through online communities, individuals find others they may never have imagined as friend material, but with whom they are suddenly thrown together. From this, they are sometimes able to see past the social stigmas that would otherwise have prevented their union and are able to connect on a deeper level. This search for connections is one of the main reasons that most people participate in virtual worlds such as Second Life and *WoW*. The emotions that people put into their friendships within these worlds can be very intense as "emotions and feelings are magnified" (Boellstroff 2008:159). However, this intensity can also lead in negative directions, and cyberbullying is an example of this: the safe haven some individuals once had for exploring these new relationships and aspects of themselves is being transformed into a hostile environment.

In the succeeding chapters I will explore the development of identity as it relates to cyberbullying. I will look at how the LFR function has changed that identity and the conflict that it has created. I will also address the research questions outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 2: The Lore.

In this chapter I will explain what exactly *WoW* is and how a person goes about creating a character. This short chapter will explore the story behind *WoW* and how it has become the power house that it is.

Chapter 3: The Plot (The theory behind this study).

Chapter three will focus on the theories that I am bringing together in order to understand the interactions that are being studied. From performativity, to narrative, to hegemony, to symbolic interactionism, these theories are based on identity creation and how identities are formed. Through digital worlds, people are able to explore their identities by creating new ones that allow them to delve into different sides of themselves.

Chapter 4: The Mechanics (The methodology used).

The fourth chapter in this thesis will discuss the methodologies that I used throughout the study as well as how I came to use the methods that I chose. While most of my methodology is typical of an anthropologist, I do explore the need for new and better methods to be created for the non-face-to-face interactions that are prevalent in the virtual world. I echo Tom Boellstroff's call for a return to and update of traditional methods in order to create ways of understanding digital communities.

Chapter 5: LFR through an Anthropological Eye.

Chapter five will be a narrative of the experiences I had while doing my participant observation in the LFR function. The intent of this chapter is to give the reader a deeper look at

WoW culture and a better understanding of what the players go through in the LFR function. At the same time, I will offer the reader a more detailed grasp on what an MMORPG and a gamer are.

Chapter 6: Rantings and Ravings from the Gamers.

This chapter is dedicated to the gamers' perspective and what they think of the LFR function. I have combined their comments from both the public forums that Blizzard Entertainment hosts to discuss *WoW* and the interviews that I conducted to express their feelings and explain the depths to which individual identities are being affected by this function.

Chapter 7: End Game.

In the final chapter, the research questions specified above will be evaluated based on the data and observations collected through the research that was conducted. According to that data collected, I will explain the reasons for the changes in both the social realm as well as identity creation with *WoW*. I will conclude with an explanation of the effects of bullying in LFR on the identity of the gamer and delve into the possible reasons for bullying.

CHAPTER 2. THE LORE

World of Warcraft (WoW) is one of the biggest MMORPGs. It was created by Blizzard

Entertainment, based out of Irving, California, and was created on February 8, 1991by three

graduates of UCLA: Michael Morhaime, Allen Adham, and Frank Pearce. The company was

originally called Silicon & Synapse, but changed in 1994 to its current name. Bizzard

Entertainment has created a plethera of other games, most notably: *The Diablo* series, the *Star*

Craft series, the *Warcraft* series, *Justice League Task Force*, and *Heros of the Storm*.

Since *WoW* was created over ten years ago, it has seen more than 100,000,000 accounts

created. There have been around 500 million characters created, which is close to double the

United States population (Blizzard Entertainment INC. 2015). The current total of subscribers is

6.8 million (CBS Interactive Inc. 2015). However, there are many players who have multiple

accounts so it is close to impossible to get an accurate count of just how many people are playing

the game. With so many people putting their time, energy, and money into playing just this one

MMORPG, it is important that we look into what is happening within the game.

So what exactly is this *WoW* thing? *World of Warcraft* was released on November 23,

2004. It consists of 236 realms, each of which is on a separate server. The first thing that a

player must do when logging into the game for the first time is to choose which server (or realm)

they wish to enter (see Fig. 1). Each realm is a copy of the game within which the players are

able to interact with the land, non-player characters, and other players in the realm. The realms

are broken down into four different types through which the players can interact with other

players. The first type is player versus the environment, which is where the players are put

against non-player characters in their questing and cannot attack other players. The second type

is player versus player, which is a server that allows for players to attack one another as well as

play the game like the player versus the environment does. The third is role playing, and on this

type of server the players stay in character as to what their character would do according to the

lore. The last type of server is that of role playing with player versus player, which combines the

role playing need to stay in character with the player killing of a player versus player server.

Figure 1. Screen capture showing the server selection screen.

Questing is a type of game play through which a player has their character either go kill

something and/or retrieve an item for a non-player character in order to further the storyline.

The players are then able to choose between being alliance or horde. The former will fight to

protect Azeroth, the land where the game is based, while the latter aims to conquer it. The two

factions are not allowed to communicate with one another in any way other than through basic

gestures. Players are also able to choose between 13 different biological races and 11 classes (as can be seen in Fig. 2). The players are then able to quest, enter dungeons, and eventually enter raids. Dungeons are small instances in which five players group together in order to complete the storyline and obtain gear. They normally have the theme wherein an enemy has overrun a particular building. These are the ways through which the players help further the storylines set forth by Blizzard Entertainment, the creator company of *WoW*.

Figure 2. Screen capture showing the creation screen. Choices of race and gender are on the left side of the screen and the classes are on the right side.

By making a set of selections a player creates a character, also referred to as a toon. An example of the process of creating a character can be illustrated with my druid toon. The first thing one needs to do is choose the gender of the toon - I chose female as it is my gender and what I am comfortable playing. People do not always choose their genders to follow their own.

The next step is to choose one of two factions to which one wishes to belong; my druid is in the alliance faction. Then one needs to choice the race; since I decided I wanted to play a druid and be on the alliance side, the only choice I had in races was that of the Night Elf. Since I created my druid, Blizzard has expanded the druid choices to include the Worgen race, as well. The next major choice is that of class. One's class will determine from what type of abilities one will be able to choose, what type of armor one will be able to wear, and where one will start questing, as well as a few other minor distinctions. Abilities are the skills that the character will be able to use in combat. For my druid, the only choice was Night Elf, but typically I chose to play a Gnome as they are short, which is something with which I identify.

The next choices in how one is going to play their character do not come until level ten when one is able to decide which role she or he wish the character to play. To level, a player must take their toon through instances, kill mobs, and/or complete quests. Because of the fact that I chose to play a druid, there were four different choices that I could make: healer, ranged damage dealer, melee damage dealer, or tank. Damage dealers (one who deals damage to opponents) are also known as "dpsers" as dps, which stands for damage per second. A healer is someone whose talents include restoring the health of their comrades and detouring the damage they are taking. Someone who is a ranged dpser would stand away from the thing that they are fighting and throw spells, objects, and/or curses at it. Melee dpser would get up close and personal with the thing they are fighting and be in close range. A tank is the one who takes the brunt of the damage and is responsible for making sure that the dpsers and the healers do not take unnecessary damage. I chose to be a healer. Since I chose to be a druid, I am able to shapeshift based off of the talents that I wish to use. Healers can, for example, turn into trees as is illustrated in Fig. 3. While healers are the only druids that are able to turn into trees, they are

9

also able to turn into a bear, cat, stag, bird, or an orca. Druids that choose to be ranged dps also have a form of their own, called the boomkin form.

After a player chooses how they want to play their toon, and a name for the toon, they have to "level" the toon. They do this by either performing quests that help to build the storyline or by going into instances. Instances are small areas through which a player meets up with four other players and they kill off whatever creatures await them in that dungeon. Once they reach max level, which is currently 90, they are able to raid. With each expansion that Blizzard puts out they have raised the maximum level that a character can achieve.

Toons also acquire gear, or accoutrements. Gear includes such things as a helmet (also known as a helm), a piece of cloth, leather, mail, or plate leggings, and so on. Each piece of gear has a level assigned to it by the game and those level numbers are added together to create a character's gear score level. Gear score is important because the gear level reflects the abilities needed to complete the different levels of raiding.

Traditional raiding groups tend to be very close-knit and they know each other's strengths and weaknesses, as they are together from 6 to 20 hours per week, every week (sometimes more!), and often socialize through other means, such as the telephone, Facebook, and occasionally face-to-face contact. The time they spend raiding might only be upwards of 20 hours a week, but they must also dedicate additional time toward improving their skills and preparing for the raid. These groups do not tend to consider themselves just online friends, but true friends that they will call or chat with about any number of problems or events within their day-to-day lives.

The very first introduction to raiding within *WoW* was that of the Molten Core (MC) raid. MC was introduced in the original game which the players call vanilla. It is called vanilla by the

players to distinguish it from the expansions that have come after it. The name vanilla was chosen as it is plain and begs for additions. This was a 40-man raid that ended up taking a group two days and at least eight hours to complete. (I use the term man as it is what the gaming community uses because of the fact that for a long time it was believed, and still is by some, that gaming is a purely male arena and females were not interested in play.) It was the people who leveled their characters together that got together to attempt this new raid, and the evolution of the *WoW* raider began.

But, not every member of the *WoW* family can dedicate so much time to the gaming community. A new flex raiding was created to allow for a group to have 10 to 25 people. Flex raiding is an in-between stage of raiding wherein the people who form the groups know each other, but instead of being just 10 or just 25 players, the number of players can be anywhere between the minimum and maximum. This type of raiding allows for guilds to bring in more people and be more flexible with the people that they bring with them to their raids. The gear for flex raiding is less prestigious than that of the regular raiding content. In order for this option to be created, players who were unable to access a portion of the game's content because they were part of the lower level of player came together with those of the lower middle class of player and petitioned the game's creators, Blizzard Entertainment, to give them access to this illusive content. These people rationalized that they, too, were paying for the right to access all of the game's content. In response, Blizzard Entertainment created the LFR function (Fig. 4). The LFR system is different in that the players are raiding with people they do not necessarily know. LFR is easier, though, and a much lower level of gear is available to these raiders. The content in the LFR function is easier than with a premade group as the people will only be together for the completion of this one raid. Therefore, their rewards are lower as well.

Figure 3. This screenshot is the dialog box through which a person shows their interest in participating in an LFR, or ques for said LFR.

The raiding system currently has many different layers of raiding. The heroic modes of raiding are only going to be accessible to the elite players and, thus, have the highest gear score. Normal raiding is the traditional form of raiding and the category of raiding into which most of the casual raiders fall. While the LFR system has neither granted access to the elite status nor allowed a person to achieve a higher gear score than the elite raiders, it does give players the footing to attempt to get into the elite groups as well as to see the previously barred content. Middle-level players are normally relegated to the regular 10- and 25-man content.

LFR is very controversial among the elite gamers, as it allows those people who were previously unable to reach the same status of having conquered an endgame boss to be able to do just that, and to represent this achievement symbolically through image captures of the screen. A

boss is a high level non-player character who is in control of a selected area within an instance and/or raid. The endgame boss would be the most powerful boss to date, with the best gear, and the hardest to beat. In short, it has stripped away some of the prestige associated with endgame content and has allowed "othering" and bullying to run amuck, because further interaction with the LFR members is very unlikely, leading to a kind of anonymity that, for some, encourages behaviors that they might otherwise hesitate to exhibit. The term endgame content refers to both the raid itself as well as the bosses within the raid. The othering that is occurring is not solely based on the temporary nature of the interactions within the LFR, though it also involves the interactions between the in group, in this case the elite gamers, and those on the outside, the casual gamers and raiders. Before the LFR function, elite raiders would construct their identifications in opposition to casual gamers, making the latter an Other to the former. However, with the formation of the LFR function, the elite raiders lost some of their abilities to be able to present their identity to the society as a whole as their elite signifier of the screen shot is now available all players. This change created the conflict between the two classes and lead to the cyberbully within the LFR function.

The LFR function has also become an outlandish forum of othering, in part because of the ability to kick a person from the group after the person has been severely (and sometimes cruelly) criticized for the lack of ability to play the game and for their gear score. Should the other members of a team decide that a players skills or gear score level is inadequate, then they can opt to kick that player from the raid by clicking on a person's name and voting to do so. A total of five people need to do this before a vote is put before the raid as to whether or not to keep or kick the person from the raid.

The addition of the looking for raid (LFR) function and the process by which it was implemented within *WoW* can be understood through hegemonic discourse theory, which I will discuss in the theory chapter. Before this function was added to the game, only those with the skills and guild connections to be considered elite players had access to much of the endgame content. These elite raiders can be compared to the social elite in a real-life society in which there is differential access to wealth, status, and power. There was an amount of prestige that came with the ability not only to see the content for oneself, but also to be able to take a screen shot of your group straddling the corpse of the boss that they just killed. The middle-ranged guilds and skilled players, or casual raiders, would achieve this toward the end of the content's relevance or slightly after the raid became outdated. The lower class of players were unable to see this content at all. While it is possible for a player to move through the different status levels, it requires work and social networking, involving a time commitment that many people are not willing, or unable, to give. Even the term "endgame content" suggests a level worth obtaining and, thus, it pushes players toward being able to complete and explore the latest and greatest that the game is able to offer.

There are many ways that one is ranked, but one of the most significant ways is "item level." Websites such as www.wow-heroes.com rank each character that is actively being played. Being on the front page of your class's list of ranked players ensures that you have at least defeated half of the current raid bosses and are of either the elite player class or the upper end of the middle-range players. Raid bosses are the bosses that are in the raid. Since the character's gear, specialization, and raiding experience is made public knowledge due to a feature within the game, the players do not have the ability to take their character out of these ranking systems. Those who do not have the ability to raid cannot obtain the gear. Thus, their

gear score will be lower than those who have completed the raid. Prior to the LFR system, it was harder for a person to move up in the class system, as their gear would determine the level of content they were able to see. Social ties were a way of gravitating toward the type of raiding in which one was able to participate, since one could not raid unless she or he was brought into a raid by another person.

The heroic modes of raiding are only going to be accessible to the elite players and, thus, have the highest gear score. While the LFR system has not granted access to the elite status or allow a person to achieve a higher gear score than the elite raiders, it does give players the footing to attempt to get into the elite groups as well as to see the previously barred content. While the lower range of players, or casual gamers, has come to enjoy being able to see content that would otherwise be unavailable to them, the middle and elite players find the LFR function to be a nuisance. This is because they are forced to use the LFR function at least when the content is first released in order to have the gear score necessary to complete the higher levels of raiding. They also do not think that it is fair to allow what was once a reward for being an elite player to be accessed by every player within the game. It is through this new function in the game that the changes to players' identities are being seen. Not only is the symbolic reward of being able to show screen shots of your conquest being taken from the elite players, but they are also being forced to interact with players they would otherwise not. This causes othering and bullying to occur not only in the LFR but also on the forums, general, and trade chat. This class struggle brings up the question of where the causal raiders have aligned themselves. With some of the middle-range players staying fixed in the realm of causal raiding, others aligning themselves with the casual players, and still others aligning themselves with the elite raiders, a new spin is given to the identities in the game. *Through this research, I will seek to answer the*

question of how identity is being created as well as how the class structures are being

maintained, changed and reified in WoW by looking at the cyberbullying that is occurring within

the LFR function.

CHAPTER 3. THE PLOT (THE THEORY BEHIND THIS STUDY)

One of the leading theories within digital anthropology is that, as anthropologists, we need to look back toward the theories that have acted as bases for our discipline and revamp them to suit the new type of community that is being created in digital realms. The flip side to this is a push toward creating new theories, as some believe that the current theories are not adequate to deal with this new type of society. Boellstorff attempts to "respond to a staggering analytical imbalance" (2012:39), meaning that, while anthropology has been the subject of many criticisms, there has been a reason for this: as a discipline, anthropology has kept silent on the idea of theorizing about the digital experience. In his ethnographic work on *Second Life*, Boellstorff connects his theories to those of Malinowski and other traditional anthropologists. Recognizing the intrinsic link between theory and method, Boellstorff also asserts that only through returning to the roots of ethnographic theory will future methodologies be created, as these traditional approaches have been altered over the generations to analyze effectively other areas of anthropological work. With this in mind, I have incorporated a variety of identity theories in order to understand where and how identities are being shaped in the digital realm. In this vain, I propose to combine a multitude of different theories to be able to better understand the nature of digital communities, such as *World of Warcraft*. Each of these theories, standing alone, is insufficient to capture the depth of these communities and the interactions within them. Taking that into account I will highlight each of the main points that I wish to take from the following theories.

Hegemonic Class Construction Theories

Gramsci's (1992:233) theory of hegemony states that the group of people with power sets the social standards for those below them. Or as Gündoǵan (2008:45) eloquently puts it, "hegemony refers not only to consent to be obtained from ruled ones, but also forces, coercion and imposition of ruling class interests over those of allies or rival groups and classes." It is by attempting to imitate the higher class that this social standard is reified and enforced. Only through the combined efforts of the middle class and the intelligentsia who choose to join forces with the lower classes will these views and norms be changed. For my purposes, I am arguing that something similar had to happen in *WoW* for the LFR function to successfully emerge. While the lower class is manipulated by the middle class in order to have the numbers and power needed to change the upper class's norms, it is not until the changes have been set in place that this manipulation is, if ever, understood. The middle class, then, is internally split between those who verify the hegemonic discourse set by the upper class, thus organizing consent to political and socioeconomic control, and those sympathizing with the lower class. This also means that the upper class is constrained by the same set of norms that are in place for the middle and lower classes. While the members of the upper class control the policy making, they cannot just create norms but must work with what already exists. It is the intelligentsia, in a type of trickle-down effect that influences the norms of the lower class. This creates a system in which each of the classes looks to the one above for verification of social normality. While it is not always the case that a lower class will side with the one higher than itself, this link between the classes is what allows for the flow of ideologies to be passed down. It also means that it is the intelligentsia who are the deciding factor as to which way the political and socioeconomic power flows and what changes are made. As Gündoǵan (2008:48) explains Gramsci's theory on how

the intelligentsia's power is gained and what part they play, "the intellectuals provided a link between peasants and administration and between the peasants and landowners." The intelligentsia became "agents" (Gündoğan 2008:48) in a fashion as they were the go between for the peasants and the bourgeoisie.

The LFR function came into being when the casual gamers and raiders banded together in opposition to the elite raiders being the only ones that were able to access the endgame content. This unified front is an example of Laclau and Mouffe's (1987) chains of equivalence, which allows the two groups to come together to create an illusion of a singular class in order to achieve a goal. As this demand is met by Blizzard Entertainment, it is what Laclau (2007) describes as a democratic demand. However, as this demand does not turn out the way that the group thinks it will -- in this case that demand would be the ability to experience endgame content -- it promoted conflict over the change. Laclau's (2007) theory on antagonisms states that antagonisms come into being when a person or group is prevented from being what they perceive themselves to be. This also means that identity is intrinsic to conflict. In the case of the conflict surrounding the LFR function, the elite raiders feel as though they have been deprived of the ability to properly adhere to their identity and to perform that identity, as endgame content is no longer solely theirs. This in turn created an antagonistic conflict between the two classes. This antagonism came out of the conflict that was resolved when the LFR function was implemented. Each of these conflicts are examples of what Laclau (2007) theorizes as antagonisms that emerge in relation to identities.

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Even within the safety of one's own home, hidden behind a computer screen, identity is about more than the lone person. Identity is created through the interactions one has within one's

community. This is because individuals' identities are intricately linked to the social groups with which they interact, as the self can only be constructed with a gaze toward the other. As Blumer (1986:535) states, "the possession of a self provides the human being with a mechanism of self-interaction with which to meet the world – a mechanism that is used in forming and guiding his conduct." This interaction is structured based not only on the hegemonic power structures in which one lives, but also through the symbolic interactions that one's communities require. As Blumer (1986:538) explains, "the reliance on symbolic interaction makes human group life a developing process instead of a mere issue or product of psychological or social structure." It is through the "process of interpretation and definition of one another's acts central in human interaction, [that] symbolic interaction is able to cover the full range of generic forms of human association." In *WoW*, the symbolic interaction is seen when a community treats those who are not spending the amount of time and energy into researching the game mechanics and bettering their character. Much of the time, if players ask a question within a general chat, they will be called casuals or a noobs (which are derogatory terms meaning a new player) and be given a smart-mouthed answer such as, "wowhead is your friend." (Wowhead is a website, wowhead.com, which allows for players to look up information about quests and items.) Generally, someone will step up to help the new person out, but the amount of jeering that is applied to that person is something that is expected in the community. This example shows not only the level of time that is expected of the players by the *WoW* community as a whole, but also the annoyance and belittling that is done when a player does not live up to the standards that have been set. The belittling that is done is an example of Goffman's "secret consumption" (1963:42), or the visibility of the stigma of being a casual player.

Symbolic interactions are constituted and made sense of in the relationship between a self and another. Perinbanayagam (2000:502) explains that the "relationship between self and 'other' is a dialectical, as well as a syntactical one, the 'other' forms the self as the self formulates the 'other'." For gamers, symbolic interactions take on an even deeper symbolic form through the interactions between characters on a screen and typed words that communicate what the characters (or toons) cannot, as they are forced to put more into their words and do not have facial and body language to back up their words. While researching this phenomenon of identity creation and the changes made due to the LFR function, I have explored how these interactions are performed and what they mean in the gaming world.

With the idea of the self being connected intricately to society, it is easy to see the reasons why one would attempt to gain higher standings within the chosen community. A comparison to Goffman's description of India's caste system helps explain the need for the LFR function. Goffman (1963:37) states that "the lower castes [tendency] to imitate the higher has been a powerful factor in the spread of Sanskritic ritual and customs, and in the achievement of a certain amount of cultural uniformity, not only through the caste scale but over the entire length and breadth of India." This is what is happening through the looking for raid function, as those who were once unable to perform to the standards necessary to unlock the endgame content are now being able to see endgame content without needing the skill set to perform at the level necessary in a regular raiding scenario. Many of the raiders believe that the casual gamers are only playing at being a raider as the gear that they are able to obtain in the LFRs is not as good as that which can be obtained by the casual raider or an elite player within normal raiding. This however does not take away from the symbolic nature of the LFR and the ability for the casual gamers to be able to participate in the endgame content. It is through this new ability to interact

21

with the endgame content that they are symbolically allowed to present a piece of what it means to be a casual raider or elite raider. They are, however, both being stigmatized by their lack of gear score while at the same time pretending to be part of the elite society. With the idea of the self being connected intricately to that of society, it is easy to see the reasons why one would attempt to gain higher standings within their chosen community. To understand the need for the looking for raid function, let us turn to Goffman and how India's caste system works. Through this analogy, it is easy to understand the reasons why the looking for raid function was added. Goffman states that, "the lower castes to imitate the higher has been a powerful factor in the spread of Sanskritic ritual and customs, and in the achievement of a certain amount of cultural uniformity, not only through the caste scale but over the entire length and breadth of India" (1963:37). This is what is happening through the looking for raid function: those who were once unable to perform to the standards necessary to unlock the end game content are now being able to see this material while not needing the skill set to perform at the level necessary in a regular raiding scenario. In other words, they are only playing at being a raider as the gear that they are able to obtain is not as good as would be obtained by a casual raider or an elite player. The problems come into play when a casual player is not told how they are supposed to act and conduct themselves and therefore stick out like a sore thumb when attempting to raid even within the looking for raid function.

While the stigmatization of the casual player is a phenomenon that is growing in intensity, it is something that has always been in the background of the *WoW* community. In the past, some players were known as horrible players. Their very names would incite laughter and taunts. It was not until the LFR function was introduced that this became a major problem within the community. As an example, a player within the Elvenage server, whose character was

called Dragon, was known as a childish person with no skills. For a while, this player hopped

from guild to guild until someone within the general chat declared that he was a horrible player.

All of the people who had raided with this person started speaking up about his horrid play style.

A widely known taunt throughout the server was to ask if the person wanted a bandage with their

healing gear if they tried to get gear not intended for their character, as Dragon had been known

to roll on gear that had a bonus to healing. Dragon played a mage and that class lacks the ability

to heal, so his wanting gear that gives bonuses not usable by his class is absurd. At some point,

the taunting and inability to get into a guild became so great that Dragon gave up and left the

server. For people like Dragon, whose name still brings snickers to the older gamers, the stigma

can never be wiped away. The fact that he, and people like him, have not changed their names or

created other accounts to disconnect themselves with their negative stigma reinforces that

connection that one has to their main characters as a way of expressing themselves. However, if

someone is a casual player and wishes to "step up their game" in a manner of speaking, she or he

can do that and wipe that stigma away. The problems come into play when casual players are

not told how they are supposed to act and conduct themselves. Therefore, they stick out like a

sore thumb when attempting to raid, even within the LFR function. While players cannot hide

their status as "noobs", they can look up fights and attempt to follow along as if they understand

the fights. If they are unable or unwilling to do this, they will be hit with a stream of text

exclaiming their status as a noob. These people are, as Goffman would say, "coming out"

through their performance within the LFR function. The difference within the game is that it is

harder to hide the stigma than in real life unless you are willing to give up your claim to the

identity (character/toon) you have created and start over.

The "secret consumption" (Goffman 1963:42), or the visibility of the stigma of being a casual player, that typically takes place when one is attempting to be a part of the raiding scene, but is unable to perform, is taken away and shown to the public through a function known as recount. Recount shows the damage and/or healing output to the rest of the players. While the LFR function was created as a way for casual players to be able to have a way out of their stigmatized role, it did not, in fact, do that. They went from being isolated to being publicly shamed. Their public shaming reinforces the public norms as well as the established hierarchy that is in place within the game.

Butler's Preformative Theory

Judith Butler shows that no identity exists behind the acts, but it is the acts that create the identity. This is done through performances and performative actions. A performance is how the identity is acted out while the performative action is the process through which identity comes into existence. Identities are scripted, rehearsed, and then performed like a play. When trying to understand why people attempt to perform specific roles, it is important to understand that the "subject [of that role] is culturally constructed, it is nevertheless vested with an agency, usually figured as the capacity for reflexive mediation, that remains intact regardless of its cultural embeddedness" (Butler 1993:182). Thus, they are performing the role based upon a culturally constructed norm. As has been stated before, identity is intrinsically linked to society and is a social construction.

Words are a powerful performative action that have the ability not only to give agency to the one expressing the speech action but also to the person hearing the words. The direction the interaction will take after one is spoken to is up to the listener, but it is also linked to the particular histories of the words used. Butler states, "one comes to 'exist' by virtue of this

24

fundamental dependency on the address of the Other" (1993:5), showing that the exchange is not just about speaker but also about the listener. With that said, words can and do cut like physical wounds, as Butler (1993:4) states, "a term such as 'wound' suggests that language can act in ways that parallel the infliction of physical pain and injury."

When looking at othering through speech, it is easy to see that "what hate speech does, then, is to constitute the subject in a subordinate position" (Butler 1993:18) or give power to the speaker. In LFR, it is not unusual for the trash talk to start even before the first mob is encountered. As the elite players typically have add-ons (game modifications that can be added to help with a number of different aspects within the game such as allowing on to see another players gear score) that allow them to mouse over another player and see just how ill-equipped that player is, this will start a barrage of name-calling. It is after the raid group has lost, though, that the most significant othering comes into play; it is after a raid wipe, or when all the characters die, that the insults really start flying. This normally leads to either the person flinging the insults to "rage quit" the instance or the person being insulted to leave in a huff. As Butler (1993:35) states, "a name tends to fix, to freeze, to delimit, to render substantial. Indeed, it appears to recall a metaphysics of substance, of discrete and singular kinds of beings; a name is not the same as an undifferential temporal process or the complex convergence of relations that go under the rubric of 'a situation'." In other words, the name being spoken gives weight and power to name-calling, as name-calling is itself a performative act. This phenomenon is the main focus of my research, as it shows othering in terms of identity creation. It shows the crisis that the elite players are going through in terms of their identity creation due to the addition of the casual players to the raiding sphere as they are no longer able to claim that they alone have concurred the endgame content.

25

Interviewing my participants was critically important because, as narrative identity theory states, individuals are only able to make sense of and recreate their lives through telling their stories. While the person places himself as the protagonist within the story, it is by listening to the details that we are able to understand the cultural, political, and socioeconomic norms of that person's society. Phillip Hammack explains this, saying,

> Personal narratives say a great deal about culture, history, and collective intention as they catalogue life events. They represent texts of social and psychological *integration,* and thus they fulfill both the individual psychological and sociocultural *purpose.*" (Emphases stated within the original text, Hammack 2010:312)

This is done in line with a particular plot that the individual sees their life progression through. This plot calls forth stories that include characters, episodes, imagery, setting, and themes. They also have a beginning, middle, and an end. Through storytelling, a person is able to "make sense of the empirical world" (Hammack 2010:313). While the first-person perspective is an integral part of understanding identity theory, we must remember that individuality is only possible when looking at it as also a reference to the other. Or as Wolfgang Krauss (2000:109) states, "identity construction is not only at stake when somebody is explicitly talking about him- or herself, but also when seemingly referring to other subjects, since even then the positions have to be taken and stories be constructed."

So why is the first-person narrative so important? Atkins states that "the model of identity required of embodied consciousness is more complex and irreducibly first-personal than that provided in a casual account;" to that end it requires a "self-constitution model of identity: a narrative model of identity" (Atkins 2004:342). This means that the "narrative conception of identity provides a more inclusive and exhaustive account of identity than the casual models

employed by mainstream theorists of personal identity because only the narrative model preserves the first-person perspective, which is essential to an ethical perspective" (Atkins 2004:341). Atkins (2004:346) states that "a consequence of the developmental and intersubjective nature of selfhood is that our personal histories precede our explicit self-understandings and so our lives need to be recounted in order to be understood." Even as the stories evolve to include possible outcomes and actions that are more favorable for the person, the desires, goals, and social norms remain the same throughout.

Since a person has multiple identities in order to interact with different social groups and become a more cohesive part of a group, it is necessary to understand the different hats that people wear and the how, why, and when these identity shifts occur. While, in most cases, "our contemporary societies no longer supply models of coherence for our fragmented experiences" (Kraus 2000:105), the gaming world fixes this to a certain extent as people are able to create a diverse range of characters that can express different versions of themselves. The ability to reinvent oneself is important in a society that limits the ways through which people can work through their different identities and explore different versions of themselves. With that said, it is important to note that, at least within *WoW*, a main identity is typically supported by the sub-identities or alts (alternative characters). The main character tends to be the one most played and the core of the online identity, with the alts being different aspects of the person and performing different roles. Alts are not typically given much, if any, real game time and will sometimes be used as a way to support the main character by using them to make goods for the main character's consumption. While these alts are typically linked to the main character, be it by names, being used as a supporting role, or just the knowledge that they are played by the same person, they do give the freedom to explore different aspects of the player's personality.

Online Society: The Theoretical Anthropological Perspective

The virtual world, like the physical world, is filled with different types of societies, making it almost impossible to group the virtual world into one society. It is through looking at the separate ways in which people come together that we will be able to understand the reasons that these communities are forming and what they mean. As Turkle (1995:103) states, "we are social beings who seek communication with others." But what does that mean in terms of the virtual world, and what effects will these virtual communities have on the physical world? Many of the researchers of online communities have attempted to answer this question, but I will focus on Boellstorff's work on *Second Life* and Kollock and Smith's work in the digital realm since they are the two most closely aligned to my own theoretical thoughts.

According to Boellstorff (2008:180), what makes a virtual world is the idea of a place, not a physical space in of itself, and that makes them "sites of culture." Sites of culture are areas through which culture is being created. Luckily for virtual worlds, "community has never been reducible to locality" (2008:180); thus, virtual worlds could be considered "Third Places" (2008:181). Boellstorff uses the interactions in events in the game as proof of community within *Second Life*. From teaching a class, to live music and fashion shows, to philosophical discussion groups, people bring their avatars, or characters together to these events to socialize. These are arenas in which groups are formed and people start creating networks. Boellstorff has been successful in explaining that these are, in fact, communities, which is the first step in giving credence to this form of study. The question remains: what are these communities, and what do they mean for the physical world?

Kollock and Smith (1993:3) state that technology has been able to "create a range of new social spaces in which to meet and interact with one another." People have used the networking

abilities of the Internet to create groups in which they are able to interact on a level that was not available to them before, whether through email, playing games, or chat systems. They emphasize that "technology has its most profound effect when it alters the ways in which people come together and communicate" (Kollock 1999:4).

The Anthropological Ideology of Embodiment

Boellstorff (2011) tries to define the virtual body by using philosophical insights and his ethnographic work. He is able to do this by defining Avatar, Chora, and Cypherg. Boellstorff's theory is that avatars displayed in online communities are the embodiment of the people that they represent and, in a fashion, a type of out-of-body experience that resides within the virtual world, thus giving a duality to the digital world and that of the offline or concrete world. His theory that an avatar is the physical embodiment of the player is contradictory in some aspects. While he states that one is able to change their being through creating an avatar that is nothing like their physical self, at the same time he suggests that online self represents the offline self. While there is a connection between the online and offline self, I am not sure that it is yet determined how that relationship works.

Avatars are the virtual corporeality of the human who is behind the keystrokes that facilitate the communicative sphere the avatar embodies. While, in most cases, they are made to represent the human controlling them, the deaths that they encounter are not feared or mourned by most players as they can be viewed via a third person perspective, which allows for a degree of objectivity. This degree is often lessened the longer the person lives in the virtual world as their avatar. Most people have a single embodiment or avatar to which they are associated and which reflects their "actual-world ideals of beauty and status" (Boellstorff 2011:506). This is the character they typically use as their main character, and it is chosen based on their subjectivity in

29

the matter, or the way through which they would like to see themselves in terms of their community. They can choose which race they find the most attractive and then change the hair, clothing, and facial features of the avatar. Avatars are made for a variety of reasons, as Boellstorff explains through his three examples: *Avatar* the movie, CyFishy's interview, and that of Eshi Otawara. Within all three of the examples, the humans are able to gain the missing emotional and physical pieces of their lives through the avatars they are controlling. The missing piece could be as complicated as one's legs and the ability to walk, the sweet nothings of a compassionate lover, or a day with a dead loved one. More research into the meanings of the chosen avatars and/or the needs that are met through them would be necessary, but that is beyond the scope of this study.

  Boellstorff (2008) discusses the idea that when talking to another person in a virtual world it is the physical proximity of the avatars, or has he puts it the "presupposed virtual embodiment" (2008:153),that makes it an intimate interaction. So why is it that this physical location of the avatar is so important? Boellstorff's research concludes that people feel a connection to their avatars to such a degree that they tend to put their own physical traits and/or wants into them, making them feel as if they are really the avatar, even if they are able to distance themselves from this extension of themselves through the alteration of other traits. The connection that people feel for the avatars shows a strong level of emotion that is poured into the virtual world through their avatar and the bonds that are formed with others through the interactions with their avatars. Because the avatars are an extension of the person at the keyboard, what happens to the avatar affects the emotional state of the person. A deep connection exists between the online community and the people that interact within them.

Digital Anthropological Identity Shaping

Individuals are commonly expected to conform to societal norms. Virtual worlds potentially give nonconformists a way in which they can develop personal identities in an environment that is supposed to be safe, where they can explore the possibilities of who they really are. The hope is that, without constraints of both the society that they are from and the physical body, an individual can create multiple aspects of oneself through which to explore and create an identity.

Many examples of this can be cited, as it is a common thread among the research works that have been done on the digital worlds. Turkle (1995) compares going online to stepping through the looking glass, as we are able to re-construct our identities and play with what identity means. Turkle focuses on the computer-mediated communication of Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), which uses the ability to interact with others in a completely anonymous way. In MUDs, people are able to play with their identities. They can be any gender, orientation, or race, and they can be from any socio-economic background they desire. As Wesch (2013) stated during his talk at the 2013 AAA conference, informal play, such as what happens within the digital world, is important, as it has long been a primary mode of learning. It both builds and broadens the person's experiences and self-awareness within social constraints. While this exploration of one's identity can be psychotherapeutic, it can also reveal aspects of the person's personality that would otherwise be denied.

As adults, we tend to trivialize adult play because it is not "productive." Turkle (1995:184), however, explains that "play has always been an important aspect of our individual efforts to build identity." The ability to cycle through different versions of oneself is an important part of knowing who exactly it is that one is comfortable being. For this reason,

people are looking toward MUDs and other types of online interactions in order to find this identity.

According to the research that Boellstorff (2008:118) has done on *Second Life*, the self and remaking of that self are critical parts of what technology has always done for humanity, and the virtual worlds are no different. The idea of personhood is "one of the most powerful but also one of the most obscure" as it "shape[s] ideas of agency, desire, and possession."

While people are able to take on roles within the virtual world that can be shaped by the appearance of their avatars or even their screen names, it is the act of remaking one's self and playing out roles that one would not be able to do in the actual world that dominate the virtual-world experience. The fact that most people are able to keep their virtual and actual lives separate does not negate the fact that this type of role-playing can lead to identity-producing activities. That is to say, people can act out being social butterflies online and then have the positive reinforcement to get out and try that persona in their actual lives. The virtual world has become an arena in which individuals are able to play with different parts of their identities and find out who they are in a way that does not create friction or strife in their physical world.

Summary

The first four theories (Hegemony, Symbolic Interactionism, Performative, and Narrative Identity) that I have covered are the bases by which I believe identity is shaped. In other words, it is through the class structures and hegemony that one is able to find their identity by looking toward the other classes to distinguish what they are not. In this study I plan to look at the conflicts created by the discourse created within *WoW*'s LFR to see where the members of this community are reifying their own identity as well as attempting to move from one social stratus to the next. They reify their places by performing their identities and using symbolic interactions

and symbolisms. Through looking at the way in which they act and the symbols that they adorn, I will be able to see their ideas of what it means to be a member of the social class to which they belong. Taking that a step further is the use of the narrative. It is through them retelling their stories of the time within the LFR function that I will be able to better understand their positions about not only the way that they perceive the other but their actions and place within the society. This not only helps them to reify their position to themselves but cements their identity within the community.

The last three theories -- the online society, embodiment, and the anthropological -- take on virtual identity help to shape the four theories outlined above in a way that makes it easier to understand the virtual community. The first theories are based off of face-to-face interactions, and it is with these specific theories based on the virtual world that I am able to understand the connections that the players have to the characters. Without this connection being made apparent, the identity creation would not be predominant within the society as there would be a disconnect between the player and the character that would not allow for the player to be able to participate in identity-creating activates.

Each of the different theories builds upon the next, as they are different ways through which social interactions help to create and define identity. It is my contention that the social background of an individual, the way through which one communicates, and the way through which one remembers her or his past, all contribute to the creation of identity. It is by looking at these theories together that we will be able to see the possible contributing factors to identity. It is important to understand why and how these identities are being formed. We can do this by understanding the background of the members coming to this community that has shaped them up to the point at which they go looking for another way to construct their identity. An

individual's identity is intrinsically linked to the societies through which he or she performs his reaffirming actions. One cannot understand personal beliefs and norms without first looking toward the others around him or her, as their ideologies are a hodgepodge mixture of what they have learned from the world around them, as hegemonic theory teaches us. One's social class, among other identifications, plays a crucial role in regulating to what social groups a person is able to be accepted, as norms are created and controlled by society. Thus, others are always central to accepting or rejecting our identity claims. The digital realm offers people a different way through which they can interact with others. This is still a social realm through which they must navigate and understand the norms of the society, or subculture, even though they are able to create another identity that is based on other backgrounds and social interactions.

CHAPTER 4. THE MECHANICS (THE METHODOLOGY USED)

Methodology is at the heart of any good anthropological work. It is the driving force that allows for a semblance of conformity within the discipline. Traditional ethnographic methodology includes what Geertz termed as "deep hanging out." This form of ethnographic field work includes, but is not limited to, participant observation, interviewing, and surveys. While methodology is being used in digital anthropological field work as well, it seems that there are new and evolving methods being considered for this new type of community. Are the methods that are used for face-to-face communication still valid for use within the virtual communities?

The idea that ethnographic work should be the focus of how we research this new social structure is echoed by Turkle (1995), who believes that, even though the medium is different, the existing methods of our discipline should be continued. Ethnographic work is one of the only ways in which we can understand what the people in a society are feeling and thinking. It is through participant observation, interviews, and surveys that we are able to get a better understanding of what it means to be human. Turkle argues that this is the way future studies should be conducted, as well, though the methodology needs to be updated, as the medium through which communication is taking place has changed. However, these updates do not mean "throwing out the baby with the bathwater." We must recognize that our existing methods are still valid but in need of adjustment.

Tom Boellstorff (2008) supports the use of traditional methodologies, but he also states that there is a need to create a separate methodology in order to further digital research. Boellstorff suggests that it is through understanding that the digital and the physical are separated

but point toward each other--or more simply put that they each reflect the other--that we will start to understand what it means to study this new social entity, and that understanding can only be done through ethnographic research. The idea of an ethnographic field site goes back to the beginning of the discipline.   Boellstorff states that it is imperative for there to be more "ethnographic portrait(s) of culture" in order to have a basis of comparison for future work, and because of this he focuses on the general aspects of *Second Life* in order to recognize subcultures within it (Boellstorff 2008:7). However, it is imperative to understand that no one is a native within the virtual world and sometimes the anthropologist will be one of the older members within the community giving a new and different set of dynamics with which an anthropologist can work.

The Trouble with Play

Through understanding the importance of the social constructs and implications that are created within the digital world, we will see a rise in the study of digital gaming. While past research indicates the important social implications involved in things that are not-work, that play has been marginalized. Play is not always just play, but it exemplifies what it means to work within the social system that is presented. The social order that is constructed through play can be just as important, if not more so, than other forms of social orders within a culture. It is also important to understand the culture that is created around play, as social interactions that take place within games can and do change based on what happens during the time of play.

From new situations to new forms of social interactions, digital gaming has seen a new type of anthropologist emerge to study these interactions. According to Malaby (2012:288), this new subdiscipline is "a project that occurs amidst broader and long-standing anthropological hesitations about high technology and the interactions mediated by it." Interest in the new

technology that has created these digital worlds has grown among anthropologists. There are two different ways in which one can study the subject of digital gaming: either through the materialist approach or that of the representationalist. The materialist approach treats gaming as play or as not-work, which implies that there are no stakes involved in this type of gaming.

Digital gaming has a promising future for study within the arena of digital anthropology. Malaby states, "work to date in the area is marked by a particularly promising eschewal of past assumptions surrounding games, play and technology as well as a rejection of an exclusive focus on the subaltern" (2012:302). It is through the study of digital gaming as a ritual that Malaby believes we will be able to truly understand that gaming is more than just play, and that the social construction of class and the reification of social norms that are present in these communities are, in fact, important. However, it is that same society that shapes and regulates the direction and rules within play. We should also note that "playful experience is not irrelevant" (2012:303). Malaby expresses that it is important to study the "deep and complex relationship between [the arenas of play] and the flow of social change/social reproduction itself" (2012:303). Thus, it is important to study play, since it is normally more than what it appears on the surface.

The LFR form of play can be looked at in two separate manners by the members of the *WoW* community, be it as a playground for the elite raiders or as a way through which the casual gamers are able to see content they otherwise could not. The interactions that are taking place within the LFR not only show the anxiety and frustrations that the elite raiders feel but also the entitlement that the casual raiders feel toward being able to see this content.

Insider Research

The insider research debate is one that has plagued the social sciences with the question of: how native is too native? Will being native negatively affect the possibility of scientific impartiality? Would this cause my research to be weakened or not taken seriously? While reading the work that Nardie (2010) did within *WoW*, it became apparent that some social norms were missed because of the lack of understanding of this geeky subculture. I had been taught for years that it was best to study cultures outside of one's own, but as Labaree states, "the concepts of what it means to be an insider participant observer have evolved over time" (2002:101), which made my decision a bit easier. This has changed because,

> a measurable segment of historical research is devoted to describing hidden truths that the public is unaware of, due to the fact that the author was 'an insider' with privileged access to information not otherwise obtainable. There are also numerous examples in popular culture which reflect a near obsession with seeking an unseen 'reality' in virtually every corner of American society (2002:103).

Not only is the scientific world looking toward the benefits of the insider perspective, but the general public is becoming more and more interested in a new perspective, as well.

The benefits of being an insider are many, from having easier access to one's research subjects, to the general ease of developing trust, to understanding the inner workings of social norms. As Labaree (2002:104) states, "the idea is that an insider would possess a better understanding of how information is gathered, synthesized, stored, and disseminated within the community." Insider research can also help with "interpreting culture-based cues in an interview" (Labaree 2002:105). Being an insider may also affect the type of data collected, as Hodkinson (2005: 136) states about his work with the gothic community, "this process may affect the general willingness to participate and the quantity and quality of data that eventually are disclosed." This is due in part to the fact that "insider researchers are likely, to some degree,

38

already to share with the respondents an internalized language and a range of experiences"

(Hodkinson 2005:137) that can lead to not only putting the respondent at ease but also the ability

to interpret the data being dispensed at a higher level. With some of the concerns that come up

with insider research, I contend that the benefits outweigh the negative perceptions. As

Hodkinson (2005: 146) concludes, "the position of insider research may offer significant

potential benefits in terms of practical issues such as access and rapport, at the same time as

constituting an additional resource that may be utilized to enhance the quality of the eventual

understanding produced."

Project Preparation

As Blizzard Entertainment has set up public forums in order to both allow their gamers to

communicate with each other and to provide direct feedback to the company, I have sifted

through the public forums to identify the reasons for creating the LFR function and the reactions

that it has elicited. I have perused the posts that I feel have elicited the best responses, as well as

those with historical ramifications. I chose posts that were in response to the creation of the LFR

function. I focused on posts in which the author had multiple threads relating to the LFR

function as well as those that were about a system like LFR but were posted before the concept

was released. The responses by both Blizzard employees and other gamers to the thread helped

to determine whether or not I used the thread within the research, with a minimum of 10

responses needed for me to include them. The emotional outpouring, indicated through words as

well as font change and bolding, to a thread or response was another factor that I took into

consideration. I looked at over 100 posts. They dated from November 5, 2010 to September 15,

2014. I chose the beginning date as it was the earliest I could find with content dealing with the

creation of a LFR system. The ending date was the last time I went through the forums as per

the timeline for my research. I chose the 20 most relevant post, based on the above standards, from which to base my work. These forums are public and available for all to view, and posting simply requires one to sign up for an account. Both accessing and posting are free of charge.

An example of this type of ethnographic work is that of Donath (Communities In Cyberspace 1999), who focused on non-fiction Usenets newsgroups, which are online discussion groups.   While the people who interact within this type of community are commonly who they claim to be, that is not always the case. These groups are established to disseminate information, and the reliability of the writing comes from the persona they have established online. Donath uses data mining in order to go through the records that have been cataloged of the interactions that take place within these Usenets. In addition, she participates in the conversations. The idea that a log is available makes for an interesting study since there is no need for the classic paper and pen that cultural anthropologists are known to carry around, as all of the data is available for recalling with a simple click of a button. This new type of participant observation also takes into account the fact that people are able to recall information in the same fashion as the anthropologist for future use. I used Donath's methodology as a basis for my work within Blizzard's public forums. I was able to search through the forums using keywords, such as LFR and raiding, in order to pull up a long list of posts that matched the search criteria. This meant that I did not have to go through each and every post but was able to focus on ones compatible with my research project.

The Interviewing Process

The recruitment of participants from digital gaming communities is not a simple task. Therefore, I decided to come up with some of my own ways of using snowball methods and to elicit responses from possible participants. The first thing that I did to help facilitate recruiting

participants is to start a blog (http://heatherbrinkmananthro.wordpress.com/) that I have kept up-to-date on the research project without allowing for any of the participant's personal data to be made available. The blog was a simple WordPress creation. While the main point of this blog was to give information regarding this study, it includes information about who I am, some of my writing samples, my CV and resume, and a general description of my interests. I tried to make the blog personal to give a more human feel to the study.   I posted the link on my personal Facebook page, within my guild's message of the day, for two months, and had friends post it to their Facebook and/or guild messaging systems. The guild message of the day is a small bit of text that pops up on a guild member's screens when they log into a character that belongs to that guild in order to give information about guild activities. They are also able to access this information by going into the guild tab and looking at the information on the guild. This blog was used to give information to people who were thinking about participating in my study. The posts ranged from information on what LFR is, to the fact that I was looking for anyone who had experience with the LFR function to participate, to links for downloading the consent form. Consent forms were sent to me through email or text message once the respondents had downloaded and signed them.

I have collected a total of 16 interviews from the three status groups I have identified (casual gamer, casual raider, and elite raider). Of the 16 interviews, six were elite raiders, six were casual raiders, and four were casual gamers. The interviews took on different structures depending on the personal preference of the participant. Three were in-person interviews, two were performed in-game through the chat function, and others were verbal through either Skype, personal phone call, or Mumble. Some participants used multiple types of interviews. Interview questions were open-ended and qualitative in nature, focusing on eliciting responses about

identity creation as well as the experiences and feelings of the player toward the LFR function.

As the IRB at NDSU would not allow recordings of the conversations due to the sensitive nature of bullying, I transcribed the interviews. Since the respondents were told before the interview started that I was not able to record them and would have to transcribe the conversation to the best of my ability, they were patient with the necessary pauses in conversation as I typed their responses. After the interviews were finished, I annotated the word document for inflections and any other observations. As I am a current member of the *WoW* community, I used my personal contacts to facilitate other contacts using a snowball method to recruit participants. This method is one that is used by many social scientists who are able to start with a few respondents and ask them for contact information for more people who might be willing and able to participate with their study. Noy (2008: 330) defines the term snowball sampling as "when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants." Noy (2008: 330) goes on to assert that,

> snowball sampling is arguably the most widely employed method of sampling in qualitative research in various disciplines across the social sciences. It is sometimes used as the main vehicle through which informants are accessed.

The reason snowball sampling is so intrinsic to the social sciences is that:

> The employment of snowball sampling in organic social networks brings to the fore two relevant concepts: (1) *Social knowledge*. Captured in the snowball sampling design, social knowledge is presently viewed as primarily dynamic, processual and emergent. In line with qualitative and feminist conceptualizations of 'knowledge,' accent is put on movement rather than on the static notion of logos. (2) *Power relations*. Related to the notion of social knowledge is the notion of power relations which transpire between researcher(s) and researched, and between the informants themselves. This feature too is tied to the fact the snowball sampling makes use of natural social networks. (Noy 2008:329)

As serendipity can be valuable to an anthropologist's research, I was also able to meet and recruit a few of the participants through my participant observation and being in the right place at the right time.

At the beginning of the research project, each participant was asked at to sign a consent form before any information could be obtained. During this process, I discovered a problem: participants struggled to return the signed form, as they were from all over the United States and some did not have access to scanners. Therefore, the IRB agreed to allow for verbal consent to count, since the risks were considered low. I switched to receiving verbal consent halfway through the collection of interviews. One thing I quickly learned was that casual gamers were eager to get their consent forms to me, but less eager to commit to a time and method to complete the interview. On the other hand, the casual raiders and elite raiders were slower to get started on the process but more willing to expeditiously set up the interview after they had made the initial commitment.

Participant Observation

One of the first things that most anthropologists are taught is that there is a need to be neutral, and while they are expected to participate within the communities they are studying, they must remain aloof to a great extent in order not to taint the research. Boellstorff (2008) set out to revamp this approach while combining some of the more traditional enthropographic methodologies. Boellstorff's (2008) *Coming of Age in Second Life* is an excellent example of the combination of traditional and nontraditional ethnographic methods. His participation can be classified as "deep hanging out" through participant observation and interviews. As many people do not meet offline, his work was done entirely within Second Life using the avatar Tom Bukowski, as he believes that the demand for face-to-face interviews is outside of the scope of a

43

virtual world ethnographer. However, I agree with Nardi (2010), who claims that both types of interviews are important in order to get a well-rounded view of what is going on within the digital realms, as face-to-face and digital worlds end up not only reflecting one another but also colliding. This also led to my decision to focus not only on the game itself but to also incorporate the forums.

Boellstorff, though, in his efforts to rethink ethnography for a digital age, did not "feign neutrality" (2008:80) as is typical of most anthropological work, but debated fiercely within the world. During his field work, he let people know that he was, in fact, an anthropologist doing research and had them sign a waiver using their screen names. Participant observation is the way through which any ethnographic work can begin, according to Boellstorff who states that "digital anthropology is a technique" (2012:40). According to Boellstorff, we cannot just rely on surveys and isolated interviews to consider our work ethnographic in nature; we must be a part of the society we are studying. Using this rationale, I decided to conduct this research on the same server where I have resided for the last 10 years. I also looked to Boellstorff's work when deciding how and to what level I would participate in the LFRs. Because of his ability to interact with his respondents and even argue with them, I decided to attempt to get myself kicked from the LFRs and delve into the conversations surrounding the troublemakers within the LFRs.

With this in mind immersed myself not only playing the game but also participating in the LFR function and talking to others in general chat channels about LFR. I participated in more than 20 LFRs, hoping to both observe people's reactions to different situations as well as play the devil's advocate, attempting to get myself harassed and kicked from the raid group. How and what I did during the LFRs will be discussed later, but it is important to note that I did not feign neutrality but actively participated in the LFR groups.

The Analysis of Speech Patterns in Interviews

When coding my data, I placed each set of narratives into a Microsoft Excel document and looked for meanings behind each set of phrases and/or paragraphs. I also did a word count on a set of key words: "harassed," "heard", "needed", "hurt", "laughed", "cursed", "help", "afk", "jerk", "kicked", "pissed", "knew", "told", "wiped", "causal", "elitist", "OMG", and "feel," as well as the different tenses of each word and words that would be placed under the same heading such as "cussed" and "asshole," to see how many times the respondents used each word. I then looked for patterns and the degree to which concepts were repeated throughout the interviews. Both the most common and the outliers of the responses were then put into a list to compare and contrast the similarities between them in emotional response as well as identity-creating terminology. By outliers, I mean words that were used two or fewer times but had emotional connotation. Both the most common words as well as the outliers were entered into separate spreadsheets in order to compare the differences. Only the words themselves were added to the spreadsheet once they were coded and removed from the sentence. These methods are used to help identify trends within the data collected.

Summary

I have studied the work of my predecessors to determine the right course of actions when attempting to study a digital community. Cultural anthropologists, such as Nardi, Turkle, and Boellstorff, have provided a foundation on which I can build in conducting my research. The concept of getting back to our methodological roots and using participant observation in a new type of setting, where observations are limited to basic text and movements on the screen, has been a challenge for not only myself but other researchers. In order to provide answers to some of the questions left open by the participant observation, I relied on interviewing and the forums

through which people could tell their stories and voice their concerns. This was done as a way of

supplementing my incoming information as most of the previous researcher had done.

CHAPTER 5. LFR THROUGH AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL EYE

For the participant observation portion of my thesis, I will use a narrative to explain my experiences. I do this not only to show just how important storytelling is to identity creation, but also to give a level of depth that cannot be found in traditional scientific writing. Through narrative, I can better convey feelings and details about the experience of the LFR that I would be unable to include through a more traditional route. I also believe it is a better method for conveying what the gamer goes through when engaged I the game. While this might seem to be an edgy approach, it is not without precedent. In a lot of older ethnographic works, anthropologists would start by relaying their travel and first impressions of the people that they were studying. In *Yanomamo*, by Chagnon (1997), and *Mules and Men* by Hurston (2008), the authors each start their books with personal accounts of how they came to be in the particular societies as well as their feelings about the first encounters. More recent researchers often write a more scientific account, interspersed with personal accounts. Many of today's ethnographers have some portion of storytelling in their writing, such as Chernoff's (2003) *Hustling Is Not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl*. I believe there is a need to go back to the older style and change the methodology from there; therefore, I decided to add this chapter. The experiences of the anthropologist are critical to understanding the fieldwork itself.

For simplicity and clarity, I have combined a few of the more than 20 LFRs that I have participated in for this study into that of three separate occasions. This does not take away from the experiences or modify them in any way. Within storytelling, experiences tend to get jumbled together to fit the exact statement and purpose that the one telling the tale is trying to get across.

My Time in the LFR Realm

It is the first Tuesday after I received approval from the IRB board to start my research project. I bustle through the morning finishing off the work I need to accomplish. A little after noon, I slide into my chair, cross my legs underneath myself, and pull myself forward by grabbing onto the top of the desk. My hands take their positions, and I give the mouse a slight shake to wake up my computer from its slumber. It's time to get down to business! I have moved the *WoW* icon to the center of my computer screen, and I double click on the icon. The Blizzard launcher pops up, and I hit the blue play button at the bottom of the popup window. My heart starts to race just a bit more than normal as the excitement builds: connecting, successful, connected, and then retrieving character list, are the pop up boxes that I am not so patiently waiting through. Finally, I am at my character screen and all 11 toons wait silently as I make my decision. I ignore the four toons at the bottom of my screen as they have not yet reached 90, which is currently the highest level. At the top is my main character, Lilostwee. She is my pride and joy: a night elf druid whose main role is to rock the healing charts with her green hair in a topknot. I quickly decide that there is no way that I am taking her into an LFR. First, she does not need anything from a raid and, secondly, LFR is not worthy of her, since she holds the standards of a top player. Next is my paladin, Lilospally. Her gear is okay, and I never really play her much since my guild stopped doing flex raids (these fall between a normal raid and LFR, and s typically done with 10-25 people you know. "Might as well," I think, "but there is NO WAY I am tanking with her.

I double click on Lilospally's name plate, and I am zipped into my home realm of Silvermoon. The guild message of the day is one of the first things that greets me, it is my advertisement for people to go visit my blog and start helping with my research project.

48

Figure 4. This screenshot shows my character list. As you can see, this photo is from after my research ended and the new expansion was released.

I smile happily and greet the other online guild members with a quick "heya." I immediately que for the first portion of the Siege of Orgrimmar (SoO) LFR as a dpser. SoO is the most current fight within the game. Both the Alliance and the Horde must battle the most recently released horror, the Sha of Pride, within the Vault of Y'Shaari. This horror was released when Garrosh raided the Horde city of Orgimmar and unleashed his wrath. It is broken down into four separate parts.

I face an hour wait to get into the LFR! Frustration builds within me as my hands tighten just a bit. If I had chosen to tank for the LFR, my wait would have been much shorter. However, I honestly hate tanking, since there is only one other tank in a group of 25 people and your actions are closely scrutinized. As a dpser, I can easily blend into the crowd for my first

few LFRs as an anthropologist and not just a gamer. My main character would have stuck out like a sore thumb as her healing per second and gear would have given away her level of raiding.

Dailies it is then! Dailies are quests that can be done only once a day and typically give reputation and valor points for completion. They are not connected to the LFR. They are primarily the fillers of most people's days, something we begrudgingly do in order to get the maximum of 1,000 valor a week which can be used to buy and/or upgrade gear. I change out my trinket, a piece of gear, and teleport myself to the Timeless Isles. This is the newest of the areas in which to get valor. It is a popular hangout place, as you can also farm for non-combat pets for *WoW*'s version of *Pokemon*. The chatter in general chat is pretty typical of a Tuesday, the day that the realms reset and all weekly activities can be done again.

There are chat boxes at the bottom of the screen through which people can talk in different channels by simply putting a "/" and then the channel name or number in. The general chat is different depending on what area you are in within the *WoW* world. People are asking for help with this or that quest, looking for a group to kill the two big bosses on the island, or joking around about those asking for help. The words "casual" and "noob" are thrown around a lot as people ask questions that a little bit of research on the internet or playing for more than a week would answer for them. However, with the announcement of the new expansion pack coming out and the new ability to turn your level one toon into a 90 for the price of the expansion, more and more people are either coming back to *WoW* or are signing up for the first time. This gives them the possibility of being able to see the endgame content quickly and not having to spend as much time leveling up their toons.

Figure 5. This is a screen shot of a map of the timeless isle, where many of the players hang out and do dailies while waiting for their LFR.

My next "go to thing" is to sit with my program open and read until I hear the que pop. Occasionally, I have to move my character over a few steps to keep myself logged in, but I can do this without even looking up from the passage I am reading. Another 35 minutes pass when suddenly I hear the unmistakable trill of the que. "Finally!" I breathe out, placing a bookmark into the identity book I was reading. I click the button to enter the raid and my screen changes to the loading screen and then, finally, into the raid itself. I am placed into a group with 24 other random people, two tanks, six healers, and 16 other damage dealers (dps). I now must rely on these people to do the jobs that they signed up for while knowing nothing about them.

The first portion of SoO's LFR is completed without a problem. I am a surprised and perhaps even a bit disappointed that the bullying I had previously seen and had been expecting was not present. So, I decide to do more research within the forums to see if bullying is perhaps more prevalent on certain days of the week. I discover that, if you want a basically trouble free

LFR, play on Tuesday or Wednesday, when most of the raiders run through the LFRs. That makes sense, since the realms are restarted on Tuesdays. In addition, many casual players are weekend players, and the more dedicated ones are more likely to play throughout the week.

So, I wait until Saturday to try again. This time I log onto my warlock, hoping that her lower gear might stir some controversy. I que in for the same LFR as before. Things go pretty smoothly through Immerseus, and I am slightly disappointed. I do, however, pick up a trinket that my lock (short for warlock) needs. The Fallen Heroes are next. Everything starts off okay, but like last time, some refuse to go along with the order, and we end up wiping within the first two minutes of the encounter. As the resurrections also known as rezes, a way of bringing a character back to life, start to go out and we start to regroup, the top dpser, who is doing 150K damage per second, states, "Anyone below 80K is useless imo [In my opinion], and we need to kick them." I look at my damage meter and notice that I am just above his statement, at 82K, and breathe a sigh of relief. Someone else says that it was the people who were not killing the adds (additional mobs, or creatures added into the fight by the boss) and just focusing on Sun, one of the bosses. I second that conviction. They are already calling for votes to kick the low dps and a few of them go through. We try again, but again it is a wipe. The main tank and the top dps leave the group, and now we have two stacks of the "idiot" buff, which is a buff that every member of the raid gets when a wipe happens on a boss fight. A buff is additional power given to the player, in this instance by the group wiping on a boss, the instance gives them a buff. It is a stacking one that gives a percentage boost to healing done, and dps done.

We wait the five minutes that it takes to get some new people into the raid group, and one of the new dpsers exclaims, "wtf kind of mess did I just que into?" We try to explain what has been going on, but they just leave and we are left to wait another two minutes to fill his slot. We

52

down the boss on the next try, and some complain about only getting gold yet again for most people.

We rez (resurrect) all the dead and get food buffs before going on to the trash mobs (those monsters that do not give much, if any, loot). The trash starts off fine, but then one of the hunters sends his pet into the middle of the room, bringing all of the trash mobs back with it, and the raid wipes. "OMG really?", "Fucking idiot is trolling", and "Fucking genius" are the comments the hunter receives from some of the other raid members. Again, we are forced to either run back in or wait for a mass rez so that we can buff up and continue. The hunter does not try that again, and we make it through to the next boss, Norushen.

We start just like the last time, but it quickly turns into a debacle as people are not picking up the orbs, moving away from the beam, or killing the adds. The new main tank exclaims right after he dies, "Raiding with helmets this morning are we?" and he leaves the raid group. The rest of us group back up and wait for another tank to take his place. While we are waiting, a few of the dpsers accuse the healers of not doing their jobs. One of the well geared healers replies, "Do the healers give a fuck about your whiny rant? We are healing; you just suck." And the dps leaves the group. After the raid fills back up, we are able to down the boss and move on to the Sha of Pride.

Once grouped up in the back after slaying all of the trash mobs in the room, one of the tanks seems to be afk (away from keyboard). We decide that since the tensions are a bit high, this would be a perfect time to see if I can get kicked, I decide to run straight into the boss, pulling him. I die, get laughed at and a few jabs of "fucking idiot lock," but get rezed and am allowed to continue. I apologize, but, since I did not wipe the raid and only got myself killed, they do not seem to care. We finish off the encounter without another incident.

Figure 6. This screen shot shows the boss Norushen and shows that the orbs and beams are in the context of the fight.

Almost immediately after finishing that raid, I que up again for another LFR, as I have time and want to try another raid group. This time I decide to do the last Throne of Thunder, or ToT, Pinnacle of Storms. "This one should be really easy and quick," I mumble. The time in que is only 30 minutes, which is nice since all of the SoO raids are around an hour for dps. I finished up all of my dailies while waiting last time, so I get out the book I am currently reading and read while waiting for the que to pop.

The que pops, and I am in a dungeon-type setting. We quickly dispatch the first few sets of trash mobs and then open a door into a rectangular room. At the far end is the Boss, Iron Qon and his quilen champions. Behind them is the all familiar door. Before them are two sets of miniature versions of the boss and his champions. The tanks bring together the adds, and we quickly dispatch them, gaining valor points for each of the mini bosses. As we are grouping up to start the boss fight, someone points out, "The bear tank is in lvl 85 healing gear!!!!" A set of

cries go up over this. The tank is asked by a few people if he has tanking gear. His response is to pull the boss so that we cannot initiate a vote to kick.

While we manage to get through the boss fight without wiping, the tank keeps pulling. As we get to the next set of trash mobs that have already been pulled, the bear tank says, "I'm trying to get gear, that's why I'm here." We all know there are ways to cheat the system into thinking that you have the gear score required, and just about everyone has used them in one fashion or another. This, however, is just way over the top. I feel somehow betrayed, not only because this person has falsely taken over the raid, but also because my main is a druid and this somehow feels like a stab at the class to which I devote most of my online life. Derogatory names and statements flashing across my screen, along with a few people trying to defend the bear. I cannot take it anymore, and say in raid chat, "Dude, I know you need gear, and there are ways to cheat the system. Next time just go in as dps. Stop trolling us, and let someone else who can tank have your spot." He does not seem to care what anyone says and goes on to the next boss.

We open the doors to the Twin Consorts, a circular room with a platform on the opposite side. The two bosses are named Lu'Lin and Suen. Lu'Lin is blue Mogu (Mogu is a race within the game.) with a moon crown, while Suen is red with a sun crown. Most of the raid makes it down the stairs to the bosses before the bear, yet again, pulls them. Five dpsers and a healer are left outside to watch and wait. As soon as the bear pulls, Suen disappears, and we focus on Lu'Lin. Very quickly, the bear dies, and it is up to the death knight tank to handle the bosses.

Figure 7. This screen shot shows the bosses Lu'Lin and Suen, the twin consorts.

Someone battle rezes the bear and a cry of "why" goes up. We dispatch Lu'Lin, and Suen pops back into the room. The bear tries to take Suen but quickly dies. After we finish off Suen, the death knight tank stops and asks us to wait until the timer so we can kick the bear. As the bear is having to run back in, he has no choice in the matter and cannot extend his timer. The vote goes through and passes. We go through the door that just opened and work on the two adds that are in the next room while we wait for another tank. They die, and we run through a stairway that has lighting coming from the walls in intervals to get to the top of the dungeon. There, two more of the same type of adds await us, and we quickly dispatch them as well. Just behind them is a disk. We each click on it and are teleported to the square platform where Lei Shen awaits us. The room is divided into four halves with a conduit at each corner and a circle with two pillars in the middle. As we are all getting buffed and ready, our second tank pops in.

Our first ready check of the LFR is posted, and the death knight tank tells us, "just spread out for phase two." He (Lei Shen) does not do a countdown, but he pulls the boss who is at one

of the conduits, casting lightening into it. We start dpsing the boss, and the first of his abilities

pop, thunder strike, a swirling vortex of lightening, hits the ground near the ranged dps and

healers. They must move away from it before it pops and does a lot amount of damage. Then

Lei Shen throws a Crashing Thunder on the ground under the melee dps. This is a void-like area

that does damage every second that someone is standing in it. The tanks move the boss to the

next conduit, and we are out of the way. The boss quickly goes down to 65 percent health and

teleports himself into the middle of the room with his fists firmly on the pillars. He is

untouchable during this phase, and the raid group splits up into the four sections.

An over charge is cast onto a few of the raid members and the rest of the people close to

them quickly group up on them so that the damage is spread out evenly. This is a negative

ability which makes the toon that it is cast on grow three times their normal size and then burst,

causing damage to themselves and anyone around them. Next, a static shock, similar to the over

charge, goes out; then the bouncing bolt ability is used; we all split up, trying to soak up the

damage caused by the bolt so the damage is spilt evenly and no one toon takes enough damage to

be killed. We also make sure that adds are not spawned. Lastly, one unlucky group gets

diffusion chain, which not only damages them but creates an add for every person the chain of

lightening touches. The platform where the adds spawned is now charged with lightening and

can no longer be accessed. Three adds are brought with the players to the spot where the boss

has landed, signifying that the phase is complete.

Figure 8. This screen shot shows the Lie Shen fight.

The next phase begins, and Lei Shen casts Summon Ball Lightning at the raid. Now each member of the raid has a small ball of lightning that goes from them to another member of the raid. We are told to group up on the boss and AOE (area of effect) the balls down. (AOE is a spell which allows a character to damage multiple mobs at once.) As we move the boss to the next conduit, he starts to cast lightning whip, which is a lightning version of his crashing thunder. We move out of it, and he is quickly reduced to 30 percent health. The intermediate phase is the same as last time, except that now only three platforms can be accessed. Someone is not paying attention. He goes to the fourth and is killed, right after a raid warning to move off of the active platform is called by the raid leader.

Only half of the platform is available now as the tank calls for hero to be popped. Lei Shen casts his thunderstruck and then quickly casts violent gale winds which push the raid into

the lightning whip if they are not constantly running away from it. As soon as it stops, he casts thunderstruck, and most people move to the other side of Lei Shen. Those who do not move die, and we all lose health. He next casts summon ball lightning but is at 8 percent health, so we focus on killing the boss. Within the next few seconds he is dead. I cast a mass resurrection on those who died before teleporting out of the raid, since it is over.

Figure 9. This is a screen shot of my gnomish mage.

Next, I decide to make one of the fast level to 90s toons. That is, with the new expansion scheduled to come out in the coming months, Blizzard has offered those who pre-purchase the game one instant level 90 character of their choosing. All they must do is create a character or choose one of their existing characters and use a coin that is given to them and their toon is instantly raised to the maximum level of 90. I create a cute little gnomish mage with green princess Leia style buns and apply the instant 90 boost. Swapping between my other 90s, I find

enough gear from the Timeless Isles to allow my new maximum level toon to get into the SoO

LFRs. So I que up and, while waiting for the raid to begin, try to figure out how to play this new

version of myself. As I have never played a mage before, my experience with how to produce

the highest dps is limited. Normally, gamers learn how to play their characters as they level, but,

since I am starting out at level 90, I lose that learning advantage. The damage that I am doing is

jaw dropping, and I die at every turn. I am forced to minimize the game and take time to look up

a good rotation for my spells and spec (or how to spend my talent points) on the icy veins

website so that I can reverse some damage. I reopen my game just in time to see that the que has

popped. I go to the same LFR as I have been doing with the other toons.

Soon after the first boss is pulled, my poor little mage is dead. I watch the fight over my

toon's corpse as they down the boss with no problems and then start the process of mass rezing.

To my delight, I get a trinket for my new toon and continue with the others to the Fallen Heroes.

On the way, someone notices my gear and says to the group, "OMG, how many insta 90s do we

have?" I quickly say, "This toon was one, but it is an alt. I know the fights if I can survive

through the damage." Some players grumble about how it really sucks that Blizzard decided to

do the instant 90s, but the grumbling stops as we start to focus on the boss. I survive through the

Fallen Heroes but only pull out 50K dps (a very low amount of damage per second or dps).

Players comment on this, so I decide to start asking the questions that I have stored away for just

this occasion.

"So," I start, "why do you care about how everyone else is doing as long as we down the

bosses?" There is some hesitation, and then I get answers that range from "it makes it harder" to

"it's just something to do." "But why do you have to be mean about it? I mean really it's just a

game, right?" I ask. "Because it is a game, and I don't know you," is one response. Another

person privately tells me that this happens all the time, and he believes it is because there are no real ramifications for any actions that take place within the LFR. Another person asks me why I am asking such stupid questions, to which I reply that I am an anthropological grad student doing research. "Well, things have changed nowadays," one person states, "It's not like in the old days where you could have a good old-fashion fight and just punch someone for saying something stupid. Nowadays, they will pussy out and call the cops. So you get your frustration out on people that can't do anything to you and you will never see again." In a private message, I ask the person to explain a little bit more. The person tells me that because he cannot see the reactions of the person that he is insulting it makes it so that it does not matter nearly as much. It also does not make it as satisfying, but the reaction online works for him as he will get messages of how much of a jerk he is being and know through those that he has touched a nerve. *It seems that being able to vent some of his frustration and have an out to some of the things that he is unable to do in real life is one of the primary goals for the bullying that occurs within the LFR.* The consequences for his actions are minimal and will not result in them being ousted from his normal community so he do not feel the need to control these negative outbursts.

I am awestruck at the honesty that I hear about how the anonymity that most gamers look for is also being used against us. Like a double edged sword, it is helpful to be able to connect with others, but it also allows for the ability to harass without repercussion. I finish up the rest of the LFR in a bit of a haze as I mull over the information that I have just gained. While *WoW* has always been a "boys' tree house" as Bonnie Nardi calls it (2009:158), I never imagined that it would get to the point where people are using it as a way of hurting others for their own satisfaction. How will this change, if at all, the level of intimacy that so many of us crave when

we log into our account? This is a question that I will be pondering through the next chapter, but I believe that LFR has had an impact on this aspect of the game.

Summary

My time in the LFRs was spent in frustration. Not only was I unable to get myself kicked from a LFR, but people did not seem to care what they did or said. My experience was better, though, in that I had expected more negative responses when I portrayed the traits that I was told used as rationale for kicking a member out of their LFR. On the other hand, I found the lack of self-control among the players to be frustrating. The taunting and ridiculing of others for not being up to the required standards can get out of hand.   As one person said, "it's not like you are ever going to see them again, so why be nice?" I do think that the long que times, the reasons for which have never truly been explained, adds to the frustration of having to be grouped with so many people you do not know and will, most likely, never run into again. I did not, however, harass anyone within the LFRs in which I participated, even though I noticed that it was one of the quickest ways to get kicked from the raid group. I attempted to be one of the lowest, if not the lowest, on the dps charts, and that did not get much more than a few jabs in my directions. I tried defending the lower dpsers and was ignored. I attempted to pull a boss but did not manage to kill off anyone other than myself, so I was spared "the kick" but not a few choice words. These three examples are but a combination of the over 20 different LFRs in which I participated. While there were a few that went as smoothly as the first example I gave, most of them were filled with cursing and name calling.

I also found that going into a LFR on the weekend made it more difficult to get through the LFR, since this was the time when many of the casuals played or when people brought in their alts. The ques were much longer and, therefore, people went into the LFR a bit more

frustrated when things did not go right, since they had waited for such a long time to play just to have it go badly so quickly. Tempers flared when there was a self-proclaimed jerk who would cause trouble within the group and when someone was trolling or when a person was not doing his or her job.

Because of the negativity I encountered while in the LFRs, I choose not to involve myself in them any more than absolutely necessary. I, however, have the advantage of being in a casual raiding guild so I do not have to go in the LFRs, since my gear score and ability to do normal raiding spares me from having to use the LFR to see the endgame content and get gear. For those that do, I wonder what type of toll it takes on their self-esteem as they do not necessarily have the support system or the ability to see the raid content without the LFRs. I do not know if I would be able to stick with a game where I was forced to interact with people who were rude and condescending at every turn simply because I was unable to dedicate the same amount of time to the game that they did. I will let the casual gamers answer these questions and more in the next chapter, however.

CHAPTER 6. RANTINGS AND RAVINGS FROM THE GAMERS

Ethnographic work is the basis for all work in cultural anthropology, and this study is no different. Although it is important to participate and observe the inner workings of a culture, it is also important to sit down with the individuals and get their opinions, as there is the possibility that our observations will miss cultural cues and reasoning. In this vein, I not only participated in the LFR, but sat down with 16 individuals to get their take on the LFR function. I also combed through the forums looking for what members of the *WoW* community at large were saying about LFR.

The age range for the 16 respondents was between 18 and 57, with most of the people falling into their 30s. In gender, 37.5% (N=6) of the respondents were female, which is about the same percentage of adult females that play video games (Frum 2013). All but two of the respondents were in a relationship, and of the six females, all but one was in a relationship. I interviewed three couples who played together. The others who were in a relationship did not have their significant others playing *WoW*. Females also had a higher number of maximum level alts (alternative characters from their main character), with the average being eight for females and only seven for males. This could indicate a greater need for the females to explore their personalities, though that possibility is not explored in this study.

On the flip side, the forums are places where gender and age cannot be determined, as Blizzard reserves the right to remove any post having personal identifying information. From time to time, people will express their sex, but it is a rarity. As is the case within the game itself, people on forums can take on another personality and hide their real identifications. It is an interesting in-between stage: not being completely in the game, but not being in real life either. I

chose to incorporate the forums as a bridge to the gap of real life and the gaming world as, for its contributors, it acts as a staging area to the game.

Why have LFR in the First Place?

A review of forum posts written before the LFR function was initiated within *WoW* shows an outpouring of requests from the casual gamers for a way to be able to see the endgame content and get into groups. These people expressed the need to have interactions with others without having to dedicate the time that many guilds require. Even though there are videos and blogs that fill the cyberspace about the raiding, it is just not the same, and people want a way through which they, too, can experience this content. As one of the casuals put it, "there's something different and satisfying about being 'there.'"

Most people who consider themselves elite gamers do not participate in the LFR system on a regular basis unless they are wanting to gear an alt (get gear for one of their alternative characters). However, casual raiders and casual gamers use it more often, mainly with their alts. Like the elite raiders, the casual raiders tend to only to use the LFRs for the initial push when new content requires new gear to be able to raid normally. On the other hand, casual gamers use the LFR system for their alts as well as their main toons. The average respondent said that the reasons they think that LFR was implemented were to get "new characters gear" and "to help casuals see the content." "I honestly think why it came about is that Blizzard started losing players, I don't have any data on this," stated one respondent.

I believe that it is vital to hear the stories of what it is like using an LFR from the players themselves and what emotional effect the cyberbullying has had on them. I have included a selection of memorable LFR stories, one from each of the three social casts and one from the forums.

A Story from an Elite Raider

The elite raiders can be sectioned off into two sub classes; the upper echelon and the regular elite raiders.   Each of the elite raiders is equivalent to that of a celebrity within the *WoW* community, with the upper echelon being recognized not only on their server but throughout the community as a whole. They are the ones that are paid to raid. There are a few different ways through which they are able to get paid. One of the most common ways is through what they call a "pay to carry." The going rate for this is $500 per person that is carried through a raid by a guild and the money is split evenly by all of the players. There is also live streaming and the ability to watch the guild through websites such as twitch.com through which people can not only watch the elite raiders in action but also subscribe to their channel at a cost and donate money to the player. The most elite groups will be picked up by companies such as Razer, through which they are able to play and get paid to do so. One of the most recognized guilds is that of Blood Legion, which is the top guild in the United States. They have raided in front of a live audience during Blizzard's annual convention, Blizzcon, on several occasions.

The elite raiders were the easiest group to set up dates and times in order to get my interviews completed. Each of them wanted to talk over either the phone or the speaking program that their guild used. They appeared to be focused only on the conversation at hand and did not seem to be distracted by playing the game or other activities while we conducted the interview.

Each of their stories were filled with confidence bordering on arrogance. The story I choose to share is a shining example of the attitude that the elite raiders exuded about their skills. John has been an elite raider for many years and is currently in one of the top 30 guilds in the United States and ranked in the top 10 of his class nationally. His confidence is well founded

because of his ranking. When asked if there were any stories that the respondent would like to share about their experiences with LFR, this particular respondent paused to think for a few minutes before starting in. Here is his story:

> John: I've got to say that I try to forget what happens within the LFRs. There have been some good times, like when all of the priests on the forum I am apart of got together and did an LFR. That was totally epic! We took a tank along with us, but it was 24 priests and one tank!

> Me: That sounds like it was a lot of fun. Was it easy to get through?

> John: Yeah, we got through it in about 40 minutes and played around a bit. (a pause) But you know, priests are just that epic.

> Me: Okay, sure.

> John: There was this one time that was kinda funny.

> Me: Okay, tell me about that one.

> John: Well, I had gotten into an LFR with my fiancé, and we noticed right away that most of the people were from one guild. About half way through, this priest from the guild started to give me shit because I tried to help a bit with his rotation.

> Me: You didn't.

> John: His dps was horrible, and I was just trying to help.

> Me: (sarcastically) I'm sure you were very sweet about it.

> John: (equally as sarcastic) Well of course I was!

> I sigh.

> John: Anyway, lil, he started yelling at me that I was being a total douche, and I just need to STFU [shut the fuck up]. So I proceeded to explain to him that he was an incompetent little shit who needed to delete his account and stop trying to play with the big boys.

> Me: I'm sure that went over EXTREMELY well.

> John: Yeah, totally. Some of his guildies started calling me names and yelling for a vote to kick.

> Me: Can you expand upon that a bit.

> John: What, like what they called me?

> Me: Sure.

> John: Elitist jerk, asshole, pussy, they called me everything under the sun, but that's not the point.

> Me: Okay.

John: This priest's name was close to mine, so Jenny initiated a vote to kick for him. [chuckles] It passed! The guild was so pissed when they figured out that they had kicked their priest instead of me. They started saying that everyone else was a piece of shit and completely stupid. Then they all rage quit the LFR. Jenny and I had a good laugh about that.

John's story is one that is typical of the elite raiders that I talked to in that they all state that they are attempting to help some casual out with their dps, tanking, or healing abilities. However, when they try to help someone and are rebuked, the elite gamer becomes condescending to the person that they are attempting to help. I had the chance to watch a few of the elite raiders going through an LFR together. I noticed that it did not take much for them to turn it into what one called "a nerd fight" where the elite raider would throw out their stats, position, and research as a way of explaining that they knew what they were talking about. The casual raiders would end up getting their feelings hurt and would come back with snide remarks such as the elite raider were being elitist jerks and that they needed to leave the LFR for those that needed it. For the elite raiders, being called an elitist is not an insult but, rather, a position for which they worked hard. The casual gamers, however, throw the word elite out like a curse word. "Why is that," I asked John. "They need me to make this LFR go quickly," he replied. Elitists were less likely to be kicked from an LFR group than the casual gamers because of this fact.

The Casual Raider's Story

The casual raiders are the comparable to the middle class in American society. They are normally secure in their gaming abilities but work on bettering them. They tend to raid two or more times a week, have a good knowledge of the game, and a decent gear score for their main character. Some of the groups complete the endgame content and are able to go on to the heroic modes, while others are not able to get past the basic raiding level, but like the challenge of

trying with a group of friends. While they do have some concern for the number output that they are able to achieve, they are not nearly as focused on it as the elite raiders. The social aspect of the game is one of the most important parts for them. One of my respondents said that, "it is in the guild raids that you really remember stuff and have the most fun. We can play around and try to kill each other off while at the same time progressing." While they classify themselves as *WoW* gamers, they also tend to branch out into other games.

The casual raiders were a bit more difficult to pin down to a date and time in order to complete their interviews. It seemed that they were all waiting for the other people who said they wanted to participate to complete their interviews before they would confirm their interest in participating as getting the ball rolling was a challenge. However, after the initial two interviews were done, they slowly jumped on board. Unlike the elite raiders, most of the casual raiders talked to me while they were playing *WoW*. From time to time, I would have to wait while they concentrated on killing a mob or cursed about something that was happening in game. We would talk about what they were doing as often as we talked about the LFR system. As a result, their interviews tended to take twice as long as the other two classes.

The story I have chosen from the casual raiders is from a player I will call Karen. She is a typical casual raider who plays many different toons and typically only takes her alts into the LFRs. While she tells me that she does not like going into the LFRs, she does admit that she uses them several times a week on most of her alts that are not geared to the level that she would like.

> Me: So, do you have any stories about being in LFR?
> Karen: [laughing] I have tons of horror stories about LFR.
> Me: Okay, I have all night, so shoot.
> Karen: Well, there was this one time, I can't even remember what it was about, but this guy was being a real ass. I remember telling him to stop being such a jerk

and let's just try to get through the instance, but he won't stop. He just kept calling me a bitch and saying all sorts of nasty stuff to me.

Me: What did you do?

Karen: I put him on ignore and started a vote to kick.

Me: Did that stop things?

Karen: I thought when he got kicked that would be the end of it, but nnnoooo. He made a level one character just to yell at me more!

Me: Oh my gods, that's horrible!

Karen: Yeah, I had to log, but Tom [her husband] was so pissed he got into a pissing contest with the guy. I think he [the guy causing the trouble] ended up getting his account suspended.

Me: Did that change the way you felt about LFR or the time you put into it?

Karen: I didn't log on for a few days after that! But I don't know, I guess I'm a bit more conservative about giving advice now.

Karen's story illustrates the amount of energy and emotion that someone will put behind the attacks when they get upset. From what I know of Karen, what most likely happened is that she stepped on the toes and was condescending toward the person that ended up harassing her. Although this was never her intent, this is what typically happens when this amount of negativity and harassment appears: someone is publically slighted by another whose intentions are to help, but because intent is not something that comes through as well in written words, the "help" is taken as a personal attack. The story about creating another toon in order to harass someone because they have been set to ignore is something that happens frequently. A person is able to ignore any communications that comes from a specific toon but not from the account at large. While the LFRs are supposed to be a one-time encounter after which you no longer have contact with the people with whom you raid, a person is able to get the name and server from just looking at the other person. If they want to, for good or ill, they are able to create a toon on the server that the other person is on and contact them that way.

The Causal Gamer's Story

Casual <u>gamers</u> do not have the time that is typically needed to put into doing the research that the casual <u>raiders</u> do and cannot set aside hours each week to sit down and raid with a regular group of people. They want to be able to experience everything that the game has to offer, but in a more casual way. They do not tend to think of themselves as *WoW* gamers, but just gamers who play *WoW*. While they all say they would love to get paid to play a video game like most of the elite raiders do, they think that the elites have way too much time on their hands to do everything that is necessary in order to achieve that status. Some of them are in guilds and will occasionally be able to join in on a normal raid, but most are only able to do so by paying an elite guild to take them through.

When I first started this study, I wondered why no one had focused on the two classes that made up the majority of the players within *WoW*. Through interviews with casual gamers, I found the answer to that question. The casual gamers initially stated that they were really interested in completing the interview and talking to me about their LFR experiences. However, when it came down to it, I found it difficult to get them to schedule times for their interviews. Their schedules were always crazy, most said, and they never seemed to have the time. I had many people tell me that they were interested in participating in my study and some that even went as far as to sign the consent forms, but only half of them actually completed the survey.

More than half of the casual gamers that I talked to said they had mostly negative experiences with LFRs. Two said that the LFRs were the reason they stopped playing for months at a time because the negativity was not worth it. This story is from one of the casual gamers who stopped playing for a few months and has since returned to the game.

> Allen: Let me start off by saying that I have had a few experiences that weren't
> that bad, but, for the most part, LFR is just a huge pain.

Me: Any of your experiences stand out as memorable.

Allen: I try to forget the LFRs as soon as I'm out of them, but, yeah, there is one that was really bad.

Me: Care to share it with me?

Allen: [big sigh] Sure. When I first came back this last time, I queued up for an lfr on my hunter. My gear score sucked, and I knew my dps would be shit, but I figured, what the hell. You know? So anyway, we get through the first boss okay and some douche links the dps meter, and I'm right under the tanks. He asks me if I boosted my 90 or bought it. I try to tell him that I've been gone for a while and just trying to relearn my toon.

Me: umhm

Allen: So, the next boss we wipe. This dude links the dps meter again and then says that we need to kick anyone under 50k dps and that the casuals are the reason we can't down the boss. People ignore him for the most part, but that pisses me off a bit. We try again, and again we wipe. He links the dps meter yet again, like anything's really going to change. Since I'm the lowest on the meters, he goes after me mainly. He starts cussing at me and saying I'm some stupid noob that needs to delete my account because a hunter can just face roll for more dps than I put out. Anyway, he ends up getting me kicked.

Me: That sucks.

Allen: Yeah, it really did. I mean, I knew my dps was going to be crappy, but that's what LFR is for right?!?!

Me: Yup. So have you gone back and done LFR again since then?

Allen: Yeah, but only after getting some more gear and practice from the Timeless Isles.

Me: And have they all gone as poorly?

Allen: Not really, but when things start going bad, it's the casuals that are the ones that get kicked and harassed. We are the ones that this thing was made for, but it's like they use casual as a four-letter word.

Within the *WoW* community, casual has become another term for noob, which is to say, not a good player. They are taunted and teased when they ask questions or are unable to perform at the level that the raiders do. What was supposed to be a way for the casual gamers to experience endgame content has become a way for raiders to look down on and take over another aspect of the game from the casuals. If the casuals are lucky, they will be able to see the content

72

a few times without being kicked from the group, but, from what they have told me, it is a fear

that they have each time they queue up for one of the LFRs.

Story from the Forum

When you type in the three little letters "LFR" into the search box on the *WoW* official

forums site, it brings up 390,647 threads as of November 5, 2014. While most of those posts are

complaints about the time it takes one to get into an LFR, the posts range from suggestions for

improvement, anger against the LFR, annoyance with the community, and a few positive posts

about how people enjoy LFRs. This story is from Linianna, a level 90 Blood Elf Warlock on the

Kamic Backlash server and is entitled "LFR Woes". The story has been copied, typos and all,

from the forum.

> So i took my wife through the first two lfrs earlier. This was the first time she had
> ever been in a raid environment and before you ask no she did not buy her 90 we
> did it the old fashion way...questing:). So the first lfr went ok (other locks
> throwing rain of fire down during maddening shout.../facepalm) but we made it
> through. Then we get to the second one Vault of Mysteries. This is where crap hit
> the fan.
>
> Now my wife has got well crap gear right now and again had never set foot into a
> dungeon/raid so i was trying to teach her where to stand...switch targets in a raid
> group..etc etc. Just the bare basics. So the first hiccup was the last raider through
> picked up the trash on the other side of the stairs on the way to elegon. So me and
> the wife and a healer doubled back while i was screaming in chat "trash in the
> back". Well no one came back and i got the guy down the hall far enough that he
> was out of range from his healer. So i got him dead enough and died myself while
> my wife finished him off. So ran all the way back and get to elegon. So a guy in
> the raid starts complaining about my wifes dps and how low it is. So i told the guy
> look she is still learning and is at least trying to learn. So he kept going on and on
> about how paid 90's suck and how my dps sucked. So i was like really i am
> watching two screens, talking my wife through her only second raid ever, making
> sure she is on the right targets and still pulling 125k total. So we pull him and half
> the raid dies when the floor drops out. Including the guy who was running his
> mouth. So i told my wife to leave and we did but before i left i said "wow all this
> complaining about dps and you died to a mechanic that has been out for idk a year
> now?".
>
> My wife is starting to hate lfrs as much as i do now sometimes and i was kinda

shocked that someone would complain in an lfr about dps. When for the most part they were all doing about 30-50k. Just told the wife to roll with it and that not all lfr's are bad but she was extremely pissed about it. So just don't always judge someone in lfrs by their dps :)

Linianna's story is comparable to many of the posts about the growing discontent with the LFR system. What made this story different from the others is the responses that he got to his wife's plight. The responses ranged from funny to condescending to encouraging. For the most part, people had encouraging suggestions for the couple. Below are two of the responses.

Sarence, a level 90 Human Warrior wrote: "Don't use LFR as a replacement for meeting people and forming social groups. Guilds are the only good way to experience raid content. LFR is to raiding what McDonalds is to food."

DeathPony, a level 90 Draenei Paladin wrote a funny, but supportive response:

Friends, like many of you, I used to hate LFR, but now I take FUKITOL and enjoy the experience tremendously! FUKITOL is a new stress relieving drug that takes away the blues and brings back the sunny days of Random Raiding enjoyment!

You know those LFR-Raiders who only raid LFR and have only LFR progression on even their main, but always bad mouth others for their performances or attempts to direct the raid and will often leave the raids early?

Well now with FUKITOL you can readily deter these 'individuals' by identifying their actual progression in real time and fuel yourself in a verbal lambasting that goes beyond their current toon and even burns their mains G'D'm house down! As these 'anonymous' trolls quickly learn they are not so 'anonymous' anymore and quickly tuck tail and run as they cannot face the sheer power and madness initiated by a FUKITOL tirade.

They'll say things like, "You're nuts!" and "I can't believe you take this game so seriously!"

But it's not the game you take seriously, it's opening unmerciful cans of Woopass on arrogant deserving loud mouths brats that need to have their egos stomped out, and who your raid always does better without! Everytime!

That's RIGHT!

Order today, and YOU TOO can bring Nerd Raging on specific individuals with Incredible Hulk like intensity and savagry!

Don't believe us? Listen to those who have tried FUKITOL:
-=-=-=-=-=-

Dear FUKITOL Makers,

Last night I was in a 4th wing LFR and this Resto Shaman started complaining about my kiting of the mobs to Siegemaster around the room in a large predictable pattern since the other tank had died right away. Knowing from experience this would drastically lesson the damage I was taking, and the healing burden, while making it very easy for ranged and heals to simply 'turn and burn', I was perplexed by this person's audacity to criticize my tanking. At first I actually thought he was a melee and would have some weight to such a comment, but then was flabbergasted by the fact that he was a healer.

But thanks to being on FUKITOL, I found out that this person was not an experience tank and had only been effectively raiding 1 month when the content has been well out for over 4. Empowered by your fantastic drug I easily asserted myself during my tanking endeavors, without skipping a beat mind you, and verbally gutted the wining little beach [sic]!

It was such an amazing display that I even received a whisper from one raider impressed with my ability to kite tank and verbally destroy someone in text! After said Resto Shaman finally left after one wipe on Siege while commenting "I have no faith in this raid", we went on to 1 shot all other bosses.
Thank You FUKITOL!

When looking at the forums, many seem to use it as another version of the LFRs, which is to say, a way that they are able to be condescending and rude to those who are having trouble with the LFR. This thread was, for the most part, very positive and ended up with two separate threads for the same original post.

Language Choices

One of the interesting things that I found in this study is that, although people are more than willing to curse within the confines of LFR, when they are talking about the encounter, they tend not to use the same language and only refer to the cursing instead of explicitly reusing the

words. It seems that the wording does not matter as much to them. What matters is the connotation behind the words being used. As John expressed, "that's not the point" when asked to expand upon the names that he was being called. By calling the other players out in such a public fashion it is a hit to their pride and a public form of shaming. As Butler so eloquently puts it, "what hate speech does, then, is to constitute the subject in a subordinate position" (1997:18) or to give power to the speaker. This shows that it is transitioning the flow of power from the one who is being bullied toward the one doing the bullying, or trolling as the players call it. Trolling is when someone intentionally is being negative and attempting to upset the people with whom they are interacting. The words themselves do not matter nearly as much as the speech act itself.

The fact that the people interviewed were unwilling to repeat the offensive words shows that while the chosen words do have an impact, the respondents are distancing themselves from the words and attempting to regain the power that they lost in those encounters. I would also go as far as to say that by not repeating the foul language they are attempting to put themselves above the bullying that they may or may not do while in the LFR. Since only a handful of my respondents, mostly the male elite raiders, stated that they had, indeed, harassed other players in an LFR, this distancing seems to show the importance of the anonymity that one experiences during an LFR. When anonymous, a player is willing to use foul and degrading language. However, during the interview, when one's anonymity is compromised, the player refuses to speak those words, and in some cases even denies having harassed others within the LFR function.

The Bullying Effect

        Most of my respondents said they were able to brush off the bullying, but, when asked if they enjoyed going into the LFRs or did it on a regular basis, the response was an overwhelming no. For the elite raiders, they did not feel that it was something to take seriously and that it was just an annoyance, at best. The casual raiders felt that it was not worth the trouble of facing the harassment that has become common place, and so they tended to avoid it. The casual gamers would play for a while and then stop because they got tired of being kicked and/or harassed on a regular basis. Most of my respondents expressed the feeling that the LFR had turned their beloved community into one of rude and uncaring people. One of my respondents stated that LFR allowed "for people to faceless attack others." This statement, above all else, shows the lack of connection that LFR has brought to the *WoW* community. It went from being a community people were proud to be a part of to one that allows a level of anonymity that breeds contempt. Because you never have to see the other person's toon again or interact with them after the LFR is over, you have that veil of anonymity allowing negative behaviors to occur.

Summary: Feelings about LFR

        While most people that I talked to stated that the LFR has filled an important role in the *WoW* community, most believe it is a necessary evil. Without the LFR, *WoW* would lose a big portion of their subscription base, and that, in turn, would create a downward spiral and potentially the loss of the beloved community. Something that was echoed again and again throughout my interviews was the fact that the LFR did not allow for anyone to learn the mechanics of the game. As one of my respondents told me, "people don't learn anything. Some people are just there and want to blow throw it quickly and get their valor points. The elite jerks that go in there ruin it for the casuals." With that said, there is also a zero tolerance policy that is

77

instated by many of the raiders as well. They believe that it is so easy that to screw up shows that you should not be playing in the first place, and they are all too happy to let the person know. I think the general feeling about the LFR was best stated by one of my respondents who said, "LFR has become such a toxic environment."

CHAPTER 7. THE ENDGAME

The LFR system within *WoW* is a function that was created in order to allow the casual gamers the chance to see the illusive end game content as well as to obtain gear in the hopes of being able to raid at a higher level. The hope was to put 25 random people together with only the constraints of a minimum item level equal to that of the previous LFR and the make-up must be two tanks, six healers, and the rest damage dealers. These people would be pulled from a group of different servers, occasionally with the possibility of a few from the same server or people going in as a group, but there would be a level of anonymity given to these groups as it is a onetime deal. While the content was the same, the mechanics of the fights as well as the bosses themselves were simplified in the hopes that these groups would be able to blow throw the content and the casual gamers would not have to invest much time and energy into them but have the rewarding experience of being able to say that they had, indeed, finished the end game content.

Unfortunately, what Blizzard Entertainment did not foresee was the fact that this level anonymity would be to the detriment of the community. Online communities come with a level of anonymity through which a person is able to create, or recreate, themselves into whatever they choose within the confines of the society in which they are interacting. Since the advent of the Bulletin Board System (BBS) people have revealed in a way of taking themselves out of their real-life social constraints and recreating themselves into a new version. However, they were still bound to the rules and regulations of the new community and answered to the community for any misdeeds. When Blizzard removed the community through which the people had to interact after the raid was complete by pulling the players from a diverse set of realms, they

allowed for a break in community protocols to happen. The result was a level of cyberbullying not seen before within the *WoW* community. As one of my respondents said, "it's a group of people you don't care about and will never see again. So why bother being nice?"

The ability to be a faceless entity and not have to have contact again with the people with whom you are currently interacting has taken what was once a "boys tree house" (Narde 2009:152) where language and taunting was not only permitted but a required portion of the game and bumped it up another notch. Without the level of responsibility towards the community, there has been a virtual form of *Lord of the Flies* within the LFR function, as those who are more sensitive and are unable to brush off the taunts and name calling have only a few options. They can refrain from seeing the content through the LFR, which defeats the purpose of having the LFR in the first place. Another option is to give in to their base instincts and retaliate with verbal sparring, which could possibly get them kicked from the group. Lastly, they can put their heads down and ignore the reactions that are happening around them. None of these responses are healthy for a thriving community.

The Elite Gamer's Social Reification

The elite raiders are proud of their status and wear it with pride. They identify themselves as not just gamers, but *WoW* gamers. They reify their social standings in several different ways. One of the ways through which they are able to control their social standing is by creating what they call theory crafting, which is the information that the *WoW* community uses in order to better the game-play by learning how to use the talents and abilities that their characters have in a way that maximizes the output. The information is disseminated through personal websites or ones that they contribute to such as elitesjerks.com. The other way through which they reify their position is through the LFR system. Even if they are complete jerks

throughout a raid, they have little fear of being kicked because of their skill levels and how they are able to help the group. For them the game is about their guild's progress and the numbers they are able to put out, whether that is in healing or damage dealt.

To the elite raider, LFR is a "dumbed down version" of what real raiding is, so it is not something to be taken seriously. This does not mean that they enjoy using the function or do not have reservations about going into them because of the drama that is involved with the process. It does mean that they use it as a playground in which they can try out different ways of using their characters to better themselves within their "real raiding situations," or for alts that they are not worried about what happens to them. It is a way to prove their superiority over the other two classes by being on the top of the charts, knowing exactly what to do, and telling people what they need to be doing.

Stuck in the Middle

The LFR system is one that they use mainly when it first comes out so that they are able to fill in gaps in their gear and are able to do the normal raids with their guilds. Other than that, they tend to only use LFR systems as a way through which they can gear their alts and get valor points when they need to max them out. They see the LFR system as "easy mode raiding but with no room for screwing up." They are able to reify their social standings through the LFR system by knowing the fights and having good numbers. There are some of the casual raiders that side with the elite raiders by claiming that the elites are tying to "help" the casual gamers with the mechanics of the LFR. Their help, however, is done in a condescending way, which ends up just stepping on toes instead of being helpful. This leads to bullying and drama. Others at least say that they try to keep the peace and help only in positive ways, suggesting that they are at least compassionate toward the casual gamers.

81

The Struggles of the Casual Gamers

For the casual gamer, the LFR function is essential in order for them to have some social interactions with other members of the *WoW* community. It allows them to be able to see the end game content and get some gear for their characters without having to put in the time and energy that the raiders do. All of the casual gamers that I talked to said that the LFR function was enough of a challenge for them, and while they enjoyed being able to complete the raids in this fashion, it was the "elitist jerks that did not need to be in the LFRs that came in and ruined it" for them. Most admitted that the bullying within the LFRs made them stop playing *WoW* at least for a short period of time because it was so hurtful. They used the term elitist in the same manner that the raiders use the term casual, as a derogatory term meant to insult the class.

Changes in Social Status and Structure

While LFR is a way that those who are unable to dedicate the time to regular forms of raiding are able to get gear and see the content, it is also a place where one can apply for a guild. The gear that they receive in LFR is such that they would be at the required item level for many of the casual raiding guilds. Only one of my respondents stated that she had moved up the social ladder from a casual raider to an elite raider because of the practice and ability to supplement her item level.

The ability to move up the social ladder is one that my respondents all agree is possible, but most believe is not likely, as players who only have LFR gear or lower are stigmatized as being "crappy players." This is illustrated very nicely by a conversation I was privy to on a chat server for an elite raiding guild. A person logged onto the Ventrillo server (a program that allows for people to vocally chat with one another) had applied to the guild and had to go through an interview process. The members of this guild were nice but bluntly told him that his

item level was just not high enough and to reapply when he was able to reach their minimum. As soon as he logged off of the vent server, the members started laughing about how stupid the person was for thinking they could get into their guild with that low of an item level.

Item level matters to those who are higher than a casual gamer. Not many guilds are willing to do what is called a carry, or allow for someone who has not proven themselves through obtaining the required gear. While in theory going through a LFR in order to be able to gain gear and experience the watered down version of raiding which LFR allows for should make it so that everyone has a shot at being an elite raider, it does not pan out that way. The ability to change one's social class because of addition of the LFR function did not work the way that many had hoped. The distinction between the three classes is greater than ever. While the use of symbolic resources is available to every class and no longer the sole property of the elite raiders, they are still able to reaffirm their position through the use of symbolic violence by bullying the casual gamers. They are in fact telling the casual gamers that even though they may have access to this coveted resource, they are still in fact below them, which helps to maintain the social boundaries. It seems that it is even harder now to bridge the gap between them, as while social mobility is possible, it is very unlikely with just the addition of the LFR function. In short, the social structures within *WoW* have not changed as was originally hoped.

Symbolic Interactionism

Before the LFR function was implemented, the elite raiders and those casual raiders that were able to finish the endgame content would post photos of the victories. There would be a photo of the raid group standing around and/or atop of the slain boss as well as the characters brandishing their new gear. These screen shots were the symbolic representations of their status.

Those who were not in raiding groups that were able to accomplish this feat did not have access

to preforming and then displaying this form of symbolic representation on the World Wide Web.

*Figure 10. This is a screen capture, taken by Chris Haven, of our guild defeating an endgame
boss.*

The addition of the LFR function has made this symbolic representation of eliteness a

thing of the past as now casual gamers are able to create and display the same type of screen

shots. This is done as the gear and bosses look the exact same even if the skill level needed to

obtain them is drastically different. This has allowed for the lower class to perform the eliteness

through symbolism without achieving the actual status through their own work. To those that

achieve this status through hard work, they are seen as stealing the symbolic resources. In other words, the LFR system has given this once prized resource to all players.

Changes in Identity

The LFR function has had a twofold effect on the identity of the casual gamer. They have stopped considering themselves *WoW* gamers, as most of the casual gamers that I have talked to have fallen away from playing with any major regularity because of the problems, the bullying, they have on LFR. On the other hand, the ones that are still playing are able to act the part of the raiding classes through the ability to share in the once coveted symbolic representation of a raider: the screenshot. They have been given a glimpse into the world of raiding, but in a sheltered format that does not require the level of time and skill on which the other two classes pride themselves. The casual gamers, such as Allen, have become fearful of the interactions that take place within the game as they are unable to find a place where they are accepted and welcomed without the prejudices that come with their social class. *WoW* has become a place where they are not safe to explore their other selves as they once did.

The casual raiders, on the other hand, have flourished with the addition of the LFR function. It has given them a boost in both their self-confidence, as well as a place to show off their skills. While most of them state they would rather the LFR be taken out of the game, they keep going back to it as they have found a place in which they are able to thrive. The LFR function has served as a way to reinforce the positive nature of their social standings. Many of the casual raiders that I spoke with stated proudly that they were not just a gamer, but a *WoW* gamer. Most, like Karen, use the LFR as an avenue through which they can show off their knowledge of the game mechanics and reinforce their standings in the game.

Like the casual gamers, the elite raiders have been hit hard when it comes to identity creation with the addition of the LFR function. Their symbolic resources have been coopted by the two lesser social groups. While there has always been a portion of the casual raiding that has been skilled enough to achieve the same goals as the elite raiders, they were few and far between. The screen shot no longer has the same awe-inspiring notion that it once did and many of the elite raiding groups no longer take them. They have latched onto the gear score as their main symbolic resource as it is one of the only physical, in game, differences that they still have. Contempt for the LFR function is widespread as elite raiders, such as John, express their dissatisfaction with the "dumbing down of the raids for people who are not skilled enough to really raid."

Cyberbullying in Context

Whether in a video game or on a social media site, cyberbullying is a problem that is being faced by many people that dive into these online worlds looking for an escape from their physical lives. Each of these different types of online groups are socially constructed environments through which one must navigate, just like in the physical world. The interaction with others is mandated as a part of these realms and as such there is the possibility for not only exploring the self but also for negative behavior or trolling to occur. When asked, most people will admit that what they are doing is, in fact, harmful and that they would not do the negative behavior if they could see the people face-to-face; yet they do it in the virtual space. This leads me to believe that because of the fact that they are not faced with the negative physical ramifications, they believe that they are able to get away with their behavior and so do. As Kirito, one of the characters in *Sword Art Online*, an anime based on the lives of people who play MMORPGs, states:

86

It's just a game in the end. Anything goes, right? If you want to kill, you kill. If you want to steal, you steal. A lot of people think like that. More than I care to know, and in a way, I get it. I use to think like that, but none of it's true. In a virtual world, there are things you have to protect because it's a virtual world. Someone special taught me that. If you give into your impulses in here, it's gonna change who you are in the real world. The player and the character are one in the same. (Kawahara 2013)

What the people who behave in a negative manner are not aware of, or at least concerned with, is the fact that their actions impact not only the people to whom they are being mean but also themselves. This is reminiscent of Bulter's (1997) theory of hate speech, through which she concludes that words give power to the speaker. The action of speaking allows for the speaker to put themselves in a position of power over the person that they are speaking to when conducting hate speech activities. This can only be done when the person being spoken to is being put down by the speech actions. Just like physical bullying, speech has the ability to not only change the power dynamics, but also to inflict harm. To reiterate Butler's statement, "terms such as 'wound' suggests that language can act in ways that parallel the infliction of physical pain and injury" (1997:4).

When speaking about the bullying that was being done by the respondents, I noticed that the tone of voice and manner in which the people were talking to me tended to change a bit when they admitted that they were in fact trolling other players. They were shorter and more curt with their responses as if they were slipping into another persona, one in which the way they spoke to someone did not matter. This begs the question: are they changing their narrative to create a better light through which they can remain the protagonist of their story? The narrative through which the people who are recreating the stated hate speech shows that they are distancing themselves from the actions as their response style changes. While none of the people admitted to creating a separate persona in order to reconcile the problem of becoming a bully, they do tend

87

to downgrade their behavior due to the fact that it is just a game or that the people are in need of knowing their weaknesses. They are able to reconcile their actions with the knowledge that they are talking to pixilated beings and as such distance themselves from the fact that there is another human on the other end of those pixels. Even though they pull on the anonymity of the digital environment to remove themselves from their actions, most still need the extra reinforcement that they are acting in such a manner because they are entitled to do so due to the inability of the lower classes to preform within the LFR.

A study on bullying within the context of gaming will help to understand bullying within other contexts as the persona that one portrays within the game may become a part of the player's other narratives. In other words, when the player is narrating their behaviors within the game, they are often doing so in such a way that has implications for their identifications outside of the gaming environment. Thus, the narrators here, when discussing their actions in the game, have to reconcile those actions with their identifications that they maintain outside of the game. This may be less necessary in the game, but in the interview setting, and in any environment in which their actions are challenged outside of the gaming interaction, this may become necessary. Following from this, understanding the effects that bullying has on the identity creation within *WoW* can help us to understand the effects of bullying in any context. While the setting in which the bullying is taking place may impact how the interaction is carried out, it is the act itself that matters. Since the people who are trolling within the game feel a level of protection from any real ramifications to their actions, it is the perfect place to look at this phenomenon and ask the questions of why and how. They are more open not only with their insults, but also with their rationale behind the actions as they have some anonymity through the digital world. The anonymity that the gamers who participate in bullying or hate speech activities are afforded also

88

allows for them to be able to keep their actions at a distance from their personal narratives. This distancing is not possible in the physical world and most bullies have to seek another way through which to distance themselves from their negative behavior. This is typically done by claiming that they people being bullied "deserve it" because they are weird or some other subjectively perceived and constructed negative action. My work shows that people do wish to maintain their positive identification through being the protagonists of their narrative, even when discussing their own bullying behaviors, tells us something about how to decrease bullying. In short, even those who participate in the bullying activities may not want to be perceived as bullies. Therefore, reminding them of the negative ramifications not only for the people that they accost, but also for themselves as the bully and for their own narrative identifications may be a successful tool for minimizing bullying or even eventually preventing it or for reconciliation. My work does not necessarily indicate how this will play out in other areas of bullying in the physical realm, but it does indicate interesting areas for further research into this topic.

Technology has become one of the main ways through which communication is currently taking place. As a result, cyberbullying has emerged as a new threat to the physiological health of those that participate within digital communities as Chang et al. state, "both cyberbullying and school bullying and/or victimization experiences were independently associated with increased depression." (2012:454). While the side effects of both traditional bullying and that of cyberbullying are similar, the way through which the power differentials are achieved are vastly different. As Mark and Ratliffe state: "in face-to-face bullying there is a clear power differential, usually where the stronger bully torments the weaker victim, in cyberbullying the power lies in anonymity" (2011: 95). The anonymity that the digital world allows for gives the ability for the

bully to "act more aggressively than they would in a face-to-face situation" (2011:94) as they are

less likely to have the same reactions that they would from a face-to-face confrontation and feel

as if they are able to get away with their actions. The reason that this type of bullying is more

aggressive seems to be that:

> cyberbullies feel less regret, sympathy, or concern toward their victims than face-to-face bullies. This lack of concern or empathy could be due to the impersonal nature of digital communication, which can leave cyberbullies both more brazen, and less aware of the extent of emotional or psychological damage they may have caused the victim Consequently, while cyberbullies feel stronger and more powerful, cybervictims can often feel more alone and helpless (Mark and Ratliffe 2011:94-5)

Cyberbullying is a stronger and more aggressive form of traditional face-to-face bullying

and stems from the anonymity allowed by the digital world. The fact is that cyberbullying is just

an extension of the traditional face-to-face bullying, even though there are some differences

between the two. This fast paced communication has led to the importance of understanding the

phenomenon of cyberbullying. Once there is a better understanding of what and why this is

taking place, there can be a way through which the problem can be dealt. Each of the

communities within the digital realm have their own set of political and social problems, but

when we look at each of them individually we are able to see that the overarching problems in

cyberbullying are similar. My study of the *WoW* community helps to show that this problem

effects not only the people that are being bullied but those that are preforming the hate speech as

well.

Summary

The LFR system was created as a way to enable casual gamers to see the content

previously kept from them. It also allowed for the casual raiders to be able to get some needed

help in gear scores in order to be able to complete the raids on a normal mode. The unfortunate

consequences that Blizzard did not anticipate is that instead of bringing the classes closer together, it would serve as a way of furthering the distance between the different classes and allowing them to reify their positions within the community. The amount of harassment within the LFR function makes it so that this function is not enjoyable for anyone and pushes the casual gamer even further from the game. For those within the community, the labels of elite and casual have become derogatory terms that are meant as a way of classifying the "other".

This othering or cyberbullying is an extension of the classic school-yard bullying that has come as a result of the increasing dependency on the digital world. The major difference between traditional bullying and that of cyberbullying is the anonymity afforded to those within the digital world. This anonymity allows for the bullies to be more aggressive in their actions while dehumanizing their victims as pixels on a screen. My work shows that this is at least in part because the bullies are able to maintain a greater distance from their own actions that they do not immediately or necessarily have to incorporate these actions into their identification narratives used outside of the gaming environment. This allows them to parcel out their various identifications in a way that protects their "primary," "real world" identification from the degrading behaviors of their digital character. While it is not known if the victims are affected to a greater or lesser degree than that of traditional bullying, what is apparent is that they feel that they are being attacked within their place of sanctuary and have lost the space to which they can escape from the negativity as the bullying is happening within their own homes. The home was previously a physical barrier between the outside world and the person, but the digital world has taken away that barrier and left the victims more venerable. This study not only puts this community into the conversation of cyberbullying, but also shows that the anonymity allowed through the digital community does in fact allow for a more aggressive and less empathetic

91

version of traditional bullying. However, following Butler, we must also remember that the victims are not entirely powerless. Interpellation allows for response and resistance, and thus future research may look further into how those made the subjects of bullying might make use of the linguistic and aggressive tendencies of bullies in resistance their own subjection as Other. My work suggests that perhaps one way of minimizing bullying or empowering the bullied is to implement the tools of narrative analysis by making the bullies more aware of the impact that bullying has not only on the bullied, but on themselves as bullies. We should thus seek to alter the plots of the bullies in order to make a safer and more engaging environment for *all* gamers. Though implementing the actual process of doing this is beyond the scope of this project, future researchers should consider ways of doing this in the vein of "giving back" to the communities from which we, as researchers, borrow.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Matthew

    2006 Hybridizing Identity and Reflexivity: Towards an Understanding of Contemporary Identity? Sociology 40(3): 511-528

Adams, Tyrone and Stephen A. Smith

    2008 Electronic Tribes the Virtual Worlds of Geeks, Gamers, Shamans, and Scammers. Austin: University of Texas.

Althusser, Louis

    1971 Ideology and Ideological State apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation). Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays.

Atkins, Kim

    2005 Narrative Identity, Practical Identity, and Ethical Subjectivity. Continental Philosophy Review 37: 341-366.

Bastian, Misty L.

    1993 Bloodhounds Who Have No Friends: Witchcraft and Locality in the Nigerian Popular Press. Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa: 1st Symposium. Afican Studies: Papers. Ed. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago

Bastian, Misty L.

    2001 Vulture Men, Campus Cultists, and Teenage Witches: Modern Magics in Nigerians Popular Media. Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft, and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa. Ed. Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders. London: Routledge

Bates, Thomas R.

    1975 Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony. Journal of the History of Ideas. 36.2

Blizzard Entertainment INC.

    2015 Blizzard Entertainment http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blizzard_Entertainment accessed February 12, 2015.

Blumer, Herbert

    1966 Sociological Implications of the Thought of George Herbert Mead. American Journal of Sociology 71(5): 535-544.

Boellstorff, Tom

    2013 Afterword: Consuming the Digital. In The Routledge Companion to Digital Consumption. Russell W. Belk and Rosa Llamas, eds. Pp. 415–420. London: Routledge.

Boellstorff, Tom

> 2011 Placing the Virtual Body: Avatar, Chora, Cypherg. In A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment. Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Editor. Pp. 504–520.New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Boellstorff, Tom

> 2008 Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bottero, Wendy

> 2010 Intersubjectivity and Bourdieuian Approaches to Identity. Cultural Sociology. 4(3): 3-22.

Bourdieu, Pierre

> 2000 Making the Economic Habitus: Algerian Workers Revisited. Ethnography 1(1): 17 - 41

Buroway, Michael

> 2012 The Roots of Domination: Beyond Bourdieu and Gramsci. Sociology. 46: 187

Butler, Judith

> 1990 Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.

Butler, Judith

> 1997 Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative.

CBS Interactive Inc.

> 2015 World of Warcraft losses 800000 subscribers in three months http://www.gamespot.com/articles/world-of-warcraft-loses-800-000-subscribers-in-thr/1100-6421529/ accessed on February 12, 2015.

Cerulo, Karen A.

> 1997 Reframing Social Concepts for a Brave New (Virtual) World. Sociological Inquiry. 67(1):48-58.

Chagnon, Napoleon A.

> 1997 The Yanomamo. Fort Worth: Harcourt College.

Chang, Fong-Ching and Ching-Mei Lee, Chiung-Hui Chiu, Wen-Yun His, Tzu-Fu Huang, Yun-Chieh Pan

> 2012 Relationships Among Cyberbullying, School Bullying, and Mental Health in Taiwanese Adolescents. Journal of School Health. 83(6): 454-462

Chernoff, John Miller

> 2003 Hustling Is Not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Cuadrado-Gordillo, Isabel and Inmaculada Fernández-Antelo

> 2014 Cyberspace as a generator of changes in the aggressive-victim role. Computers In Human Behavior. 36:225-233

Doostdar, Alireza

> 2008 The Vulgar Spirit of Blogging: On Language, Culture, and Power in Persian Weblogestan. Special Virtual Issue: The Anthropology of Language. American Anthropologist. 106(4):651-662.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E.

> 1971 The Azande History and Political Institutions. Oxford: At the Clarendon.

Farnell, Brenda

> 2000 Getting out of the Habitus. Journal of Royal Anthropology. 6: 397-418.

Fink, Bruce

> 1995 The Lacanian Subject, The Subject of the Other's Desire and The Theory of the Mirror Phase in The Lacanian Subject.

Frum, Larry

> 2013 Nearly Half of All Video-gamers Are Women. CNN. http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/08/tech/gaming-gadgets/female-gamers/ accessed February 13, 2015.

Gergen, Kenneth J. and Mary M. Gergen.

> 2011 Narrative Tensions: Perilous and Productive. Narrative Inquiry. 21(2): 374-381.

Geschiere, Peter

> 2013 Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust: Africa in Comparison. Chicago: University of Chicago Goffman, Erving

> 1959 The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.

Goffman, Erving

> 1986 Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.

Gramsci, Antonio

> 1992 Buttigieg, Joseph A, ed. Prison Notebooks. New York City: Columbia University Press. pp. 233–38.

Gündoğan, Ercan

> 2008 "Conceptions of Hegemony in Antonio Gramsci's Southern Question and The Prison Notebooks." New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry 2(1): 45-60.

Hall, Stuart

> 2011 Who Needs Identity? In Questions of Cultural Identity, Sage Publication Ltd.

Hall, Stuart

    Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities. Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity. Ed. Anthony D. King Minneapolis: U of Minnesota 41-68.

Hall, Stuart

    1985 Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates. Critical Studies in Mass Communication 2(2).

Hammack, Phillip L.

    2011 Narrative and the Politics of Meaning. Narrative Inquiry 21(2): 311-318.

Hodkinson, Paul

    2005 'Insider Research' in the Study of Youth Cultures Journal of Youth Studies 8(2): 131-149.

Holstein, James A. and Jaber F. Gubrium

    1999 The Self We Life By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World. Oxford University Press.

Horst, Heather A. and Daniel Miller, eds.

    2012 Digital Anthropology. London: Berg.

Hurston, Zora Neale

    2008 Mules and Men. New York: Perennial Library, 2008.

Kawahara, Reki and Tomohiko Itō dir.

    2013 The Legrue Corridor. Adult Swim, Toonami, July 27.

Kraus, Wolfgang

    2006 The Narrative Negotiation of Identity and Belonging. Narrative Inquiry. 16(1): 103-111.

Labaree, Robert V.

    2002 The risk of 'going observationalist': negotiating the hidden dilemmas of being an insider participant observer. Qualitative Research. 2(1):97-122.

Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe

    1987 Post-Marxism Without Apologies. New Left Review. 79 - 106.

    2001 Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics, second edition. Verso Press.

Laclau, Ernesto

    2005 Populism: What's in a Name? Populism and the Mirror of Democracy by F. Panizza (ed.). Verso.

    2007 On Populist Reason Verso.

Leonardi, Paul M., Bonnie A. Nardi and Jannis Kallinikos

    2012 Materiality and Organizing: Social Interaction in a Technological World. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Li, Honglei

    2012 Virtual Community Participation and Motivation: Cross-disciplinary Theories. Information Science Reference. Hershey,PA.

Mark, Lauren and Katherine T. Ratliffe

    2011 Cyber Worlds: New Playgrounds for Bullying. Computers in the Schools: Interdisciplinary Journal of Practice, Theory, and Applied Research. Honolulu, Hawaii.

McLeod, Julie

    2005 Feminists Re-Reading Bourdieu: Old Debates and New Questions about Gender Habitus and Gender Change. Theory and Research in Education. 3(1): 11-30

Nardi, Bonnie A.

    2010 My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Noy, Chaim

    2008 Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling in Qualitative Research International Journal of Social Research Methodology. 11(4): 327-344.

Patchin, Justin W.

    2013 Cyberbullying Research: 2013 Update. Cyberbullying Research Center. http://cyberbullying.us/cyberbullying-research-2013-update/ accessed February 12, 2015.

Perinbanayagam, R.S.

    1975 The Significance of Others in the Thought of Alfred Schutz, G. H. Mead and C. H. Cooley." The Sociological Quarterly. 16(4): 500-521.

Perinbanayagam, R.S.

    2000 The Presence of Self. Rowan and Littlefield.

Rabinow, Paul

    2008 Marking Time: On the Anthropology of the Contemporary. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Reay, Diane

    1997 Feminist Theory, Habitus, and Social Class: Disrupting Notions of Classlessness. Women's Studies International Forum. 20(2): 225-233.

Redman, Peter.

    2005 The Narrative Formation of Identity Revisited: Narrative Construction, Agency and the Unconscious. Narrative Inquiry. 15(1): 25-44.

Rheingold, Howard

    1994 Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World.
    www.rheingold.com—book.

Smith, Brett and Andrew C. Sparkes

    2008 Contrasting Perspectives on Narrative Selves and Identities: An Invitation to
    Dialogue. Qualitative Research. 8: 5.

Smith, Marc A. and Peter Kollock

    1999 Communities In Cyberspace. New York: Routledge.

Smith, Peter K. and Jess Mahdavi, Manuel Carvalho, Sonja Fisher, Shanette Russell, and Neil
Tippett

    2008 Cyberbullying: its nature and impact in secondary school pupils. Journal of Child
    Psychology and Psychiatry 49(4):376-385.

Subrahmanyam, Kaveri and Patricia Greenfield

    2008 Online Communication and Adolescent Relationships. The Future of Children.
    18(1): 119-146

Turkle, Sherry

    1995 Life on Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Vila, Pablo

    2000 Interpellations, Narrative Identities and Popular Music. Crossing Borders,
    Reinforcing Borders: Interpellations, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the US-
    Mexico Frontier. University of Texas Press. San Antonio, Texas.

    1997 Narrative Identities: The Employment of the Mexican on the US.-Mexican Border.
    The Sociological Quarterly. 38(1): 147-183.

Wow Heroes

    WoW Heroes. http://www.wow-heroes.com/ accessed on January 2, 2015.