COMMUNICATIVE IMPLICATIONS OF THE MODERN VIDEO GAME:
AN AUDIENCE-CENTERED APPROACH

BY

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Kyle D. Richards

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Communication Studies
and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Chairperson Tom Beisecker, Ph.D.

_____

Donn Parson, Ph.D.

_____

Diana Carlin, Ph.D.

_____

Scott Harris, Ph.D.

_____

David J. Cook, Ph.D.

Date Defended: December 2, 2010

The Dissertation Committee for KYLE D. RICHARDS
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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_____

Chairperson Tom Beisecker, Ph.D.

Date approved: December 14, 2010

Abstract

The advent of the home video game console and three decades of continuously evolving

gaming technology has had a profound impact on American culture. While many studies

have investigated various sociocultural outcomes and conducted behavioral correlation

analyses of video games, few have examined how individuals talk about, or share

meaning from the game outside of game play. This analysis first briefly reviews extant

video game research and arguments for the increasingly immersive aspect of playing

video games, then identifies a lack of focus in the literature on the communicative aspect

of audience-centered analysis of these games via gamer-generated blogs and message

board interactions. Subsequently, a rhetorical analysis of two independent blogs for

World of Warcraft, (*WoW*) a massively multiplayer online (MMO) video game examines,

from a communication perspective, the inherent structure of the game, as well as the

various methods by which the gamers discuss and share meaning about in-game and out-

game experiences. A rhetorical analysis of gamer's out-game talk on *WoW*-centered

message board forums and blogs is then conducted via the lens of dramatism. The

theoretical underpinnings of this analysis further concretize the value and necessity of a

communicative lens as a privileged voice in the field of video game studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

2:00 A.M.
Rubbing my inflamed eyes, I realize I've been staring at the computer screen for 20 straight hours. My back hurts. My head is spinning. My tongue is coated with a gummy rind. I can hardly keep my chin off the keyboard. But I can't go to bed yet. It's only 2:00 A.M. and I have too many important things to do. (Kelly II, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games, 2004, p. 1).

Throughout history technological applications have had profound implications and lasting effects on human culture. One realm with a decidedly pronounced impact over the past two centuries has come from communication technology. From the telegraph to the telephone, television to the personal computer (and internet), communication technology is playing a more prevalent and ever-increasing role in the individual's everyday life in American society. One manifestation of this change has been the emergence of the video game (used interchangeably with "digital game" by many game studies scholars) and its assimilation into the mainstream for many Americans. Simply stated, video games represent a currently important cultural phenomenon.

To begin, it is important to review the rapid advancement of video games as a consequence of consistently improving computer technology. Video games are unique in that the technology upon which they are based and used continuously evolves at breakneck speed. As a corollary, one might compare the advancement of television technology over the same 30 years with advancement of the video game and its capabilities. Whereas television became somewhat mainstream by the mid 1950's, the

Atari 2600 was not introduced until 1977 and according to senior Atari game designer

Chris Crawford (1992) did not become popular commercially until 1982.

Until the advent of HDTV, LED and plasma screens, television technology

evolved relatively slowly, counting only tube and then projection screens as its only

iterations. In contrast, since the original Atari 2600 was released, there have been seven

successive generations of gaming consoles. Each of these at least doubled the processing

speed and power of its predecessor. In recent cases such as the XBOX 360 and

Playstation 3, the technological advancements have been exponential. In the realm of

personal computers (PC's) utilized for gaming, the enhanced processor speed and

graphics card capabilities of a 2009 PC compared to one from 2000 are self evident. A

simple convenience sampling of a computer purchased in August 2000 compared to a

mid-market computer of comparable price found on the electronics retailer Best Buy

retrieved May 5th, 2009 (Retrieved:

http://www.bestbuy.com/site/olspage.jsp?skuId=9180628&type=product&id=121804680

2510) demonstrates that today's mid-market PC's possess 7-10 times the processing

speed and quadruple the graphics card capabilities of the 2000 model. This is

notwithstanding the 3-D shader technology or pixel rendering abilities of programming

and software inherent in newer PC's which did not exist nine years ago.

This comparison is important because it underscores the depth and breadth of

commitment by the gaming industry to meet demographically diverse (Entertainment

Software Association, 2008) consumer demands for better technology at a much faster

pace than traditional commonplace technological applications such as the television.

Some of these video game advancements occurred due to the rapid expansion of global technological capabilities involving the microchip, computer processing abilities, and graphical enhancements/improvements; however, critics also argue they are a function of Moore's Law (1965), which postulates that the speed and power of microprocessors double approximately every 18 months. Therefore, the gaming industry may be seen to some as the lamprey to the computer industry's shark, and it is clear the gaming industry has benefited immensely from the rapid evolution in the power and speed of hardware and software. Despite this, sales data indicate that as each successive gaming platform and/or software is introduced, it is rapidly assimilated into mainstream gaming, which fuels demand to constantly increase and enhance software and hardware, and the cycle continues.

There are additional reasons beyond merely technological advancements that the gaming industry has been so successful. Chief among these include the relative affordability of basic gaming consoles and games, arcades (TV has no analogous example of this), and increasing socioglobal interactivity which exploded with the internet and in which video games were primed to assimilate quickly. With that said, it is critical to examine in greater detail three specific reasons why video games are a huge cultural phenomenon: their sales have burgeoned over the past few years, the industry has attracted increased marketing attention, and game developers are taking advantage of the rapid technological improvements in the field to create increasingly complex, immersive, interactive games.

Sales

First, video game sales have burgeoned over the past few years. In 2008, computer and video game software sales exceeded $11.7 billion in the United States alone (Electronic Software Association, 2008). Even while lagging approximately 3% behind the global market, the U.S. video game industry is expected to see sales growth at an 8.9% compound annual rate per year, reaching $13 billion in aggregate sales by 2010 (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2006).

In the same Price Waterhouse Coopers (2006) report, when compared to global mass-media growth of television and film, the 16.5% compound annual video game growth rate far exceeds the 5.3% compound annual growth rate of film and 6.6% compound annual growth rate of television. Price Waterhouse Coopers (2006) excludes hardware and accessories from this figure, and posits introduction and market penetration of the next-gen consoles such as XBOX 360 and PS 3, and portable gaming devices such as the PSP and Nintendo DS as particularly salient to this continued growth.

Marketing

Furthermore, the video game industry has attracted increased marketing attention. The video game industry recently began to see more "tentpole" releases of major franchise games and sequels, including movie style preview advertisements, both television and in theaters, as well as in cross-promotional avenues. One recent and telling example of video games' assimilation into cross-promotional endeavors traditionally the domain of blockbuster films or popular television shows comes from *Halo 3* (2007), the conclusion of Microsoft's sci-fi trilogy based loosely on the Greeks' last stand at Thermopylae. According to Pham and Friedman's *Los Angeles Times* (September 24,

2007) interview with Bungie Software executives (a Microsoft subsidiary), in addition to a production and design budget topping $30 million, *Halo 3* also had a marketing budget of $30 million. Snider's (September 17, 2007) *USA Today* article reports much of this marketing budget included cross-promotional ties with Burger King, PepsiCo (in the form of a new, Halo labeled Mountain Dew drink called "game fuel") and NASCAR (David Stremme's #40 Dodge Charger got a new *Halo* paint job theme).

The end result of this type of full-scale production and marketing, previously the domain only of film and the most successful of television productions, was that *Halo 3* took in an estimated $170 million, <u>in one day</u> according to an Associated Press report from the October 5, 2007 edition of *USA Today*. Lifetime sales for the game are currently projected at over $700 million, with a profit margin for Microsoft of approximately 90%, (as opposed to 40% for Sony's blockbuster movie, *Spiderman 3*) according to Price Waterhouse Coopers (2007).

These facts do not suggest video games are replacing television or film as the dominant medium for popular entertainment (or aggregate profit). They merely point out how profitable video games can be if developed and handled right, as well as show some corollaries between the development and marketing of video games and the development and marketing of traditional visual mass media. As Hollywood and TV executives have demonstrated countless times, if there is money to be made in a venture then someone will make it: the same basic concept can inexorably be applied to video games as well.

Video Game Trends

The increasing prevalence of video game sequels known more commonly as "franchises" suggest that more and more games will be produced in this manner in the

future. Just as the realm of television, film, and literature has learned of the profitability

of developing a serialized franchise and cultivating a corresponding fanbase (see for

example Harry Potter, Grey's Anatomy, The Dark Tower, Pirates of the Carribean, etc.),

so too have game developers. This recent video game sequel and franchising trend

carries with it the implicit assumption that video games are following previous mass-

media trends to develop and maintain a core consumer base and maximize profits.

Halo 3 (2007) as one recent example, supports the previous assertions that

gaming companies have a substantial financial interest in producing games that will

capture the public's imagination. The intent is to immerse gamers in a franchised

"world" and its stories (King and Borland, 2003; Kolan, 2007) to which they will

repeatedly wish to return. This occurs via sequels, spin-offs, or in the case of Massively

Multiplayer Online games (MMO's) such as *Star Wars: Galaxies* (2003), *Halo 3* (2007),

or *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*, 2004), through purchase of expansion packs.

The primary purpose of these expansion packs, beyond the obvious profit motives

of the companies who make them, is to enhance and expand the game play and story of

the original game. This is done with new adventures and challenges (in single-player

games commonly called "campaigns", and in MMO lingo, commonly referred to as

"quests") for players to undertake once they have successfully completed or grown bored

with the campaign or quests in the original game. In single player games this occurs in

the form of releasing a sequel or spin-off of the original game, in MMO's this is done via

release of an expansion pack or "add-on" which is compatible with the original game

programming. In nearly all cases, the game "world" is also modified or changed

altogether to add to the immersive element inherent in exploring a new environment.

As Annisimov (2007) states: "One popular selling point is expansion packs, either downloaded from the server as patches or sold in stores. These expansion packs ensure that the virtual worlds in MMOs stay fresh and interesting, constantly changing." (Retrieved: http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-mmorpg.htm).

Thus, video games can be viewed as being increasingly prevalent in modern society. They have advanced rapidly as a consequence of improved computer technology, leading video game developers to develop increasingly elaborate, interactive, and innovative games. From this, their sales have skyrocketed and marketing efforts have increased. The enhanced marketing and increased sales seek to bring more players into the fold, players who will longitudinally play video games for years, if not decades, according to the ESA (2004; 2008) reports.

From the aforementioned examples, therefore, it can be asserted that video games are an important cultural/media phenomenon. As a cultural/media phenomenon, games are also an important communication phenomenon; in other words, they promise to reveal to us salient examples of how people (specifically gamers) communicate in a rapidly changing technological world. And, by bringing an increasing number of players into the fold via enhanced sales and marketing, video games are being played by a rapidly increasing, broad spectrum of the population.

Demographics

Beyond the impact video games have on the financial market, there is also the salient aspect of demographics. Traditionally, video gamers have been characterized as socially regressed white males. Evidence of this characterization exists both in popular culture, such as in the 2007 retrospective video game documentary *A fistful of quarters:*

King of Kong, as well as in some scholarly works such as in noted video game theorists

Wolf and Perron's (2003) conceptualization of video game players as "horny nerds" (p.

viii). This casting of gamer-cum-nerd has proven both powerful and relatively durable

for years, and although the language has changed, as recently as 2007 the American

Medical Association's Council on Science and Public Health issued a report which

described hardcore gamers as socially regressed. When coupled with a litany of scholarly

articles on the minimalization of female gamers (see for example Cassell and Jenkins,

1998) as well as industry statistics such as a 2005 report by the International Game

Developers Association that 80% of game developers are white males, the notion of the

"typical" gamer as a nerdy white male has remained in the American zeitgeist.

In the past 5 years, scholarly articles (see for example Jenkins, 2001), as well as

game industry reports such as the 2008 one generated by the Electronic Software

Association (ESA) have demonstrated this to be not only untrue, but grossly so. The

same ESA (2008) report estimates that 65% of all Americans play video games, and of

that figure, 40% are female. A recent report by the Consumer Electronic Association (as

cited in the April 17, 2006 technology section of the *New York Times*) found that 65

percent of women in the 25-34 age bracket play video games, while only 35 percent of

men in that group said that they play video games.

According to a 2003 study published by The Pew Internet & American Life

Center, college-aged consumers encapsulate the largest demographic chunk, with 100%

reporting they had played video games and a staggering 65% reporting frequent or

regular gaming. While younger gamers are the most coveted demographic of the video

game industry, (similar to the 18-34 demographic that many television and film studios

covet) as of 2008, the average age of video gamers was 35 and those individuals have

been playing games for an average of 13 years (ESA, 2008). Thus, it is apparent that the

video game industry has high consumer loyalty. This fact suggests that as gamers age

and continue to play, the percentage of people playing games will continue to increase as

new, younger players begin playing and presumably follow longitudinal purchasing and

playing trends much like gamers before them have.

In addition, as gamers who began with the Atari 2600 or NES have aged, many

have continued to play games at least some of the time, and some late adopters of the

technology have also entered the fray. As of 2007, 26 percent of Americans over the age

of 50 played video games, an increase from nine percent in 1999, according to the most

recent ESA (2008) report on gamer demographics. Indeed, even persons aged 65 years

and older play games, and of those surveyed who do play games, one-third play every

day as opposed to one-fifth of their younger counterparts aged 18-64 (Pew Internet &

American Life Center, 2008).

The breadth and depth of diverse demographic market penetration is not limited

simply to age or gender. In a Kaiser Family Foundation (2003) study as well as the

aforementioned Pew Internet & American Life Center (2008) and ESA (2008) studies,

myriad demographic statistical data is readily available which shows that video games are

played on a regular or semi-regular basis by some component of many racial/ethnic, age,

and gender demographic categories.

Coupling the aforementioned Kaiser Family Foundation (2003), Pew Internet &

American Life (2008), ESA (2008), and CSA (2006) statistics with the 2004 ESA report

that 50% of its respondents indicate that they will play as much or more than they do now

in 10 years, the statistical data extrapolate to a substantially large, increasingly diverse

demographic who will spend significant amounts of time playing video games.   From the

aforementioned sources, it can be asserted that statistical figures on market penetration,

popularity, and financial impacts of video games occurring across large and varied

demographics represent a cultural phenomenon which has permeated American society

and will continue to do so for the forseeable future. Despite this, the video game industry

is not standing pat or resting on its laurels. As the beneficiary of being in an industry

where technology is constantly and consistently upgrading itself, video game developers

are focusing on providing state of the art interactive and immersive games for its

consumers.

Massively Multiplayer Online Games: History

As discussed, video game developers are creating increasingly elaborate,

interactive, immersive, and innovative games as technology advances. Massively

Multiplayer Online Games are at the forefront of this new wave of video game

technology and application. Hence, a brief history of Massively Multiplayer Online

Games and their offshoot genre, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games

(MMORPG's, shorthanded for convenience as MMO's henceforth) is required. This

history serves to help better understand both the MMO's role within the larger arena of

video games, as well as their impact on gamers who invest incredible amounts of time

and money playing them.

According to Kelly II (2004), MMO's have their roots in traditional "tabletop"

role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974), in which a group of individuals

gather at a central location. These individuals all have characters they have created,

usually through selecting a player class such as Warrior, Monk, Paladin, Orc, etc., and then determining attributes such as strength, dexterity, luck, etc., through rolling of dice. After the players are created, a system of rules is developed vis-a-vis the "game master" as well as official rules developed by the company that created the game, including items available for purchase, experience points and gold that can be gained and "spent" to improve their character, and how the game will be played. This "game master" (usually the person "hosting" the gamers) then relates a narrative, either from prewritten stories developed by the game developers in published works, or from his or her imagination.

These games were frequently quite immersive given that they were extended, interactive narratives limited only by the "game master's" imagination. A typical *Dungeons and Dragons* (*D & D*) game, according to a blogger website which seeks *D & D* players, is 3-4 hours, and the games themselves can often last for 6 months (Retrieved: http://richards.sdf1.org/ircrpg/dnd.html). Thus, role playing games, whether tabletop or online, require substantial player commitment in the form of time spent playing.

Kelly II (2004) supports this assertion specifically concerning *WoW*, stating that "Ordinary players typically spend 20 to 30 hours a week in these worlds, but obsessed players spend every night, every weekend, every vacation—for *years* at a time—forgoing food, sleep, and real human companionship just to experience more time in the virtual world." (author emphasis, pp. 13-14). Gahlok, a blogger from the *WoW*-centric weblog Frostbolt, actually ended up leaving the game due to the phenomenon Kelly II (2004) referenced. He writes:

The game was probably fun until the last couple of months, for some reason I ended up thinking that WoW was just playing 5-6 hours a day, 5 days a week,

which seemed like a job (and not enough room to make other stuff). **There were even weeks that I would raid 6 days per week, there's not much fun about it.** (author emphasis, Retrieved: http://frostbolt.com/2009/09/25/the-end-of-a-jouney/)

While some tabletop games remain popular today, such as in the case of the role-playing game *Magic: The Gathering*, as personal computers and home video game consoles became more prevalent, video game versions and variations of these games became more popular. While essentially the same concept as their tabletop predecessors, these games were different in that they did not require the physical presence of gamers in a central location. Thus, the game developers, through the development of game code and creation of virtual worlds, became the "game masters". Prior to the mainstream adoption and use of the internet, initial computer role-playing games such as *Might & Magic* (1986) or *Ultima* (1980) were essentially single or two-player games, with the players competing on a single computer or gaming system in a predetermined series of adventures against the game's computer-generated characters.

Contemporary MMO's

Once the internet became relatively mainstream, the ability to engage in a virtual version of traditional tabletop role-playing games began. In these MMO's, players could link up to a central "hub" and play with or against not just a few of their friends, but in some cases thousands of geographically disperse individuals who also had access to the same hub through an internet connection. According to Annisimov (2007) "An MMORPG is a computer-based RPG (role-playing game) which takes place in an online virtual world with hundreds or thousands of other players. In an MMORPG, a player uses

a client to connect to a server, usually run by the publisher of the game, which hosts the virtual world and memorizes information about the player." (Retrieved: http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-mmorpg.htm).

He continues "The genre surged into popularity throughout the late nineties, finding especially welcoming markets in Taiwan, South Korea, and America." (Retrieved: http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-mmorpg.htm). This statement emphasizes that as the requirement of physical presence for game play was eliminated due to the interconnectivity of the internet, people became more readily able to interact with others across the globe in playing MMO's.

In plain language, gamers in MMO's (just as in their tabletop predecessors) are tasked with various quests such as raiding a dungeon with members of a group (called a "guild" in MMO lingo) to slay monsters, gain loot and treasure, and earn experience points to upgrade various abilities and attributes of their character. Over time, as quests are completed, the gamers or guilds have fewer new things to do within a game. Therefore, expansion packs are added on which feature new and progressively more difficult challenges, in addition to adding to the lore and mythos of that particular game's universe. Of course gamers are not limited to the proscribed game scenarios, as the virtual world they inhabit is relatively open ended and players may choose simply to socialize with others, perform mundane tasks such as farming, or explore the virtual world as a vagabond with no specific purpose in mind.

Despite this, the majority of MMO players purchase the game and pay the monthly fee to play and complete its proscribed quests and tasks (Corneliussen and Rettberg, 2008). With substantial financial and manpower resources devoted to first

developing a successful game, and then capitalizing on that success via 24 hour live programmer modification and oversight as well as game sequels or expansion packs, it is important to understand why successful games must continue to provide fresh storylines for their players.

Furthermore, as the various MMO's became increasingly immersive and expansive due to the various add-on's and expansion packs, gamers began to interact with one another not only within the confines of the game world, but outside of the game in various forums as well. This out-game talk between gamers represented an entirely new manner of interactivity for MMO's, one that exists outside the realm of traditional game play. Therefore, it becomes critical to narrow the focus of this study to an exemplar MMO that is the most popular, most developed, and with the most recognized history.

World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft, or "*WoW*" as it is known by parent company Blizzard Entertainment and players alike, is a 3rd person MMO set in the virtual world of Azeroth. The title is the 4th in a series of games from Blizzard Entertainment, which originated in 1994 with the real-time strategy video game *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans*. The original game was a real-time strategy (RTS) game between a human player and a computer opponent, where the player was tasked with gathering resources, turning those resources into gold or materials, and then "spending" the resources to build a base and develop fighting units. As a real-time strategy game, *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans* takes place in real time, meaning that while the human player is gathering resources and building his or her base, the computer is simultaneously doing the same thing (e.g. both sides compete simultaneously rather than turn-by-turn). The game is won or lost when a player has

annihilated all of the opponent's units or structures, or achieved a predetermined mission

objective as dictated by the game (e.g. "capture the flag" or "defend base for 10

minutes").

Warcraft: Orcs and Humans, was followed up by two similar sequels. In 2004,

Blizzard Entertainment departed from the RTS game model and released *World of*

Warcraft, a 3rd person MMO based on lore and mythos of the the previous games but

little else from a technical standpoint. (Retrieved: http://us.blizzard.com/en-

us/company/press/pressreleases.html). The game is based in the virtual world of Azeroth.

According to Corneliussen and Rettberg (2008) "Azeroth, the planet on which *World of*

Warcraft takes place, has a long history of wars and conflicts between different races in

earlier times." (p. 5.) This backstory, related when a player first logs in to play the game,

helps orient the player to the "history" of Azeroth in order to better understand the

general theme of the game.

After players purchase the game, pay the monthly user subscriber fee, and then

log in to a server, they are faced with an immediate choice. As MacCallum-Stewart

(2008) relates: "The first decision a player makes when entering *World of Warcraft* is

directly related to conflict. Before choosing a side, character, class, or avatar, they must

choose what type of server they wish to enter." (p. 40). She then goes on to describe the

types of dedicated servers and what they mean to game play: "On 'normal' realms other

enemy players can't attack you unless you allow them to. . . .players in those realms. . .

.fight against the monsters of the game rather than other players." (p. 40). She continues:

"Realms in which players fight each other on sight—the PvP or 'at war' realms—

predominate." (p. 40).

After choosing a server, a player will go about the traditional aspects of character creation similar to those described in the aforementioned *D & D*, and then control said character--called an "avatar"—as they enter Azeroth and begin to play. They then can perform the same functions as described in the tabletop role-playing games of above in questing and having adventures, except the simulation is virtual instead of told or imagined via oral narrative. There are also many other activities beyond the ones intended by the game designers (more on this later) that can be performed in *WoW*.

As a so-called "3rd person" game, *WoW* employs either an over-the-shoulder or diagonally floating camera angle depending on player preference. This is different from 1st person games where the screen serves as the player's "eyes" and the mouse swivels and rotates their head. The camera angle allows the player to see their avatar and the immediately surrounding environment and characters at all times, and "flies" or "swoops" with the character to follow the progress and action.

WoW, like many games in the genre of MMO's, is decidedly a fantasy-themed game. As *WoW* blogger stewart94case relates, "*World of Warcraft* is built on the classic medieval fantasy model, a combination of Tolkien, Camelot, and a liberal dash of unique original elements mixed into the hoary stand-bys. The world is filled with magic spells, swords and shields, gold pieces and assorted items of value, and skills both worldly and other worldly that a character can acquire with practice and effort – and hours online." (Retrieved: http://worldofwarcraftmerchandising.wordpress.com/2010/03/21/world-of-warcraft-history/).

Since it first became available, *WoW* has quickly risen to become the undisputed king of MMO's, landing in the Guiness Book of World Records for "Most Popular

MMORPG of All-Time" as of 2010, with nearly 11.5 million monthly paying subscribers (Retrieved: http://gamers.guinnessworldrecords.com/records/pc_gaming.aspx) paying anywhere from $12.99 to $14.99 per month with one month of initial free play (Retrieved: http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/info/faq/general.html). For those keeping score at home, that's approximately $143 million in gross revenue per month, making *WoW* not just the most popular MMO on the planet, but very, very big business.

Referencing Kelly II's (2004) earlier assertion—namely that "ordinary" MMO players spend 20 to 30 hours per week online and some play even more frequently—it is apparent that the players are highly invested in their character and in the online interactions the game provides. Further considering that *WoW* is the most popular MMO of all time, it provides a compelling artifact to study not merely for the game play itself, but for the communicative implications resultant from such a diverse, widely populated and played arena within the context of video game studies. Finally, given that *WoW* has literally hundreds of message board forums and comment-enabled blogs where players can discuss virtually any aspect of the game, it provides a novel avenue by which to illuminate the various aspects of and about the game that make its players tick.

Proposal

The purpose of this study is to investigate why people choose to play *WoW*, and why they spend so much time outside of game play discussing it with other players. Specifically, what is it about this game that instills such passion in its players? While the game play itself is undoubtedly the primary reason for individuals to devote such significant time and money to it, how the players talk about and discuss the game is of interest to unearth why the players are so involved with this particular game.

Extant research in the emerging field of video game studies is a hodgepodge of approaches from a variety of academic disciplines. However, these studies gave impetus for research into what video games can mean, how they function, and, critical for this study, how players communicate about the games they play and arrive at shared meaning. The idea of sharing meaning is not unique to academia, and assuredly not to communication, however, while many scholars have posed this question with respect to new media forms, few scholars have directly posed this question with respect to video games.

An in-depth examination of *WoW* is an excellent starting point to foray into this line of inquiry. By focusing on the most popular, widely-played, consistently played (20-30 hours per week according to Kelly II's 2004 book) MMO in history, this study seeks to provide greater insight about how gaming influences people's lives.

To that end, the study will be organized in the following fashion. First, a review of extant literature is necessary to determine what research on video games in general, and *WoW* specifically, currently exists. The literature review culminates with specific research directives aimed at identifying where this study plows new ground with respect to video game studies and communication. Second, the methodology for this study is espoused, focusing on deploying the lens of the pentad as espoused by Burke's (1945) theory of dramatism. Third, a discussion of the findings from the dataset is related with respect to the research directives. Finally, conclusions are drawn which highlight implications for future research in the field of video game studies as well as justify the heuristic value of the present study for communication scholars.

Literature Review

3:00 A.M.
Glancing at my real-world surroundings, I see, scattered around the room, scraps of paper recording place names and coordinates, scribbled notes detailing the whereabouts of quest items, hand-drawn maps, a homemade catalog of characters who've helped or harmed me, and shopping lists of items I'm searching for. My eyes rest on the family dog, who commences a whining lament because I forgot to take him out earlier. A 150-pound Newfoundland is not an animal who should be denied bathroom privileges. But I figure his complaints won't crescendo for a while, so I have a little time before I attend to his needs. I understand his suffering, though. My own insides are about to rupture as well. But any real relief is going to require getting out of my chair. And that won't happen until later. My real body will just have to wait a few more hours. I have more important problems to attend to. (Kelly II, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games, 2004, p. 3).

Introduction

We shall begin with a brief review of prevailing literature on games and play to better couch video game studies as an offshoot of well-established areas of academic inquiry. From that, to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities in place for an application of rhetorical criticism to the realm of video games, it is vital to gain an understanding of the history and scholarship of the medium, field, and its nomenclature. Next, a closer examination of the predominant issues being debated in academic game criticism is warranted. In addition, an overview of contemporary rhetorical techniques as they apply to the arena of video game studies will help orient this study in terms of its direction and scope. Finally, the literature review will examine the current, albeit limited research attempting to mesh rhetorical criticism with video game studies, and illuminate areas for closer analysis that have largely been ignored, particularly with respect to communication studies.

Games and Play

What is a game? Anscombe (1999), translates Wittgenstein: "How should we know what a game is? I imagine that we should describe games to him, and we might add: 'This and similar things are called 'games.' And do we not know any more about it

ourselves? Is it only other people whom we cannot tell exactly what a game is? But this is not ignorance. We do not know the boundaries because none have been drawn." (p. 69). This quote presents a rather daunting challenge, to try to define what a game is when no consensus exists on what a game "is" versus what a game "is not". Moreover, it is vital to adopt a working definition of a game as such that will allow for fluid movement to what a video game is for the purposes of this study.

To begin, an examination of not what a game is, but what it does is a worthwhile starting point. The function of a game, generally speaking, is to "play" it (Buckingham, 2006). Therefore, it logically follows that a brief review of play is first required before attempting to define what a game is. Interestingly, the distinction itself is a peculiarity of the English language, since the words and meaning for "game" and "play" in other languages such as German and French are virtually synonymous (Parlett, 1999).

As previously mentioned, Huizinga (1949) asserted that games are the more formalized version of play, which itself predates human civilization. In his book *Homo Ludens: A study of the Play Element in Culture*, he states "Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing." (p. 1). More notably, the French sociologist Roger Callois (1961) divided play into what he termed "four main rubrics" (p. 13). These are: "agôn, alea, mimicry, and ilinix, respectively." (p. 13). Noting here that the words are synonymous in his native French, Callois (1961) explains these as games of competition, games of chance, games of simulation, and games of vertigo. Importantly, he follows up this taxonomy by coining two terms still widely used in video game studies to this day: paidia and ludus.

Paidia is, according to Callois (1961), "carefree gaiety" (p. 13) and has been interpreted by video game scholars such as Frasca (1999) and Shields (2009) as the act by a gamer of playing a game in the manner they please without regard for the rules, proscribed objectives, or intended purpose of the game. To clarify, a video gamer engaging in paidia might play *Mario Kart Wii* (2008) simply to cause opponents to crash instead of trying to win the race, play a college basketball game to see if a created player designed after their legal communication professor can score 100 points in a game regardless of team outcome, or play *WoW* (*World of Warcraft*) simply to explore the world of Azeroth and interact with people with no regard for quests or character development.

Ludus, on the other hand, refers to following the rules and proscribed intent of the game designer, and is often used by video game scholars such as Frasca (1999), Juul (1999, 2001), and Salen and Zimmerman (2003) to describe "meaningful play". Clearly, these scholars fall into the ludologist disposition of video game studies in their determination of one type of play as more meaningful than another based on privileging the system component of a game over player experience. Thus, with a (very) brief review of play conducted, it is time to turn the focus to the concept of what a game is.

Avedon and Sutton-Smith (1971) cite Homer and Plato, amongst others, who describe the games played during their era. They also mention similar cultural artifacts depicting games from China and the Middle East, and discuss several books from the 1600's through the late 1800's which focused on games and their play. Games have been studied for centuries, from ancient times to the present, and the presumed purpose of games is to play them. Still, while beginning to formalize textually what, exactly, a game

is, for centuries games have only been defined by the rather nebulous "formalized system of play" definition.

Scholars have not come to a consensus on any one definition of what a game is; several examples emerge from the writings of Avendon and Sutton-Smith (1971), Callois (1961), Crawford (1984), Huizinga (1949), Salen and Zimmerman (2003), and Parlett (1999). It is not the intent of this study to weigh the relative merits of each independent definition, rather, it is to find amongst the extant literature a workable definition which best applies to the emerging field of video game studies. In his keynote address at the conference of the Digital Games Research Association, Juul (2003) defined a game as "a rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable." Simply put games are, according to Shields (2009), "systems composed of designer-created symbols with which players can interact in proscribed meaningful ways." (p. 8).

While by no means an exhaustive or wholly inclusive definition, the above Juul (2003) and Shields (2009) definitions provide a functional starting point from which to move to a working definition of video games. While there are various definitions for what a video game is, according to Perron and Wolf (2009), "The definition of an object and the vindication of its examination are certainly representative in the defining of a new field of research. For the most part. . . .video game studies has passed beyond this stage." (p. 4). Widely considered the preeminent video game scholar of today, Juul (2005), has advanced a simple working definition that is widely accepted by a majority of video

game scholars in stating that a video game is: "Generally speaking, a game played using computer power and a video display. Can be computer, cell phone, or console game." (p. 5).

Having established, albeit selectively, what a game is, and from that, what a video game is, we next review extant video game research to show what video game studies have focused on, and what has to date been overlooked.

Extant Video Game Research

While video game studies are a rapidly expanding field of research and inquiry, most traditional video game studies have focused largely on defining and articulating the field of video game studies, and on effects, primarily sociological, that video games may produce upon those who play them. There has been little research on gamers themselves beyond effects-driven analyses of video games which drew upon Gerbner's (1976a) cultivation theory, Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, or on the experiential aspects of playing a game (see for example Santos and White, 2005)**.**

Extant video game study research includes a large contextual study and genre classification published in two texts by Wolf (2000, 2002), a study on the marginalization of femininity in video games (Consalvo, 2003), an examination of the experience and role of presence in playing video games (Tamborini and Skalski, 2006), as well as numerous studies of gaming effects on violence, aggression, and cognitive constructs of the players (see for example Lin & Leper, 1987; Funk, 1992; Sherry, 2001).

Some other, novel applications of social scientific theory to video game research endeavors include Davidson's (2003) paper presented to the International Game Developers Association in their "Ivory Tower" forum on a rhetorical look at game play

within the game itself, and Whitlock's (2005) "Beyond Linear Narrative: Augusto Boal Enters Norrath" article, which touches upon Boal's (1985) interactive drama theory and applies it to MMO's (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games). Tocci's (2008) "You are dead. Continue?" examination of interactivity vs. narrativity in character death during game play and Tyler's (2008) "A Procrustean Probe" application of McLuhan's four digital laws of media to game play are other notable applications and modifications of social scientific theory to the realm of video games. Lastly, Bogost (2007) and Shields (2009) have both conducted studies on the rhetoric of game play itself, the former via what he calls the "procedural rhetoric" of video games to other realms such as politics and advertising, and the latter via a semiotic and rhetorical analysis of the "purpose" of the video game *Tropico*.

Outside the realm of the social sciences, MMO's have even been used by epidemiologists to help study human behavior and reaction to theoretical plague conditions, such as when *WoW* developers at Blizzard Entertainment created an artificial plague as an encoded virus in a particular dungeon level. This "plague" quickly spread beyond the level the developers intended once players determined how to move it outside the confines of the dungeon, and "leapt" from server to server. Some players actively participated in spreading the "plague", while others ignored Blizzard programmers' advice to quarantine themselves. Still others isolated themselves within the game, going so far as to kill any characters who came near where they had holed up. In short, people acted in a completely random and unpredictable manner[1].

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[1] Known as the "Corrupted Blood Incident", this virtual plague has achieved legendary status amongst *WoW* gamers, computer programmers, and epidemiologists alike. In addition to the epidemiological studies referenced in the text, an excellent summary by a computer security firm of the incident and its aftermath can be found at http://www.securityfocus.com/news/11330.

Balicer (2007a) subsequently suggested studying how players reacted to this epidemic as useful for epidemiologists because he postulated that while within a virtual world, gamers acted randomly in much the same way as people would in a real-life epidemic. He did not suggest that gamer behavior would mimic their real-world choices in a similar circumstance, rather, he suggested the randomness of all player reaction and behavior could be useful to study on a macro-scale. A follow up study by Balicer (2007b) in conjunction with the Linden Research Group has subsequently proposed utilizing the MMO *Second Life* as a "virtual laboratory" to continue this line of research.

 Beyond the more rigorous academically-based articles, others have entered the foray of applied video game research, such as a college course at The University of Denver over online ethnography of *WoW* and the subsequent creation of student outputs "in order to craft documents that effectively met the rhetorical needs for that community", (Retrieved: http://writ1133.richardcolby.net/node/1) or the development of an interactive video game by University of Texas graduate students called "Rhetorical Peaks" for use in introductory rhetoric and writing courses (Retrieved: http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/gaming_issue_2008/King_Rhetorical_peaks/index.html).

However, while video game research is a rapidly expanding field of social scientific inquiry, its relatively embryonic nature for the most part still limits publication in primary journals to effects driven analysis. Applications and/or modifications of extant theory to the realm of video games, or theoretical postulates unique to video games, are often left to newer journals, most of which are online, several of which are still considered "fringe". Specifically, in terms of gamer rhetoric outside the realm of the game itself, there have been almost no studies conducted. As stated by Williams (2006),

"…it is not particularly surprising that attention has remained focused on what games do *to* people, and not what people do *with* games." (emphasis added, p.208)

In other words, while extant video game research has examined video games from a variety of perspectives using a variety of analytical tools, nearly all minimize at best, or largely ignore how gamers talk about games. In particular, only a few examine video games either within or outside the realm of in-game chat and communication with one another, and nearly all major communication studies journals ignore both this research avenue, as well as video games themselves. As the function of video games is to play them, attempting to study and interact with gamers in-game as an observer-participant is highly challenging and time consuming, which may explain this phenomenon.

Video Games and Communication Studies

Currently, there remains a dearth of research from a communication standpoint reflecting the views of gamers themselves concerning their view of the games they play. A systematic content search of 11 leading communication scholarly journals from January 2000- August 2009 (*Communication Monographs*, *Communications Quarterly*, *Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *Communication Research*, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, *Human Communication Research*, *Communication Theory*, *Communication Studies, and Quarterly Journal of Speech*) revealed only thirteen articles analyzing video games or gamers. Of those, all but two centered on effects based research concerning what games do to people, (latent violence effects a la Gerbner's (1976a) cultivation theory, Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, etc.) and none

focused on communication between gamers beyond basic discussion of gamers responses to game stimuli or telepresence.

Therefore, most video game research only tangentially includes any communicative aspect beyond the aforementioned effects-driven analyses, which generally eschew the communicative processes in lieu of the end results (or lack thereof) of playing a particular video game. With respect to the most primary form of communication, talk, there exists limited scholarly research with respect to the study of video games and their players.

One study of particular note which examined video games via an audience-centered approach was performed by Consalvo (2007) study in her book *Cheating: Gaining advantage in videogames*. She conducted an online ethnography of several multiplayer and MMO based videogames, and interviewed players on their views of cheating and cheaters in those types of games. This study is both useful and important, since it is the first to tackle, at least partially, gamer talk in-game (albeit as only a smaller ethnological part of a larger interview based out-game talk research piece centering only on the aspect of cheating). Beyond that, as Consalvo and Dutton (2007) argue, there has been "little or no effort to develop a method for the qualitative, critical analysis of games" (p. 1).

Beyond Consalvo's (2007) research focusing on gamer talk, there have been a few other examples of video game research focusing on gamer talk. These studies include a brief mention by Juul (1999) of gamer storytelling outside the realm of games, an explication of the typologies of gamer in-game talk in a multiplayer game by Wright, Boria, and Breidenbach (2002), a study on socioemotional valence of in-game text

messages conducted by Pena and Hancock (2006), interviews of gamers on the social life of guilds in *WoW* by Williams et al. (2006), an analysis of the lifecycle of Chinese MMO gamers via content analysis of gamer rhetoric on message boards conducted by Jiang (2008), and a rhetorical criticism of the purpose of the video game *Tropico* by Shields (2009).

If video games themselves have received little attention from communication scholars in the past, the process of gamers' sharing of their in-game experiences with other gamers as an important communication phenomenon has been ignored to an even greater extent by scholars. As previously stated, little research has been done on gamers' in-game talk (see for example Duchenault et al., 2006) due to the complications of attempting to study in-game phenomenon, particularly player interaction, since the function of games is primarily to play them. Within an MMO, a researcher encounters several issues, some ethical (undercover ethnology within a "guild" or online adventure team) and some practical (attempting to study gamer interaction while playing the game limits the game play and could create an Asch or Milgram effect).

Thus, analyzing video games from a communication perspective proves to be challenging. Little research has been conducted which privileges the communicative processes which take place either within the game between players, or outside the game. As attempting to study in-game talk is exceptionally difficult, focusing on out-game talk is the most salient avenue from which to pursue analysis that focuses on communication. With respect to out-game talk, the primary arenas where this type of communication is most prevalent occurs in game-specific blogs and message boards.

Online Community & Blogs

The notion of studying gamer talk is a critical one. It is in the process of sharing meaning that people come to understand what they have experienced; one might go so far as to argue that, through this sharing, the experience itself is fundamentally changed; some aspects are forgotten, while others are emphasized and enhanced. As an example, studies of online message boards provide insight into the importance of online discussion both as an artifact for discovery and review, and to the individuals participating.

There have been numerous studies on the subject of online community, primarily relating to message boards and blogs (see for example Baym, 2000, Preece, 2001, Andrews, 2002, and Blood, 2004). These studies primarily seek to identify and define what an online community is, what it does, who(m) it serves, and in what capacity.

According to Andrews (2002), "Community is no longer defined as a physical place, but as a set of relationships where people interact socially for mutual benefit. Online community is a social network that uses computer support as the basis of communication among members instead of face-to-face interaction." (emphasis added, p. 64). Therefore, online communities are places where individuals go to participate in sharing meaning with one another, usually on forum-proscribed topics that are as abundant as those found in the "real world". Forum topics are limited only by the online administrator's discretion and the input of the participants, and can include anything from baking tips to sports teams, soap operas to video games.

As previously discussed, research into video game online communities has been relatively limited; indeed the only primary studies which examine online gaming communities are the aforementioned Jiang (2006) and Consalvo (2007) studies on

Chinese *WoW* gamers and video game cheaters, respectively. However, non-video game related research on online communities, such as Baym's (2000) study of message board interactions concerning soap opera fandom, provide support to the assertion that online interactions are both real and important to many individuals who participate. Baym's (2000) study reviewed fandom of soap operas, and the online discussions by participants on a message board devoted to them.

The study found that for the participants, the story and interactions of the characters on the soap opera were very real and highly important to those who engaged in the discussions. Arguments, flaming (a buzzword used to describe message board posts which serve only to attack, disparage, and "enflame" others), alliances and debates were all commonplace on the forum. Additionally, as certain more prolific members of the board became well known to the participants, they assumed characterizations such as "the one who flames", or "the one who loves X character but hates Y character". As Baym (2000) discusses, there were also several tangential offshoots from the primary focus of the message board (soap operas) as many participants also began to discuss issues unrelated to the soap opera such as pregnancy, marriage, and life in general.

These discussions, along with the mainstream ones concerning the message board forum topic of soap operas, eventually developed into what Baym (2000) referred to as "online communities" in which the participants were highly invested. Moreover, these online communities helped to reify the objectified experience by the participants and become a "community of practice"--an interesting corollary whether the subject is a TV show or an online video game.

Along with online forums, another significant presence in online talk is the weblog, or "blog" as it is commonly referred. According to blogger Dave Winer, who currently operates the longest running blog on the internet, "Weblogs are often-updated sites that point to articles elsewhere on the web, often with comments, and to on-site articles. A weblog is kind of a continual tour, with a human guide who you get to know. There are many guides to choose from, each develops an audience, and there's also comraderie and politics between the people who run weblogs, they point to each other, in all kinds of structures, graphs, loops, etc." (Retrieved: http://newhome.weblogs.com/historyOfWeblogs/).

Just as message boards provide a forum for multiple users to engage in communication via interaction or merely "lurking" (reading but not posting), blogs provide a forum for an individual or individual to post their thoughts and feelings on any number of topics. While a blogger is usually not restricted to any one topic, many stick to one arena as an efficient way to find, develop, and maintain a core-audience of interested individuals. Additionally, while the first blogs were merely information portals, as technology has advanced many newer blogs now feature an additional comment section which allows the followers of a blog to respond to the author and one another. As Blood (2004) asserts, "For many, Weblogs are unthinkable without comments and the community of readers that comments make visible. Indeed, some have criticized comment-free Weblogs as an inferior form of broadcast media." (p. 5).

Therefore, it has been determined that online communities exist, both in online message board forums and blogs, and that the interactions and sharing of meaning in these communities is both real and important to their members. Thus, it can be logically

inferred that it is vital to examine gamer talk outside of games in their online communities, focusing specifically on gamer rhetoric in blogs and message boards where interaction is not limited or bottlenecked by game play. Ludologists, or game theorists who reject the notion of games as being narrative, tend to agree. For example, Juul (1999) describes this "out-game rhetoric" as "stories" about game play while largely dismissing the actual game play as stories themselves.

Perhaps even more telling, however, is the ability of examining rhetorical outputs of gamers for "deep meaning", to also provide important findings even for game scholars who view true gaming as paidia. What kinds of things might someone who plays a game simply for the sake of playing, uninhibited by gaming rules, objectives, or constraints, find important or interesting? Rather than spend time arguing about what games are or are not via sacrosanct definitions and partisan semantics, examining how gamers, themselves, talk about and reflect upon games provides the impetus to "begin at the beginning" by studying gamers talking about games free from paradigmatic constraint.

Rhetoric and Gaming

Earlier in the chapter two studies were mentioned which apply rhetorical criticism to the realm of video games. Both Bogust (2007) and Shields (2009) argue for the inclusion of video games as an artifact that can be rhetorically analyzed. Bogust is among the first to argue that since media studies already analyze visual rhetoric, videogames, thanks to their basic representational mode of procedurality (rule-based representations and interactions), open a new domain for persuasion; they realize a new form of rhetoric. He coins a new term, "procedural rhetoric" by which he argues that

video games are in some ways symbolic manipulation, and points to politics, marketing, and education as three arenas where this is most evident.

Shields (2009) uses semiotic analysis to break down a video game into its various sign-based components and rule-based structure, and then analyzes the strategy game *Tropico* for its rhetorical "purpose". While both of these studies provide an exploratory foray and justification into videogames as rhetoric, neither focus on the rhetoric of gamers as it relates to the games themselves.

Furthermore, both studies deploy rhetorical criticism from the lens that the game seeks to persuade in some manner. While this is certainly a traditional manner to employ rhetorical criticism, and both authors adapted a novel approach to it, it presupposes that a game has a primary or secondary agenda enmeshed with the game. This tends to lead the authors away from the individuals playing the game and their attitudes, values, and beliefs concerning the game and game play itself.

In that matter, to the current study's way of thinking, these authors put the cart before the horse. What do the people who actually play the game think about the game? This, it would seem, is the appropriate overarching question to ask. Therefore, an expanded analysis of gamers' out-game rhetoric is essential to gain a better understanding of not simply what a game is to those who play it, but also what it does.

Method

5:00 A.M.
I've been up all night . . . . I'm moving in bleary slow motion. The bear growling in my belly and the now-quite-extreme preeruption-geyser pressure in my intestines are telling me that it's time to do something else for a while, something healthy, something life-affirming. But I've learned to ignore my own physical complaints. The needs of the real body come second. I have more important things to worry about than bursting bladders, sleep-deprivation-induced psychosis, and a stomach beginning to digest its own lining. I'm focused on what's important in life—the game. (Kelly II, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games, 2004, p. 5).

Introduction

In *A Grammar of Motives* (1945), noted philosopher and rhetorical scholar Kenneth Burke asked a seminal question which would influence many of the liberal arts disciplines significantly thereafter: "What is involved when we say what people are doing and why?" (p. xv). The subtext contained within this question in turn becomes reflective of the title of the book. The portion "when we say what people are doing" (p. xv) alludes to one of Burke's primary contentions. Namely, that language arose as human beings tried to communicate and relate with one another to understand about things in the world around them. This language, this grammar, as Burke (1945) refers to it, is the first concept contained within the above statement.

Second, Burke's (1945) ending of the sentence with "why?" (p. xv) refers to his notion of motives, inasmuch as he utilizes the term there specifically for discussion of language choice. As Burke (1945) relates, "Strictly speaking, we mean by a Grammar of motives a concern with the terms alone, without reference to the ways in which their potentialities have been or can be utilized in actual statements about motives" (p. xv). The "terms" Burke (1945) is referring to are the elements of the dramatistic pentad, which in turn form the bedrock for his methodological approach of dramatism.

As briefly discussed in Chapter Two, the dramatistic approach--and within it Burke's pentad--is the selected tool for this analysis. The reasoning behind this choice is simple: There is this thing, this artifact, which exists. In this case it is a video game. It has been established that video games are a significant cultural phenomenon which have interesting communicative implications in terms of the sharing of meaning between the gamers themselves. This sharing of meaning, this intersubjectivity as Schutz (1932) would call it, is constructed through their language choice in out-game talk. From this intersubjective out-game talk, gamer motives and indeed self-identities can be unearthed. Foss (1996) agrees with the above statement, in her explication of pentadic criticism as "a means to understand the way in which a rhetor encompasses a situation through rhetoric – through the selection and highlighting of particular terms" (p. 457).

The video game itself, and through it the gamers who play it, represent an ideal arena upon which to focus the lens of pentadic analysis. As Shields (2009) states, "Since the world created by certain video games are recreations of a series of events, then the five elements of dramatistic theory – the act, the agent, the agency, the purpose and the scene – are also present" (p. 1). If the game "world" recreates a series of events, and gamers play a role within that MMO (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) game world (which is itself a kind of virtual "stage"), then it makes sense that their out-game rhetoric would be a reflection of the game play. The game world is a place where gamers perform, on various levels (or "scenes"), often with purpose. Therefore, their rhetorical outputs related to that role in its arena dovetail nicely with various aspects and ratios of the pentad, from act to agent, agency to scene.

The choice to employ pentadic criticism for the analysis of video game rhetoric is therefore a parsimonious one. According to Foss (1996) "the critic who wishes to use pentadic criticism as the source for units of analysis approaches an artifact in four steps: (1) selecting an artifact; (2) selecting a unit of analysis; (3) analyzing the artifact; and (4) writing the critical essay" (457). In this study, the artifact is the out-game rhetoric of *WoW* gamers, and the unit of analysis is their individual comments in the *WoW*-centric blogs. Analysis occurs via pentadic analysis, for the reasons outlined above. Prior to delving into the intricacies of pentadic analysis, however, we must first more closely examine Burke's (1945) treatment of language and representative anecdote in *Grammar*.

Reduction and Scope

Throughout his prolific career, one of Burke's primary assertions was that all language is inherently symbolic. That is to say, a symbol only has meaning inasmuch as it also has a limit to its meaning. As a relatively basic example, to say something is a tree is to say it adheres to the conventions of what that particular language has determined encompasses what a tree is. At the same time, saying something is a tree is also, as one example, to say that it is not a human. Conversely, while conventionally a heuristic for most people, saying that someone is a human implies that they are also "not tree" amongst millions of other heuristic taxonomies. Burke (1945) clarifies this: "The most thoroughgoing dialectical opposition, however, centers in that key pair: being and Not-Being. The process of transcendence may, of course, be reversed" (p. 34).

Burke (1945) clarifies this idea of language as symbolism vis-à-vis his concepts of scope and reduction, whereby one's vocabulary has scope which reflects reality, but also inherently contains reduction by which those same words exclude some meanings:

Men seek for vocabularies that will be faithful reflections of reality. To this end,

they must develop vocabularies that are reflections of reality. And any selection

of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a deflection of reality.

Insofar as the vocabulary meets the needs of reflection, we can say that it has the

necessary scope. In its selectivity, it is a reduction. Its scope and reduction

become a deflection when the given terminology, or calculus, is not suited to the

subject matter it is designed to calculate. (p. 59).

Representative Anecdote

Closely tied to the concepts of scope and reduction is Burke's (1945)

conceptualization of the "representative anecdote" (RA), which serves people as a form

of equipment for living via language and symbolism to help recreate reality. RA's

function much as their name suggests. In a particular culture or community, there exist

stories, or anecdotes. These stories are widespread and varied, but over time one

particular story begins to become, for lack of a better term, "dominant". This story

appears repeatedly over time in that particular community or culture, and while there may

be minor discrepancies, the essence of the story remains unchanged. While this story

may have preexisted the individual's within said culture or community's speaking of

them, it is in the speaking of or about them that they gain significance. Thus the anecdote

becomes representative of that particular culture or community's overarching ideology.

In many respects, then, a representative anecdote is similar to a mythology.

Individual myths reveal a mythology, but the entire mythology isn't present in any single

myth – together the stories constitute the mythology. And, just like a mythology, RA's

preexisted before specific individuals comment on or about them (in this case on blogs

and message boards related to the *World of Warcraft*, a.k.a. *WoW*). However, the
individuals focusing on the subject at hand (in this case *WoW*) are all familiar with the
RA, because in essence it shapes their worldview and informs their thoughts and actions,
and there exist hints of it in the gamer talk. In actuality, an RA does exactly that – shapes
the language that the gamers use.

These RA's are products of selection and can inspire different incarnations
amongst those sharing meaning as the RA is communicated about, analyzed, and
criticized. As Burke (1945) states, the RA is both "supple and complex" (p. 60), meaning
that while it is "a unifying central position around which to construct terminology"
(Shields, 2009, p. 22), it does possesses the ability to adapt and change, and may possess
degrees of differentiation amongst the audience. Examining the dataset for a potential
RA which shapes *WoW* gamers' worldviews as well as how they experience the world of
game play is one avenue which requires investigation.

Burke (1945) states that "A representative case of human motives must have a
strong linguistic bias" (p. 59), thereby linking the notion of the RA to that of drama. He
explains:

> It is enough to observe that the issue arises as soon as one considers the relation
> between representation and reduction in the choice and development of a
> motivational calculus. A given calculus must be supple and complex enough to
> be representative of the subject matter it is designed to calculate. It must have
> scope. Yet it must possess simplicity, in that it is broadly a reduction of the
> subject matter. And by selecting drama as our representative, or informative
> anecdote, we meet these requirements. (p.60).

According to Shields (2009), "By motivational calculus Burke is referencing the product of an applied methodology – an argument as to who or what in any given artifact can be said to be the origin of action as opposed to motion" (p. 23). Shields (2009) continues: "At the moment that a distinction is drawn between action and motion and thus often when a situation is described, humans will attribute action to a myriad of things. This is the subject of dramatism" (p. 23). Shields (2009) assertion therefore draws attention back to the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, namely "what people are doing and why" (Burke, 1945, p. xv). The five terms of the pentad were Burke's (1945) methodological response attempting to investigate and potentially solve that question.

Analysis of RA's has not been limited merely to the conventions of traditional rhetorical artifacts, either. Brummet (1984), for example, advocated for both the deployment and analysis of RA's as a means of enhanced media criticism, whereby "the representative anecdote is a lens, filter, or template through which a critic studies and reconstructs the discourse. Subsequently, the critic represents the essence of the discourse by viewing it as if it follows a dramatic plot (Harter & Japp, 2001, p. 412).

Furthermore, Harter and Japp (2001) argue that the analysis of RA's is beneficial to understanding a particular culture:

A representative anecdote establishes parameters, norms, and hierarchies while developing and reinforcing language and other symbol systems that will operate within its boundaries. As such, the representative anecdote is especially valuable for a critical analysis of the implicit assumptions and values held by a particular culture as manifested in that culture's mediated texts (p. 413).

This quote is especially telling with respect to the analysis of gamer rhetoric within the subset of both gamers as a whole and MMO players specifically. Harter and Japp's (2001) argument that attempting to identify RA's helps "get at" the core culture of a group meshes well with this pentadic analysis of what is important to video gamers, what it is, rhetorically, they privilege in their sharing of meaning.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, a RA functions as a pseudo-mythology of a given rhetorical artifact. It is a "transcendent binding" which individuals in a given community (in this case online *WoW* gaming community blogs and message boards) repeatedly return to via their language choice and the rhetorical outputs they privilege. This occurs via either quality (or forcefulness and complexity of statements) or quantity (repetition of statements or similarly-themed statements) of their comments. Once it has been identified, the RA provides a framework by which to understand the specific pentadic elements, and from them pentadic ratios, in the gamer talk. The question then becomes, how do these ratios help the gamers relate to this symbolic world they've created? To answer this, it is important to first identify and discuss the elements of the pentad as they relate to dramatism as a whole.

Elements of the Pentad

As an explanation for motive, Burke (1945) identified five key terms in dramatism which he referred to as the pentad. These terms are act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. The act describes what took place, the scene discusses the background of the act or "situation", agent refers to what person or type of person performed the act, agency describes the "means or instruments used", and purpose indicates the reason for

the act. (p. xv). There is also a "sixth element" of the pentad, "attitude", which more clearly addresses the "manner" or "how" (p. 20).

Burke (1945) then aligns Aristotle's six elements of tragedy with the elements of the pentad as such to show the relationship of the pentad to the conventions of drama: 1) Plot to act, 2) Character to agent, 3) Thought to purpose, 4) Spectacle to scene, 5) Melody and 6) Diction to agency. His overall intent with the Grammar was to illuminate the power of the pentad for getting at people's motivations: "We hope to make clear the ways in which the dialectical and metaphysical issues necessarily figure in the subject of motivation. Our speculations, as we interpret them, should show that the subject of motivation is a philosophic one, not ultimately to be solved in terms of empirical science." (p. xviii).

Burke (1945) also spends some time discussing the concept of "ratios" between the various elements of the pentad. As there are 5 terms in the pentad (with "attitude" being a potential sixth), there are 10 possible primary ratios. Of course, when considering the flip-flopping of a container and thing contained the number of ratios increases, and Burke (1945) himself alludes to the fact that in the end the elements of the pentad are like the bones of our fingers; they all meet at the hand. Therefore, "true" ratios will contain all elements in some order. Despite this revelation, however, such an analysis of all five elements in some ratio form is too complex for this study, so more simple primary ratios are the focus.

Among the primary ratios, Burke (1945) spends most of his time discussing the scene-act and scene-agent ratios, while taking some time to discuss the "ubiquity" of the ratios and cautioning against "the many guises which the five terms may assume in

various casuistries" (p. 11). He mentions that the order of the terms in the ratios is arbitrary and may be shifted around to gain more insightful analysis of a particular artifact. He also notes "that all the ratios are essentially analogies. That is, by a "scene-act ratio" we mean that the nature of the act is implicit, or analogously present, in the nature of the scene, etc" (p. 444).

Along with the concept of ratios, Burke (1945) introduced the notion of "container and thing contained" (p. 1) whereby one element of the pentad contains another element. As an example, the scene contains the act, the act contains the purpose, etc. This in turn leads to one of the central concepts of dramatism, in that with "container" vs. "thing contained" one term takes on a position of dominance. Referring back to chapter one, it is important to note that many dramatistic studies simply point out the ratio and dominant term without getting at the significance or purpose of that ratio and dominant term for the people communicating, despite Burke's (1945) admonition that getting at the symbolic intent of an artifact, at the *raison d'etre* of the rhetoric, is the express purpose of the methodology of *A Grammar of Motives*.

Sample

This study examines gamers out-game rhetoric on two separate blogs. The first blog selected is one of the most active blogs for both postings and reader commentary, entitled "Breakfast Topics" and found on the "official" *WoW* blogosphere (Retrieved: http://wow.joystiq.com/). It is important to note here that this website was formerly located at http://www.wow.com before changing its domain name in the fall of 2010 to the aforementioned joystiq.com. This forum selects a current or hot topic and poses a question or questions about it to the blog readers, and is posted early in the morning as a

sort of unofficial *WoW* "newspaper", except instead of waiting on the front porch when a gamer wakes up, it waits online. In this manner the "Breakfast Topics" forum manages to keep its finger directly on the pulse of *WoW* player opinion for the most up-to-date and topical issues surrounding *WoW* at that point in time.

The second blog selected came from one of the (formerly) most active "unofficial" (read: non Blizzard sponsored) blogs, entitled Frostbolt (Retrieved: http://frostbolt.com). As stated above, while Frostbolt still "hits" at the top of many search queries for *WoW* blogs due to its formerly immense popularity, at the time of data collection the blog author was in the process of disengaging from *WoW* altogether. This distinction between those who are clearly fully engaged in, and devoted to, *WoW* vs. someone whom is voluntarily leaving that world provides a fascinating diametric by which to view the game.

In order to justify the selection of the sample, I employed the following selection process. First, the web search engine Google as well as the independent blog traffic analysis portal Big Boards were used as a manner of information discovery. These sites were chosen primarily due to the former's position as the dominant, and widely-considered most thorough search engine on the internet, and the latter's specialized role analyzing blog site traffic in real-time. All the arenas selected for analysis were chosen due to high user traffic as evidenced by frequency of posts as well as Google trends (Retrieved: http://www.google.com/trends) and Big Boards data (Retrieved: http://www.big-boards.com/) as well as to provide a voice to gamers both within and outside the confines of officially sanctioned *WoW* gamer-generated rhetoric. By selecting

popular, high-traffic blogs and message boards both within and outside the "official"
realm of *WoW*, the potential for enhanced breadth and depth of data is increased.

While utilizing Google could be considered simple convenience sampling taken
to the penultimate level, the use of Google to locate online communities for *WoW* is a
justifiable choice. Considering that Google is the primary choice as a search engine for
internet users, it is logical to infer that a substantial number of typical *WoW* players most
likely use Google to search for online communities. Therefore, it makes logical sense to
begin from the same theoretical starting point (query term differences notwithstanding).
With respect to Big Boards, having a secondary, independent site to help locate or
corroborate high-traffic *WoW* blogs proved highly beneficial.

Google search queries for the words "WoW Blog", "World of Warcraft Blog",
"Warcraft Blog" and "List of Warcraft Blogs" led to similar "hit" results in each search
iteration. At the top or near the top among these was, of course, the "official" *WoW* blog
(Retrieved: http://www.wow.com/). However, two other top "hits" included both an
unofficial conglomerate "bloggers blog" website, Twisted Nether (Retrieved:
http://wiki.twistednether.net/index.php?title=WoW_Blog_List) as well as an independent
unofficial blog called Frostbolt (Retrieved: http://frostbolt.com/).

Twisted Nether, in addition to being an unofficial audio blog (otherwise known as
a "podcast") of all things *WoW*, also tracks other *WoW* blogs and serves as a *WoW*
information portal. As of July 14, 2010, there were over 500 registered *WoW* blogs
according to Twisted Nether's index, many in specific subgenres. Some examples of
subgenre *WoW* blogs include ones in Portuguese (http://worldofwarcraftbrasil.com/),
Spanish (http://stercusmoriturussum.com/), sites for women (http://wow-heroine.com/)

and several dozen for each specific *WoW* character class, dungeon raiding tips, gold generation, and guild management/strategy.

The second top "hit" from the initial search queries, Frostbolt, proved to be an exceptionally serendipitous find. This is primarily due to the fact that at the time the site was located and data retrieved, the blogger (and also the webmaster of the site) was in the process of formally quitting *WoW* after 4+ years of extensive play. This is of particular importance to the study as a whole for a few reasons.

First, the study is primarily focusing on the rhetoric of "typical" *WoW* gamers. Referring back to chapter one, according to Kelly II (2004), "Ordinary players typically spend 20 to 30 hours a week in these worlds, but obsessed players spend every night, every weekend, every vacation—for years at a time—forgoing food, sleep, and real human companionship just to experience more time in the virtual world" (pp. 13-14). This means that typical players are highly invested in the game, both emotionally and financially.

Being able to compare and contrast the rhetoric of the "typical" *WoW* player with someone who has chosen to leave something which clearly exhibits a powerful hold on its users provides the opportunity to unearth fascinating data. And not just on what makes the game so fundamentally important to its players, but also on what makes it become unimportant to others. Gahlok, the blogger who created and ran Frostbolt, alludes to one reason why *WoW* can lose its hold on its players: "The game was probably fun until the last couple of months, for some reason I ended up thinking that WoW was just playing 5-6 hours a day, 5 days a week, which seemed like a job" (Retrieved: http://frostbolt.com/2009/09/25/the-end-of-a-jouney/).

While the wealth of blog information currently available is staggering, this study focuses primarily on more generalized, day-to-day narrative and conversation of "primary" blogs (blogs not specialized to specific audiences or subgenres). By avoiding highly specialized arenas of discussion, the study aims to illuminate the "typical" game player's rhetoric that is more applicable to *WoW* gamers as a whole, and MMO gamers in general.

Burke (1953) supports this notion in Counterstatement, where he discusses symbols being at their most powerful when they both follow conventional storylines and reflect real-world experience. Thus, the true influence/impact of the game comes through this process of communicating *about* the game in the blogs. Analyzing the rhetoric the gamers create will provide a wealth of rich data to mine for whatever it is (if anything) that gamers privilege in their online communities. As an analogy, one might consider the playing of *WoW* to be like a sporting event, and the blog commentary to be like the post-game press conference. Undoubtedly there is talk and communication amongst the players during the game, but it is in their intersubjectivity vis-à-vis their out-game talk that they begin to make sense of what they have experienced.

The data was collected over a two week timeframe between August 22, 2009 and September 5, 2009. The sum total of the data encompassed 23 blog posts, and 1,935 comments or "posts" responding to the initial blog posts (often with the blog author his or herself engaging in the comment debate) spanning 671 pages. While the sum total of blog posts was relatively small, the primary purpose of this study was not to analyze one or even a few individual's opinions on *WoW*, but rather many, and that "many" through

their interactions with one another talking about the game via their comments or "posts" to the blog.

The specific time frame for data collection was random, however, the length was selected for a few reasons. First, two weeks was selected because it represents a manageable sample size while still allowing for depth of analysis. Second, this study doubled in length the time frame of the study which is most similar to it. In that study, Jiang (2008) conducted a content-analysis of message board posts of *WoW* and *Mir II* gamers. By Jiang's (2008) own admission, the time frame in his study was too brief for anything beyond initial, cursory analysis, moreover, the study was a comparison of message types between two sets of gamers on two separate message boards. Finally, while the dataset selected for analysis in the present study may not be highly generalizable, it likely represents typical conversation about *WoW*, a game that at the time of data collection had been the dominant MMO for over four years.

In the interests of standardization, the blog posts and comments were copied and pasted into Microsoft Word using the default settings. The reason for this was pragmatic, in addition to providing hard copy without the banner ads found on the top and sides of these websites, rough comparisons can be made between the relative length of one blog and its resulting commentary to another, especially when considering the typical blog length on these particular boards is fairly standard.

To clarify, some of the blog posts from wow.com may have 170 comments but only be 48 pages long, whereas others may have 183 comments but be 65 pages in length. This reason for this 17 page discrepancy is evident upon reviewing the hard copy pages, inasmuch as the former has fewer, but also much less detailed comments. The latter, on

the other hand, has only a few more posts but is substantially longer because the

discussion generated both by the initial blog post as well as between the people

commenting is far more detailed and in-depth. Moreover, in several examples, heated

and sometimes even "flaming" style arguments can be seen to break out, further showing

the level of passion many individuals have for *WoW*.

While it is true the official blog has substantially higher volume of posts and

comments than the unofficial one, there is still worthwhile data to mine in both.

Additionally, the opportunity to compare and contrast not only the tone and tenor of the

respective blogs, but also get at a macro vs. micro level look at opinions on *WoW*, proved

exceptionally fortuitous**.** In the former, there is robust discussion between numerous

players about a myriad of contemporary *WoW* topics, whereas in the latter, there is

evidence of some negative feelings about the game from an individual perspective

outside the confines of an officially sanctioned *WoW* blog.

It is also important to note that initially an additional forum called

"Blogstorming" from an unofficial "bloggers blog" entitled Blog Azeroth (Retrieved:

http://blogazeroth.com/) was to be included in this analysis. However, after cursory

review of overall site activity as well as individual posts within the forum, the content

and frequency of posts were deemed insufficient to glean meaningful insight from (e.g.

only a few posts during the entire data collection period, and one or two sentence

maximum text from each post).

Method

This study, therefore, specifically focuses on first identifying a representative

anecdote in the gamer discourse, then subsequently using the RA as a lens to identify the

pentadic ratios at work within the gamer rhetoric, and finally on attempting to use the ratios as lenses to unpack the motives that drive the gamers. More specifically, the first step of the analysis is to identify the particular elements of the pentad which appear to be recurrent vis-à-vis a representative anecdote in gamers' "out-game" rhetoric. After the elements have been identified, the privileged or dominant elements will become more apparent and ratios will emerge depending upon which seems to be the "container" (primary importance ascribed by the rhetor) and which seems to be the "thing contained" (secondary importance ascribed by the rhetor). Both quality (or passion and complexity of statements) and quantity (repetition of statements or similarly-themed statements) will help better illuminate the ratios.

Finally, once the ratios have been identified, and specific ratios have proven to be dominant, a second review and analysis of the gamer's out-game rhetoric is conducted focusing on truly getting at what the gamers mean when they privilege a particular ratio or ratios in their out-game rhetoric. As noted in previous chapters, simply determining that a ratio such as an act-agent ratio is prevalent in gamer out-game rhetoric does not make the attempt to get at the "motives" of the gamer. Analyzing and attempting to explain the meaning behind the privileging of such ratios is what this study hopes to determine. By moving beyond a statement of "found ratios" to a frank discussion of potential motives that drive gamers, this study seeks to sidestep the pitfall of "premature rhetoriculation" common in many dramatistic criticisms. Furthermore, this analysis suggests some implications for future research based on dominant terms and identified ratios for MMO gamers as a whole and what that might suggest for the future of specific gaming avenues.

Blogger rhetoric was examined for statements in the blogs that reinforced (or contradicted, in places) the qualities of "realness" that *WoW* possesses as a narrative, as well as any topics which appear privileged either in the breadth or depth of discussion they generate. Specific attention was paid to how other bloggers may come to convince the original poster or other bloggers of the importance of the topic at hand, or of the "realness" of the *WoW* experience, both through their out-game rhetoric as well as their use of analogous real-world examples or narrative.

By doing so, the study seeks to illuminate the power of the game on gamers—not from the game itself—but from analyzing the players talk about the game. This in turn privileges the very "audience" for which the game was created. As previously asserted, too much focus in video game studies research "has been on what games do to people, and not what people do with games" (Williams, 2006, p. 208). This study bridges the communicative disconnect between extant research and future research endeavors to get at the heart of what people do with games by going straight to the source—the gamers who play them.

Discussion

The epiphany was stunning, powerful and immediate. I looked at the screen. And, all at once, my view of myself shifted. I became a gamer. There was no gradual building of subterranean pressure that would lead to a later tectonic shift, no subtle grinding of crusted plates. The earthquake struck quickly and without warning. And it was a 9.9 in the Richter scale. I had been one person before, gazing into a new world. And I became another person when I tried to turn away and couldn't. (Kelly II, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games, 2004, p. 9).

Introduction

Throughout this study, each chapter has begun with a quote by noted MMO

(Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) player-critic R. V. Kelly II (2004),

who even back when *WoW* (*World of Warcraft*) was in its infancy saw its potential to

become more than simply a game; rather, to become a lifestyle or in extreme cases a way

of life for gamers.

As one example, blog commenter wolfsterne wrote:

Basically...my wife and I are Blizzards bitches and happily so. we play the MMO,

the TCG[2] the mini game, we read the comics, the novels.. wear the clothing...go

to the Blizzcons...I have already related how much we play per day (which folks

were rather supportive of surprisingly) But it's what we do...hell we met at

Blizzcon 2005.... (wolfsterne, 2009, August 29).

One of the other things Kelly II (2004) mentioned in his prescient treatise on

MMO's in general, and *WoW* in particular, was the aspect of culture in MMO's and its

impact on the gamer's "way of life" within the game world. He specifically mentions

just a few of the many aspects of *WoW* culture that over the course of this analysis of

blogger and responder rhetoric emerged repeatedly. Often, this aspect relates directly to

the virtual world providing or enabling something which for the gamer the real world

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[2] "TCG" = the *WoW* tabletop card game

may lack. The culture of a MMO is shaped by the RA (Representative Anecdote), therefore discussing an MMO's culture (in this case *WoW*) helps us to begin the process of identifying it. Furthermore, understanding the culture within its specific historical context allows for better understanding of where *WoW* gamers' are coming from at that particular point in time.

Therefore, we shall begin with a general overview of *WoW* culture, and subsequently discuss the state of transition *WoW* was in, culturally, during the time data were collected due to the announcement of the *WoW* game expansion pack *Cataclysm*. After that, we will briefly review the data collection process as well as the steps taken in analyzing the dataset. Next, recurrent topics are identified which lead to the identification of themes within the gamers' out-game talk. From this analysis, we will discuss three themes that emerged from the dataset: 1) *WoW* is a repository of important experiences concretized via extant game lore, 2) *WoW* is reified for the gamers through their discussion of it in nostalgic terms, and 3) *WoW* is, for many of the gamers captured in this dataset, almost a necessity for them and in some ways a part of their self-identity.

Subsequently, the RA will be discussed in general terms. While the RA isn't spelled out explicitly in the dataset, it's clearly functioning among *WoW* players as *WoW* being, for its players, something that is important and matters a great deal to them. This RA finding is supported via selected examples from the dataset. After a review of several posts which hint at the RA as well as a discussion of the RA in general terms, the RA will then be unpacked and employed as a lens by which to identify dominant elements of the pentad privileged by *WoW* gamers' in their out-game talk. In this study, the dominant pentadic element is that of scene and the dominant pentadic ratio is scene-purpose. Next,

we shall discuss gamer motives of personal fulfillment to help encapsulate the pentadic

analysis and affirm the findings of the chapter to that point. Finally, the findings of the

chapter to that point will be compared and contrasted with the secondary "Frostbolt"

dataset to determine what might lead a gamer to leave *WoW*.

WoW Culture

Kelly II (2004) describes the virtual world of the MMO as being one of

"continuous progress", or as he eloquently puts it "something that is taken for granted in

every MMORPG but can be <u>conspicuously absent in real life</u>" (emphasis added, p. 24).

Also, he discusses the fact that in MMO's there is the element of the quest where positive

real-world things like experience and profit are found by seeking out danger[3], while

simultaneously eliminating the threat of true danger to the player's physical self.

Furthermore, this danger is almost universally sought out with a guild, an

organization of like-minded individuals created for the express purpose of aiding and

assisting the player with symbiotic interests at heart. Finally, Kelly II (2004) alludes to

the aspect of killing, the fact that in an MMO, gamers can live out self-liberating

fantasies such as committing murder without any legal repercussions. In short, MMO's,

and *WoW* in particular, allow its players to do things that for many of them are difficult if

not impossible in the real world, even when it seems as mundane as receiving

compliments, forging friendships, or feeling like a valued and productive member of a

team.

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[3] In WoW and other fantasy-themed MMO's, gold and experience points for a player are gained through "quests" such as raiding dungeons, storming an evil warlord's castle, or slaying a beast. In nearly all quests in fantasy-themed MMO's, there exists a very real threat to the player's character. Interestingly, this has led to a secondary or "black" market in the real world where money is exchanged via the website banking portal PayPal for virtual gold, items, or even fully developed characters.

The above paragraph is not intended to revisit the notion that all gamers, and *WoW* gamers in particular, are a bunch of antisocial nerds with poor hygiene and even poorer people skills. Rather, it is the exact opposite. It can be reasonably assumed that many well-adjusted, regular, "normal" people often find themselves unfulfilled in some aspect of their lives, and for some of them an escape to a virtual world such as *WoW* allows for them to obtain, at least in part, what they find lacking in the real world (Kelly II, 2004).

Additionally, the world of the MMO is in and of itself egalitarian. As Kelly II (2004) states, "In an MMORPG it doesn't matter how young and pretty you are, how svelte you are, what color your skin is, how much money you were born into, how well you did on your SAT's, or who you know. The only thing standing between you and success is you" (p. 63). This sense of a virtual, controllable manifest destiny for players undoubtedly adds to the appeal of the game and is also an area which elicits gamer talk as demonstrated in the data.

One final point concerning the generalities of the "typical" *WoW* gamer as Kelly II (2004) describes is that many times things in the virtual or game world will take on enhanced, even exaggerated importance when compared to an analogous real-world counterpart. Individuals may find themselves becoming more attached to an avatar they created than to a prized possession in the real world, or find that things which would stimulate little or no reaction in their daily lives suddenly become of extreme importance and enflame them in either the game arena or in the rhetorical out-game discussion forums.

Take, for instance, the statement by blog poster Rylka, concerning subscribing to a $9 per issue *WoW* magazine in the hopes of obtaining bonus in-game "pets"[4]: "Plus, my spouse is a serious in-game pet collector and is starting to collect mounts as well. If this subscription should happen to surprise me with any in-game goodies, I'm set for my next gift-giving holiday!!" Hopefully, Rylka and his/her spouse don't have a real pet they forget to feed while they tend to the needs of their virtual one!

Blog poster MoarHeroisms also appears to privilege the "reality" of some experiential aspects of *WoW*: "As a long-time *WoW* fanatic I'm excited about finally returning to the old world after years abroad. But as a collector of vanilla antiquities I'm nervous at the same time, wondering what will be taken out in the process." This quote is both fascinating and telling concerning the hold *WoW* has on some of its players. MoarHeroisms is, in essence, a "virtual antiquer", collecting items and relics from the original (or as *WoW* players refer to it, "vanilla") version of *WoW*. His post represents trepidation on what items he will no longer be able to locate and obtain, as well as concern about the potential value of items if they suddenly become obsolete in *WoW: Cataclysm* (either for in-game gold or real-world dollars).

Furthermore, MoarHeroisms uses the rhetorical phrase "years abroad", a reference that imports the real-world notion of being away from one's homeland and then returning. While not anywhere close to a Jeremiad, that simple phrase does invite some Jeremiadic comparisons with respect to a triumphant return to the motherland by the chosen. This comparison is further supported because in *WoW* once one leaves an area

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[4] "Pets" in WoW are simply virtual analogues to their real-world counterparts, albeit often fantastical or mythical in nature. They require regular care just as a real world pet does, and can "die" if not properly cared for. Also, generally speaking, they cannot virtually "reproduce" (so as to maintain their rarity and value). In recent years, these virtual pets have become a collector's item due to their scarcity and, in some cases, value either for in-game gold or real world dollars.

they rarely, if ever, get a chance to return to it since they are busy advancing their character by questing in new realms. While not expressly stated in most of the dataset by the posters, the notion of "The Great Journey" is a recurrent implied metaphor from many of the posters who privilege scene in their rhetorical outputs when discussing the "World" of Warcraft. This is likely due to the constant quests which take the *WoW* player to various locations across the ever-shifting landscape of the "World" of Warcraft.

The above examples, while extreme, do happen, and there are dozens of additional blog posts which support the validity of the phenomenon. But, most importantly, these examples hint at the RA which emerges from the gamer talk data. The importance of identifying this RA to the study overall must be restated: The RA provides the lens which crystallizes the study's focus on better understanding the pentadic ratios (in this case primarily scene-purpose) being used in the gamers' out-game talk. In that process, the RA also serves to illuminate the gamers' motives in engaging both the game play itself and the blog conversations about the game. Prior to discovering and illuminating the RA, however, it is critical to understand exactly where *WoW* as a franchise was at, and where it was heading during the time data collection commenced.

Snapshot in Time

Purely serendipitously, the selected timeframe for data collection coincided with what can only be called a "sea change" for the actual "World" of Warcraft as a game, and its millions of players. While the Electronic Entertainment Expo (or "E3" as it is known by gamers, techies, and aficionados alike) is the annual holy grail for both game developers and fans alike, for *WoW* players there is one event which supersedes even E3 as the pinnacle of *WoW* rapture.

Known as "BlizzCon", the event is part preview of upcoming Blizzard Entertainment titles, part game demo, part panel discussion, part social mixer between like-minded individuals, and part hard core concert and after-party—all dedicated solely to the Blizzard Entertainment line of games and game-related products. Started in 2005, the first event had approximately 8,000 attendees, each paying $100 apiece for a two-day pass to the weekend event, and by 2009 the event had grown to over 20,000 attendees, each paying $150 apiece for the two-day weekend pass according to Blizzard's official BlizzCon website (Retrieved: http://us.blizzard.com/en-us/blizzcon09/?rhtml=y). This information is useful beyond economics because it demonstrates the ever-increasing population of *WoW* players and illustrates that many of them are willing continuously to pay higher prices for things associated with the game.

For those who either attended in person or tuned in live, BlizzCon 2009 proved to be quite a spectacle. As noted above, BlizzCon 2009 represented a "sea change" for the entire culture and community of *WoW* in the form of an expansion pack[5] called "*Cataclysm*". After releasing two previous expansion packs, "Burning Crusade" in 2007 and "Wrath of the Lich King" in 2008 (both of which added features to "vanilla" *WoW* via tweaked gameplay), another expansion pack was not expected for a few years, if at all. One major rumor being discussed by many hardcore *WoW* gamers across discussion boards (surveyed as preliminary groundwork for this study) was that Blizzard would actually create "*World of Warcraft 2.0*", a brand new *WoW* game.

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[5] An expansion pack is essentially a sequel to an already mass-produced and widely played game. The story, graphics, and gameplay may be tweaked slightly, but the overall elements of the original game are retained.

According to the rumors, this "2.0" version would be an entirely new game played on different servers and functioning as an entirely separate sequel to the original *WoW*. It would keep alive the mythology of the game (or as *WoW* players refer to it, "lore") but substantially change some aspects of game play in addition to the technological improvements realized by hardware and software designers since 2004 when the original *WoW* was released.

Instead, what happened was the announcement of the previously mentioned "expansion" pack called *WoW: Cataclysm*. The word "expansion" in the previous sentence was placed in quotes because the release actually ended up (and this is a subject of great debate in the dataset collected for this study) being either a complete rehash/recycle of *WoW* with better graphics designed to bleed players of more monthly subscription money (if one believes the detractors), or a *WoW* version "1.5" game with a unique, creative, and progressive concept (if one believes its proponents). This dichotomy between two camps of *WoW* players, each equally passionate about the game, is but one of many aspects of *WoW* that repeatedly inspire and provoke passionate (and sometimes heated) debate on the blogs, message boards, and discussion forums for *WoW* littered across the information superhighway. Some examples of these types of debates are typified in exchanges found throughout the dataset, and will be discussed in more detail shortly.

In a manner similar to political partisanship, one can pick virtually any topic related to *WoW* from lore[6] to character class[7] (e.g. Orc, Elf, Priest, Human Warrior),

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[6] "Lore" is the term WoW gamers use when describing the narrative and mythology of WoW.

[7] A character class is a type of playable "race", for lack of a better term, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. A human warrior, for example, will be quite strong and proficient with melee weapons but lack magical powers, whereas a Priest will generally be weak but proficient with "light" magic powerful against "evil" or "undead" enemies.

game server or tech problems to the introduction of a *WoW*-centric hard-copy magazine, and find robust debate on *WoW* forums. This robust discussion and debate among gamers is, as asserted several times earlier, because *WoW* seems to inspire incredibly high levels of commitment to play. Not only is the time required (20-30 hours per week for the "typical" gamer according to Kelly II, 2004) significant for the average working- or middle-class American with a job, school, and/or family, but the financial aspect is substantial as well (a minimum $14.99 per month according to the most current Blizzard subscription rates, extras notwithstanding).

Thus, the fact that a game which inspires robust online debate on seemingly any selected topic was now going through a massive and unforeseen shift, meant that the timeframe randomly selected for data collection proved especially fortuitous for this study in terms of the breadth and depth of discussions on the "World" of Warcraft.

Having now placed the dataset in a proper historical context, we next move to a discussion of the analysis process and procedures before subsequently delving into the identification of the emergent RA found in the out-game talk espoused by *WoW* players.

Analysis Procedures

As discussed in chapter 3, the websites chosen for analysis were the (at the time) "official" *WoW*-centric blogosphere WoWInsider (Retrieved: http://www.joystiq.com/) and the "unofficial" website Frostbolt (Retrieved: http://frostbolt.com). The data were collected over a two-week period from August 25th, 2009 through September 5, 2009. Additionally, some follow-up data from Frostbolt (Retrieved: http://frostbolt.com) were retrieved periodically during the infrequent webmaster updates on his continuing decision not to return to *WoW*.

The sum total of the data collected encompassed 23 blog posts, and 1,935 comments or "posts" responding to the initial blog posts. The posts were left unedited in their original entirety, but copied and pasted into Microsoft Word in order to get a more accurate assessment of total pages as opposed to the online format[8].

As discussed in chapter three, the reason for copying and pasting the online blogs and comments into MS Word was pragmatic. In addition to providing hard copy without the banner ads found on the top and sides of these websites, rough comparisons could then be made between the relative length of one blog and its resulting commentary to another. The dataset totaled 671 pages on the default setting for Microsoft Word.

I began my analysis by first reading the "official" blogs themselves (ignoring their response posts) to get a general feel for the types of topics being discussed in the forums selected for data collection and analysis. From this initial read-through, one blog topic appeared at first glance to be privileged above others. A substantial percentage of the blog topics (roughly half) dealt directly with the recently-announced *Cataclysm* expansion pack.

I then went back and re-read each blog as well as its corresponding response posts made by the individuals who participated in discussions in the forums selected for data collection and analysis. I did this to glean a better understanding of not merely the topic being discussed that particular day, but also how the corresponding posters reacted to the topic and to each other when commenting on the topic of the day. As mentioned in Chapter 3, these "Breakfast Topics" blogs are posted early each morning and are almost

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[8] In the online format, in addition to banner ads which made printing difficult, the blog comments were arranged 20 per online "page". In the interests of simplicity and also for quicker comparison, the blogs and corresponding comments sans banner ads were copied and pasted into MS Word.

always framed in the form of an open-ended question intended to spark discussion (and in some cases, debate). Therefore, this second read-through allowed me to gain a better sense of the main issues being discussed by this particular *WoW* online community as well as gain some sense of its culture.

The cursory read-through provided a general sense of some content areas (at this stage not quite themes) that appeared to be privileged by the blog posters and respondents. Subsequently, I performed a "rough thematic analysis" via a simple hand-charting method conducted while re-reading the individual posts more closely once again to identify emergent themes. A message board or blog post forum is a relatively anonymous free-for-all, and therefore many posts could be quickly rejected either for lacking clarity, for being nonsensical, for being off-topic, or for being so brief as to eliminate consideration[9].

According to Aronson (1994) themes are "patterns of experiences" (p. 1) which "can come from direct quotes or paraphrasing common ideas" (p. 1). Taylor and Bogdon (1984) define themes as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (p. 131). Aronson's (1994) definition provided a loose framework by which I began my analysis, and Taylor and Bogdon's (1984) definition identified several components by which the analysis further crystallized through the use of their terms "conversation topics" (e.g. blog topics), "vocabulary" (e.g. language within the blog commentary posts), and "recurring activities, meanings, feelings" (e.g. repetition and/or forcefulness of the blog commentary posts).

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[9] Many posts consisted of short or abbreviated language such as "lol" (laugh out loud) or "nm" (no message), name-calling, "flaming", or being unrelated to the discussion at hand and hence largely ignored by the other respondents.

According to Leininger (1985), the identification of themes occurs by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (p. 60). With respect to dozens upon dozens of blog commentary posts for each "Breakfast Topic" blog topic, there existed plentiful examples of blog posts which met the above criteria.

With respect to the validity of my identification of the emergent themes from the data, Leininger asserts that the ""coherence of ideas rests with the analyst who has rigorously studied how different ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together" (p. 60). This last quote by Leininger supports my multiple read-through of the data after first examining the extant literature in the field of game studies concerning video games in general, MMO's in particular, and *WoW* specifically.

Upon completing the initial charting of themes, a few emerged as being privileged (e.g. more frequently and fervently discussed) by the respondents. I then went back and re-read the posts which were denoted as corresponding to the previously-identified privileged themes. Applying the Burkeian concept of "transcendence", a synecdoche emerged where elements of each of the identified themes alluded to (or in some cases directly discussed) one overarching concept which seemed to bind (if not unify) elements of all the themes. This overarching concept, this synecdoche, was identified as best exemplifying the probable RA for *WoW* players. In terms of the applicability of themes leading towards identifying the RA, Aronson (1994) states that "themes that emerge from the informants' stories are **pieced together** to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience (emphasis added, p. 1). Prior to moving our discussion to identifying the RA for *WoW* players, however, we must first examine the recurrent topics

and their underlying themes. These underlying themes, collectively, make up the corpus

of the RA.

Themes

In reviewing the dataset, several recurrent topics appeared. Chiefly, the topics of

lore, nostalgia, *Cataclysm*, player classes, and occupations resounded throughout many of

the comments made to the myriad of "Breakfast Topics" blog posts. After careful review

of the commentary made by the gamers to these topics, multiple themes emerged from

the dataset via the process outlined directly above. Of these, three were predominant

among many of them. These three themes were the aforementioned *WoW* as a repository

of important experiences concretized via extant game lore, *WoW* as being reified for the

gamers through their discussion of it in nostalgic terms, and *WoW* being or becoming, for

many of the gamers captured in this dataset, almost a necessity for them and in some

ways a part of their self-identity. As widely discussed earlier in the chapter, *Cataclysm*

provided the impetus for a majority of the discussions since it had just been announced at

the time of data collection.

Repeatedly, the posters sought validation from others in the forthcoming

examples, and frequently resort to citing outside (*WoW*-centric) reference sources as

evidentiary support for their arguments on various topics.   This validation-seeking

amongst the posters also introduces the concept of the "old school" vs. "new school"

WoW gamer, a dichotomy wherein the camps are clearly delineated by the rhetorical

choices each make in their posts. Each of the primary themes will be presented and

discussed with their corresponding posts below.

<u>*Lore*</u>

Several times in this chapter, the concept of "lore" has been mentioned as it relates to *WoW*. As previously defined, "lore" for *WoW* players represents the mythos behind the "World" of Warcraft. When one first begins the game, or checks Blizzard Entertainment's official *WoW* website, (Retrieved: http://www.worldofwarcraft.com) they are presented with some brief background lore to situate the game. Blizzard entertainment rarely addresses the concept of lore, and outright shies away from the use of the term canon, although Blizzard has gone on record by saying they consider most of the related *WoW* novels, manga[10], and other ancillary but officially-sanctioned *WoW* material to be canonical[11]. Despite, or perhaps because of Blizzard's lack of involvement in discussions on lore, the concept of lore for many *WoW* blog posts captured in this dataset is hotly contested.

One blog discussion which dovetails nicely with the notion of an RA as "myth in infancy" comes from the following discussion of lore. With the advent of *WoW: Cataclysm*, one aspect of the game most substantially and passionately dissected by *WoW* blog posters concerned the rewriting (or in some cases, outright ignoring) of previously established lore by Blizzard developers. In the selected examples below, most of the conversation (as in many of the other topics) centers on *Cataclysm* and its impact on the lore of *WoW*. This is because, as previously discussed in this chapter, *Cataclysm* was such an unexpected watershed announcement for many serious *WoW* players due to the changes it would bring to the virtual "World" of Warcraft, the game's storyline, and its

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[10] Comic books and/or anime

[11] For clarification from Blizzard VP of Creative Development Chris Metzen, please refer to http://www.wowwiki.com/Lore. In some posts from the dataset, Metzen is specifically cited by posters as an evidentiary source when arguing lore; these posts will appear later in this chapter.

gameplay. By altering the lore, many posters expressed concern relating to the disruption of "realness" and continuity of the previously established and accepted lore. Others, however, accepted the changes *prima facie*. It should also be noted in the following posts that character class is one predominant topic-within-a-theme concerning lore.

For example:

Kylenne Aug 28th 2009 9:19AM
Azeroth is an especially fun setting for a traditional RPG campaign, especially if you've got a bunch of nerds who really love the lore the way my friends and I do. I've made a couple of netbooks incorporating BC material[12]

klink-o Aug 24th 2009 8:04AM
One small step away from pick any race and any class[13] and see what happens. Take that lore!

Seraphna Aug 24th 2009 9:43AM
Funny, since there's a perfectly justifiable explanation for each one.

Daniel Aug 24th 2009 1:45PM
sorry Seraphna, if everything is explainable by lore, then anything is possible. someone had to be the first dwarf shaman, someone had to be the first troll druid, someone had to be the first of everything[14]. are you saying that players arent capable of being the first just because no one in the past has done so?? Ridiculous **(emphasis added).**

Elmo Aug 24th 2009 8:54AM
I do want some good explaination for this from Blizz. **(emphasis added)**

shkss Aug 24th 2009 9:55AM
And blood elf warriors[15]. Please. Lore-wise, every person in history can pick up a weapon and beat people with it. **(emphasis added)**

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[12] The author is referring to online fiction she wrote about the WoW expansion pack game Burning Crusade
[13] Referencing the fact that in previous WoW lore, some character types were disallowed
[14] Types of character classes previously disallowed by lore
[15] A type of character class previously disallowed by extant lore

Aubrecia **Aug 24th 2009 8:11AM**
I think that, before anybody brings up past lore, they need to realize that
Cataclysm is upsetting everything about how the world works . . . <u>The great thing</u>
<u>about WOW is that the lore is changeable and adjustable, and the REALLY great</u>
<u>thing about these changes is that they don't even "fly in the face" of any lore</u> . . .
Mostly, I think that people need to wait and see **(emphasis added)**

Tridus **Aug 27th 2009 9:33AM**
Yeah it's amazingly one sided.
Ashenvale is particularly galling, <u>since from what I've been told in the comics,</u>
<u>Alliance actually defeated Horde in WSG, story wise</u>[16].
They can't even stay consistent with themselves for a year now. **(emphasis**
added)

Robert **Aug 24th 2009 11:08AM**
I completely agree with you as well. Something that people tend to forget...
<u>Lore/history is all well and good, BUT seriously, what good is a game such as</u>
<u>WoW if the game doesn't change at all? WoW was built as a universe. People can</u>
<u>learn to do different things, adapt to different situations, and learn from their</u>
<u>mistake.</u> That is what these new class/race combos are about. Lore wasn't always
history... <u>someones lore was someone else's current events.</u> **(emphasis added)**

Ghallar **Aug 24th 2009 8:16AM**
I'm really sorry, Blizzard, but your "Night Elves Mages have been added because
it sounded pretty cool to have Elves using arcane when they shouldn't be
anymore."[17] is <u>just a big FU to every single lore nerd in the game</u>. This change
just makes no sense. **(emphasis added)**

Wubble69 **Aug 24th 2009 8:30AM**
I currently do not drive a motorcycle. I have never driven a motorcycle. I do not
like motorcycles. I have had friends die from driving motorcycles.

What is to stop me learning to drive a motorcycle?
What is to stop me buying a motorcycle?
What is to stop me suddenly becoming a motorcycle nut?

<u>Or are you suggesting that because things have always been this way, they have to</u>
<u>remain this way forever?</u> **(emphasis added)**

---

[16] When beginning *WoW*, a player can choose from one of two sides: "Alliance" or "Horde". The poster
here is referencing the fact that in *Cataclysm*, Blizzard changed some previous lore by giving one side
territory that in the *WoW* comics they lost.
[17] Again, the poster is referencing a type of character and magic use ("arcane") that was previously
disallowed by WoW lore for that character.

christian_588 Sep 1st 2009 12:39AM
letting everyone do wtf[18] they want even tho nothing makes sense is stupid.

While describing *WoW* lore instead of contemporary myth, the previous exchange could almost be considered analogous to a debate between a fundamentalist and an interpretive biblical scholar, if the *WoW*-esque references were eliminated and replaced with traditional religious terminology. Of particular note in the previous exchange was the deployment of various argument strategies (example, analogy, narrative) by those involved in attempting to attack or defend a position on the relative value (or lack thereof) of maintaining and literally following the lore of the *WoW* universe vs. adapting and interpreting the lore in a manner which allows people to "move on with life" (e.g. continue playing the game *sans* troubling or unanswered questions).

The above exchange also represents the first of several clashes between the "old school" and "new school" *WoW* players found throughout the dataset. This clash is not merely because it is the first exchange presented for review, but because the posts selected above were taken from the "Breakfast Topics" blog post "What do you think of World of Warcraft: Cataclysm?" which was the blog topic on the first day of data collection. Reviewing the posts, it is apparent that some of the individuals are playing the game for fun and novelty, whereas others are fiercely protective of an adherence to lore because that lore is part of the established status quo for the *WoW* they know and love.

In essence, lore is part of the structure of *WoW*, and for many of the "old school" gamers, any change (or in this case, wholesale rewriting) of lore represents a shirking of an unspoken covenant between the long-time gamers who have diligently paid their dues

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[18] "wtf" = "What the fuck".

(literally and figuratively) and Blizzard. Suddenly changing the entire *WoW* paradigm

via the shattering of extant lore recalls Giddens (1986) notion of ontological security.

The ontological security of *WoW* for many of the "old school" gamers arguably came

from the reliance on lore to establish structure and rules to the narrative, the gameplay,

indeed the "World" of Warcraft. By introducing swift and sudden change to the "World"

of Warcraft via *Cataclysm* without soliciting feedback from the legions of gamers who

played it since its beginning in 2004, the element of chaos via the unknown is introduced,

whereby former rules and structure are no longer valid. The backlash to this loss of

ontological security for the "old school" *WoW* gamers is apparent in their impassioned

posts on *Cataclysm* and lore, respectively. Their use of multiple argument strategies

when confronting the "new school" *WoW* gamers demonstrates their commitment to

maintaining the status quo of *WoW*, which is to them is a "stable" and "known" entity.

Furthermore, the use of various argument strategies to debate just this one aspect

of *WoW*, lore, exemplifies the passion many *WoW* players have for the game and

provides compelling evidence of the importance placed on maintaining consistency and

"realness" for them. In some examples of lore discussion, posters went so far as to cite

WoWWiki (Retrieved: http://www.wowwiki.com/Portal:Main), the *World of Warcraft*

database Wowhead (Retrieved: http://www.wowhead.com/), *WoW* books/manga, or

Blizzard Entertainment VP of Creative Development Chris Metzen as evidentiary support

for their arguments, much like a priest might point to examples in the scripture or a

specific biblical prophet to prove a point to a troubled parishioner.

See for example the following interchanges as instances of this evidentiary

support citation:

> **Khremloc Aug 27th 2009 8:58AM**
> Yes, but we may well see our favourite hidden locations vanishing.
> Does anyone know what will happen to the dancing troll village?[19]
>
> **zappo Aug 27th 2009 9:15AM**
> According to wowwiki it's going to be available as a regular place you can visit.
>
> **Briggs Aug 22nd 2009 8:07AM**
> They gave me everything I ever wanted... Except the pony that Ghostcrawler[20]
> promised me.
>
> **Malkia Aug 22nd 2009 8:10AM**
> But he gave us aponi!~
> http://www.wowwiki.com/Aponi_Brightmane
>
> **Honoke Aug 29th 2009 8:12AM**
> Maybe that's where the Demon Soul is hidden.
>
> **Laughtrey Aug 29th 2009 8:14AM**
> It was destroyed. Keep up.
>
> **Malkia Aug 29th 2009 8:16AM**
> The demon soul was destroyed...wasn't it? Do the books count?
>
> **Itanius Aug 29th 2009 10:11AM**
> The books are official canon approved my Mr. Metzen, so yes they do indeed
> "count".

In the above posts, the posters employ the use of the aforementioned types of

evidentiary support for their claims. The posters zappo and Malkia both cite the *WoW*

Wiki website (Retrieved: http://www.wowwiki.com), and Itanius cites both the *WoW*

books as well as Blizzard VP of Creative Development Chris Metzen as "proof" of the

validity of their claims. This desire for acceptance is telling as it seems that some posters

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[19] A location from the old or "vanilla" *WoW*.
[20] A non-playable computer character from the old or "vanilla" *WoW*.

feel the need to back up claims even in the anonymous arena of an online blog

commentary when discussing *WoW* with others (likely complete strangers).

   Nostalgia

   Another powerful theme illuminated through data analysis was that of nostalgia,

generally speaking, for "the way things were" in the "old-time" (or as *WoW* gamers call it

"vanilla") days of *WoW*. Part of that nostalgic power resides in the import, and

importance, of the quality of symbolic reality the game possesses, and from that, the

intersubjective acceptance that this "realness" is understood and shared by others.

   As support, the following examples illustrate the intersubjective qualities of

realness *WoW* possesses for its players via nostalgia:

> **Jorges Aug 27th 2009 10:42AM**
> I have to admit that when I saw Auberdine in ruins and parts of Ashenvale[21]
> destroyed, I went "omg..." with a nostalgic/sad mix of feelings...
> Being in the new Azeroth and telling stories to my newbie[22] friends about how
> this or that place used to be, will be fun!
>
> **DigitalMonitor Aug 27th 2009 12:11PM**
> When next year's Lunar Festival[23] comes around, I'm going to take my time
> visiting each of the Elders and turn the event in into my own Azeroth
> Remembrance Tour. I'll be snapping pics[24] like an obsessed tourist.
>
> **tabardsrock Aug 27th 2009 5:22PM**
> @jorges: i definitely agree with you... it's fun nowadays to chat with friends that
> are new to the game about the "old days" of WoW
>
> **Markainion Aug 27th 2009 9:57AM**
> I hope blizzard is smart enough to keep the old world files on hand, if for no other
> reason to keep a good memory of what the world once looked like for future
> instances or expansions . . . so maybe someday we will have a few pre Cataclysm
> serves, to remind old players what the world use to look like, and for new players
> to experienced something they never experienced before.

---

[21] Cities located in the virtual world of Azeroth, which is where the "world" of Warcraft takes place
[22] a "newbie" is a gaming term for someone who has only recently begun playing *WoW*
[23] A virtual festival held online in Azeroth
[24] "pics" here refers to screen-captured images or "screencaps" that are stored on a computer like a photo

Lyncis **Aug 27th 2009 8:10AM**
I'll certainly miss the old world, all the familiar places and memories - and I've got a kid on the way, who'll never see it as it was.

moxie **Aug 27th 2009 8:39AM**
I think that's exactly what the devs[25] are going for though... how would your character feel if his or her favorite place were trashed? How would YOU feel? It's a "punch in the gut" approach, and I think it'll work well for them. I can't wait to see what goes down.

springwater **Aug 27th 2009 8:41AM**
There's definitely places in the old world I'll miss. My girlfriend just started playing recently, so I'm going to make sure she sees everything the way it is now before it's all changed for good.

Faladril **Aug 27th 2009 9:00AM**
Yes, I'll miss it. Even though I've basically leveled one toon[26], the areas I've seen, for what they are, are still nostalgic. So, I should make a photo album of the world as it is, including the world maps. Then if I ever decide to level an alt[27], I can show him the pictures and say, "This is how the world looked before you were born. This is how it was when Desolace[28] was really desolate and you didn't get scorched going through the Barrens. This is how it looked when the only way fly from one place to another was to take a zeppelin or a taxi. Then you had to hoof it the rest of the way."

In the above exchange, one of the most fascinating aspects of the gamer's talk revolves around the use of personification with respect to the characters they play. In the above exchange, the posters moxie and Faladril actually write about their characters as if they were living, breathing, feeling entities. While perhaps a bit more extreme than the "typical" gamer talk analyzed in this dataset, it is one of several examples where the importance of the game, its characters, locations, indeed the entire "World" of Warcraft shines through. Furthermore, the abundance of posts evocative of nostalgia imply that

---

[25] "devs" = Blizzard Entertainment's *Cataclysm* game developers
[26] "toon" = a player's primary character in *WoW*
[27] "alt" = a player's additional characters in *WoW*, each requiring a separate paying account
[28] A volcanic, desert-like area in *WoW*

while playing the game is meaningful to the players, the memories they gain from having

played it are also important to them as they progress through the game.

Furthermore, this nostalgia isn't something that is passing or mild for several of

the gamers who post about *WoW*. For example, in the posts below, respondents to the

blog post entitled "Most emotional boss encounter?" (Retrieved:

http://wow.joystiq.com/2009/09/01/breakfast-topic-most-emotional-boss-encounter/)

engage in robust debate on how much fighting and defeating a certain boss character

affected them:

> **Tirrimas Sep 1st 2009 8:08AM**
> Keristrasza[29]. First time after doing that quest chain on Coldarra, I cried.
>
> **Daniel Sep 1st 2009 9:22AM**
> Keristrasza for me too, I always feel sorry for her
>
> **Kia Sep 1st 2009 9:22AM**
> Was just logging in to say this.
>
> **Rhabella Sep 1st 2009 9:53AM**
> Looting Keristrasza's Broken Heart[30] always breaks mine.
>
> **VioletPheonix Sep 1st 2009 10:18AM**
> Aw I am glad I am not the only one. That encounter, seeing her standing there and
> hearing her anguish while fighting, always gets to me.
>
> **Karilyn Sep 1st 2009 10:27AM**
> I still cry every time I do that fight.
>
> **vocenoctum Sep 1st 2009 10:36AM**
> Same here . . . It really resonates emotionally.

---

[29] A boss in *WoW*

[30] After defeating most enemies in *WoW*, players "loot" their virtual corpses for treasure and items

Shardrell Sep 1st 2009 11:05AM
Yeah, I think Keri's[31] death is particularly affecting because we knew her, y'know?

Poor Keri.

Senor Sep 1st 2009 11:04AM
This ^ Breaks my heart to kill her after she was so protective of us during the quest chain.

Silversol Sep 1st 2009 11:03AM

http://www.wowwiki.com/Keristrasza

For those that don't know the story.

And what's said upon death is sad as well.

"Dragonqueen... Life-Binder... preserve... me."

Nothing like finding that glimmer of sanity upon the throws of death...

Wulfkin Sep 1st 2009 5:58PM
This. You fight alongside her only to see her taken and turned against you. Of the millions of mobs I have killed in WoW, she was the one that made me feel sadness.

One other aspect of the above posts that bears mentioning is that several of the posters not only feel strong (and in the above examples, negative) emotions about fighting particular bosses, but also that they discuss repeatedly replaying the scenario despite the emotions it elicits. In five of the above examples the posters use the terms "always" or "every time" or "first time". This also speaks to the nostalgic pull the game has, via the players repeatedly returning to former encounters for both (it is presumed) fun as well as emotional resonance.

These posters are subsequently confronted by others within the same blog

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[31] Shorthand for Keristrasza

commentary who are dismissive of the game being able to generate such emotion. While

it is unclear if this second camp are veteran players or "newbies" (due to the anonymous

nature of posting on blogs), the interchange between them and those who feel emotional

resonance when defeating a boss in *WoW* is reflective of the "old school" vs. "new

school" dichotomy found throughout the dataset:

> **Kaleo Sep 1st 2009 8:30AM**
> Not really emotional
>
> **Mortosa Sep 1st 2009 8:41AM**
> I have not, nor will I ever, attempt For the Alliance[32]. I have too much respect for them to try to kill them. That makes the encounters the most emotional encounters In the game for me.
>
> **Omegan01 Sep 1st 2009 8:48AM**
> This is silly. I've you've never even -attempted- 'For the Alliance!' how can the encounters possibly be emotional for you? You've never actually, you know, ENCOUNTERED the bosses.
>
> **Takuwind Sep 1st 2009 1:51PM**
> Seriously is this the level Wow.com has sunk to? I know you guys wake up in the morning sometimes and struggle to come up with a topic, but for heavens sake - if this is the best you can come up with, please stay in bed.
> While wow.com has been an exceptional journalistic effort and has produced some amazing stories and analysis, I have seen a slow creep in some areas to the inane and pointless. Is this the drivel your fine site is going to be known for?
>
> EMOTIONAL encounter? Good god people, you are approaching the level of the fans who Shatner famously told to "Get a life." in that well-know SNL skit.
> Emotional encounter? I could tell you mine, but it would not be printable.
> How 'bout we try to keep things in perspective and not sink to this level.
> Fine. Lets talk about our Favorite bosses. Our most memorable Role Playing even. But lets find more constructive topics that our most Emotional boss encounter. Or the NPC[33] we fell in love with. Or the day we cried when a gnome ganked[34] us...

---

[32] A type of quest in WoW culminating in a boss battle

[33] NPC = non-playable computer controlled character. The poster is poking fun at several of the posters who talk about crying, etc in this discussion thread.

[34] Again, the poster is poking fun at players who become so attached to their character they feel strong emotion when the character is "killed".

qoa Sep 1st 2009 2:43PM
Seriously though. Who cries from a quest chain in an mmo?

BuzzDX Sep 1st 2009 2:50PM
People who have a heart and soul.

Silversol Sep 1st 2009 3:01PM
Lulz[35]

You're getting emotional about how people shouldn't show emotions during a game.... Yet your showing probably the same level of emotion in the comment section of a blog about the game.

Chamual Sep 1st 2009 6:04PM
Have you ever felt saddness or fear or anger when reading a book or watching a film? Sure you know it's not real but the emotion is still there. Why should a computer game be any different? At least half the games made today try and feature a storyline for the player, and most games now look better than films did 10 years ago.

WoW is a game that most invest more time than any other game, and it has had plots that twist and turn over several years of gameplay and all the books and others that expand the storyline. Is it so inconcivable that someone might get a twang of emotion when they see a character they have read about for so long bit the dust, or their guild defeats a boss they have been working on for weeks?

Of particular note in the two above interchanges on the role of emotion as it relates to nostalgia is the divide between the two camps. One camp freely and openly talks about how playing the game elicited a strong emotional response, while the other felt that those people needed to "get a life". When confronted, the emotional posters immediately counter with comments about the hypocrisy of those who poke fun at them, and use analogy as an argument strategy. Also, the pro-emotion posters again allude to the amount of time many gamers spend playing *WoW* and how that may also bolster an emotional investment in the game.

---

[35] "Lulz" = internet shorthand for "laughing out loud", but generally considered to be laughing <u>at</u> someone rather than <u>with</u> them.

Having discussed the themes of nostalgia and lore, the final primary theme to discuss is the role of *WoW* as a "necessity" for many of those who play and then post on *WoW*-centric blogs. In many respects *Cataclysm* could be considered the dominant driving force behind many of the blog topics as well as corresponding commentary by posters. Again, it is important to note that this is likely due to the timeframe of data collection, since *Cataclysm* was announced the evening before data collection was randomly selected to begin and remained a hot topic throughout the entire data collection period. Additionally, even outside the realm of *Cataclysm*-based discussion, discussions arose which seem to cast *WoW*-as-necessity.

WoW as Necessity

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, *Cataclysm* was the impetus for many of the blog posts, corresponding discussions, and heated debates found in the dataset. With respect to its relationship to thematic elements present in the posts, the advent of *Cataclysm* seemed to elicit strong feeling which spoke to the "necessity" of *WoW* for its players. This in turn led to a staunch defense of *Cataclysm* by some, and a rejection of it and *WoW* by others.

Previously, I noted that the major dichotomy of opinions resulting from the *Cataclysm* announcement led to a divergence of posters into two primary camps which I have labeled "old school" and "new school"[36]. Some players, often those who appear from their posts to have played the game for a while, expressed disdain, anger, or outright horror at what *Cataclysm* would do to "their" world (e.g. their ontological security). Others, often seeming to be newer players judging from their posts, expressed excitement

---

[36] "Old School" players are traditionally long-time, long-term WoW players who are resistant to change, whereas "new school" players tend to be relative newcomers to WoW who embrace game changes.

about the potential changes and new challenges *Cataclysm* would bring to *WoW*. There

is also a strong underlying theme of nostalgia from both camps, pro- and anti-*Cataclysm*,

which is interesting as a unifying concept.

In the following exchange, taken from the morning immediately after the

Blizzcon announcement of *Cataclysm*, this dichotomy is readily apparent:

<u>Muse</u> <u>Aug 22nd 2009 8:02AM</u>
I'm busily . . . covering as many areas of the game as possible, so I'll have a strong before-memory to compare with when I start leveling my next alt[37] up post-Cataclysm

<u>uncaringbear</u> <u>Aug 22nd 2009 8:34AM</u>
As much as I'm looking forward to the content, I will surely miss many of the old zones, and it saddens me that many of the places that I leveled up in many years ago will be changed forever. Before the expansion drops, I will be taking more than a few nostalgic trips through places like Dark Shore and the Barrens[38].

<u>Zanthexter</u> <u>Aug 22nd 2009 8:41AM</u>
Cataclysm has me excited, and ready to roll a new toon[39]. Not because I like alts, but because levels 1-60 are basically a new game with enough of the old game left that I won't feel completely lost!

<u>Chilblain</u> <u>Aug 22nd 2009 8:02AM</u>
Meh . . . I'll get it . . . but most of the expansion looks like recycled content

<u>Masarah</u> <u>Aug 22nd 2009 8:05AM</u>
This isn't recycled . . . The rest is all new and looks awesome, I cant wait.

<u>Chilblain</u> <u>Aug 22nd 2009 8:06AM</u>
No . . . The same dungeon re-tooled for max level isn't new content.

<u>Jingo</u> <u>Aug 22nd 2009 8:11AM</u>
yeah guild and I are going to wind down and finally finish, not paying for content I've already got

---

[37] "alt" = alternate or additional character to the primary one the gamer plays.
[38] "Dark Shore" and "Barrens" are two areas in the virtual world of Azeroth, the setting for *WoW*
[39] "toon" = another word for a character the gamer plays in WoW.

Chilblain **Aug 22nd 2009 8:12AM**
What is "new" about leveling from 1 to 60 again[40]? Old Azeroth or new Azeroth, it's still geared towards people who want to either play a new race, or a new race/class combo[41]

deffo **Aug 22nd 2009 8:15AM**
seriously, what do you people expect? if they keep ADDING shit the game would just get freaking ridiculous... how many new continents can there be, etc? updating old things makes perfect sense. why would you want the world to be full of ever growing piles of static, unused places and things?

Zanthexter **Aug 22nd 2009 8:16AM**
This "expansion" has more new content than the original game. And all you can do is whine

Blackhawk003 **Aug 22nd 2009 8:29AM**
The endgame isn't everything… a great deal of the fun of WoW is simply exploring new areas. This refreshes and updates the parts of the game left by the wayside, as old Azeroth has been ailing in light of the expansions. Can you really object to revisiting the areas of the game that made WoW great in the first place? And if you're so upset . . . you can always go pick up a shiny, new MMO.

Azradesh **Aug 22nd 2009 9:02AM**
Perhaps if you spent less time whining and read about the damn expansion then you wouldn't have to whine in the first place.

bizounce **Aug 22nd 2009 9:26AM**
This is why I loathe 99% of "gamers". Your bitching is neither warranted, or necessary. You don't even know what you want. You're still getting new content. You're still going to get your new dungeons/raids. So they changed a huge part of the game and added to it? What exactly is wrong about that? I just don't understand what you could be pissed about. Absolutely worthless.

Rubitard **Aug 22nd 2009 9:52AM**
Well, sounds like Cataclysm will also bring an end to some players who get all nerd-enraged over one or two detail. So, please, Chilblain and Jingo, go. Make the game better by your absence.

---

[40] In *WoW*, a character "levels up" by gaining experience points from quests and defeating enemies. 1-60 are the standard levels, with 80 being the maximum.
[41] A "new race/class combo" refers to the previously-discussed new combinations of characters *Cataclysm* introduced which were previously disallowed by extant lore.

Chilblain Aug 22nd 2009 2:22PM
It's unfortunate that you can't be critical of something without the community responding with the trite, "if you don't like it don't play it" response. Criticism is what makes things better, not a bunch of sycophantic idiots who will line up at midnight and buy two copies of anything with a Blizzard logo on it.

ramivore Aug 22nd 2009 6:32PM
You seem to be asserting that:

Time and money spent=Value

which is incorrect. The best way to improve something is to fix its worst attributes. Perhaps recycling old content will give the developers more time to improve other parts of the game. Or maybe they could just dig a giant hole somewhere in Anaheim and fill it back up again. Would that satisfy you?

Komorado Aug 22nd 2009 8:07AM
I cant wait for cataclysm to come out! Everything about it looks sooooo good!

Rippchen Aug 22nd 2009 8:41AM
because this fiddling with numbers is a minigame all for itself, which can be real fun to a lot of people. there are folks out there, who actually enjoy math.

Damon Aug 22nd 2009 9:06AM
There are more people that believe the math is a frustrating affront to a pastime that's supposed to be fun then there are that mildly enjoy it. That equation is pretty damn simple

Kiertel Aug 22nd 2009 8:21AM
I agree, this reset is almost like getting WoW2. People who do not play before the world is destroyed will never know what playing the original game was like. Blizzard is pressing the reset button in a big way and I for one could not be more excited.

JD Aug 22nd 2009 8:19AM
YES!
I'm sure a LOT of people are freaking out,"this sucks, that's not what i wanted"...i personally am very excited with what's to come

Gilgamesh Aug 22nd 2009 8:21AM
I'm not excited at all. And taking a closer look at SW:TOR[42] as a result.

I didn't think WoW would cheese it so soon. Recycled content? No thanks

---

[42] "SW:TOR" = Star Wars: The Old Republic, LucasArts forthcoming MMO expected to challenge *WoW* for supremacy of MMO subscribers.

rawrawrawr **Aug 22nd 2009 8:29AM**
IF recycled means updated, polished and reworked, then yes, WoW has cheeesed it.

But, clearly, attempting to appeal to your fanbase/customers with long awaited additions and changes . . . ruins the game.

The previous interchange between posters of rival factions (and, notably, with the majority being pro-*Cataclysm*) represents ten percent of the total number of responses to that "Breakfast Topics" blog question "What did you think of World of Warcraft: Cataclysm?". While many responses in the overall dataset on a myriad of topics demonstrate the passion several *WoW* gamers who post responses on the *WoW* blogs have for the game, this topic evoked the highest number (229 responses) and most heated debate, which is why it has been utilized for examples several times in this chapter.

The heated debate about forthcoming change to *WoW* speaks to the importance of the game for these individuals, for whom playing the game is not enough to satisfy them. For the individuals who comment on blog posts on various topics about *WoW* (and in particular, *Cataclysm*), *WoW* is more than just a game, it is part of who they are. They take ownership in Azeroth, the "World" of Warcraft, whether in wanting to see progressive expansion and evolution, or in maintaining tradition until a fully-realized new "World" of Warcraft is developed by Blizzard.

For a few, the game even takes on overtone of being a "staple" expenditure. The comments below come from a blog topic on Blizzard's announcement of a quarterly "WoW Insider" magazine for a yearly $40 subscription fee.

Note that many of the individuals who say they will not subscribe still imply or outright

state that *WoW*, itself, is a "necessary" expense:

> **Nathanyel Aug 25th 2009 8:05AM**
> Already did :P I'm expecting special treats for early subscribers ;)
>
> **Legance Aug 25th 2009 8:52AM**
> As did I, subscribed the minute it was available
>
> **mtsadowski Aug 25th 2009 10:28AM**
> Me too.
>
> This reminds me of the Nintendo Fun Club. Anyone remember that?
>
> **Neofox Aug 25th 2009 2:24PM**
> I already subscribed as well. :)
>
> Well, mainly for the free baby murloc Kwurky[43] at BlizzCon...
>
> **Deadly. Off. Topic. Aug 25th 2009 4:12PM**
> I wonder why they can't just include it in the subscription fee - god knows we
> already pay enough and then some
>
> **Komorado Aug 25th 2009 8:06AM**
> Why pay when you can probally find it on the internet the very afternoon its been
> recieved by subscribers?
>
> **Narshe Aug 25th 2009 8:14AM**
> Exactly, online content is free so why pay outrageous prices for a trade
> publication with paper costs skyrocketing.
>
> **Legance Aug 25th 2009 8:55AM**
> Its all about the collectable value of the magazine. I would much rather actually
> own the magazine, then have to read 148 pages offline any day.
>
> **Gerik Aug 25th 2009 9:19AM**
> There's no way the magazine isn't going to use its relationship with Blizzard to
> score exclusives. I'm expecting sneak peeks at Cataclysm, interviews with
> developers, behind the scenes photos, etc.

---

[43] A type of in-game "pet" only available to subscribers of the magazine who also attend Blizzcon.

impurezero **Aug 25th 2009 11:45AM**
Sure, any "breaking new information" will show up on the internet in some form, and if that's all you're concerned about, by all means stick to just the internet and you'll be set.

However, it sounds like this will likely include additional lore discussions, full interviews, in depth discussions and various other things that sites like this won't print. You really think that wow.com is going to spend 50 blog posts just reposting everything from the magazine? I guarantee you that for the fans, there will be additional things printed that won't end up all over the internet just because it doesn't qualify as "new Cataclysm info."

Wipeman **Aug 25th 2009 4:33PM**
I will buy the magazine. And it's not becuse i hate internet or i am a collector. It's just that those pixels on your screen cannot be actually compared to this classy feeling of that 148 page high quality paper magazine being held in your hands. It just feels better.

jfield **Aug 25th 2009 8:06AM**
Already did! I'm a sucker =/

Baruti **Aug 25th 2009 8:25AM**
I have at least thought about it..
Sounds interesting for those boring offline hours! ;)

Malkia **Aug 25th 2009 8:37AM**
It's too expensive for me. Yes I realize it's the same cost as only a few month's subscription, but when you compare the hours I get for my $15 each month for all the months to equal the subscription fee to the hours I'll spend looking at the 4 issues each year..it's just not a good deal for me.

Jamison Banks **Aug 25th 2009 9:39AM**
No. Why?

You want to give me a murloc marine for Blizzcon? Fine.
You want to give me an exclusive email newsletter I pay for? Fine.
You want to sell me an collectible plastic figure? Fine.
You want to sell me an authenticator to protect my game account? More than fine.
You want to sell me a magazine? . . . .

vinehorn **Aug 25th 2009 7:53PM**
I signed up for it. I even got a cute little murloc plushy for it (at Blizzcon). I signed up for the magazine (2yrs) because I love World of Warcraft. This game is a hobby just like my other hobbies rugby, weightlifting and computers. People invest money in their hobbies.

Ian R. (Orkchop) Aug 25th 2009 12:10PM
They were offering a cute baby murloc[44] at BlizzCon that sucked me in. And it'll be nice to have something to read away from my computer, like on my commute.

The majority of the above discussion centers on cost versus perceived benefit. Some players took the seemingly high price in stride as an additional expense to an activity or hobby they love, while others seemed offended by what they perceived as a money-grab by Blizzard. A couple of the posters, notably Nathanyel, Neofox, Gerik and Ian R. all cited the potential rewards of special collector's items not available to the "average Joe" type *WoW* player. The poster Wipeman discusses the pleasure derived from being able to physically hold a tangible piece of *WoW*. Others discuss having something *WoW*-related to do during the time they are not playing *WoW*. Even for those who say they will not subscribe, such as Jamison Banks, they still describe their willingness to give Blizzard money for many *WoW*-related things, be it just the game or several "extras".

A couple of the posters even seem to consider *WoW* as being nearly life-or-death, including it as a "necessity" cost along with heart medications or despite being broke:

Tzivya Aug 25th 2009 8:31AM
I'd sub if I knew I was going to get cool in-game items for them, but not otherwise, frankly. I don't have tonnes of surplus cash as it is, so I need more value for my dollar than this gives.

tyler Aug 25th 2009 8:42AM
no thanks, i'll pass. my monthly WoW fee is really the only non-necessity thing i'm able to spend money on right now.

Nick Aug 25th 2009 2:35PM
I really cannot afford to throw away another forty bucks right now. :[. I want to subscribe, but cannot. Paying for heart medications, food, and college leaves a hole in my pocket.

---

[44] A type of in-game "pet".

ZUR13L **Sep 5th 2009 1:14PM**
Due to RL[45] time constraints these days, I am really intent on only having 4 toons[46].

The last post by ZUR13L is also telling despite no explicit mention of money or cost. In that example, ZUR13L mentions trying to limit themselves to four characters because of real life time constraints. This demonstrates that the cost of *WoW* for those who can afford it often times comes in the form of time rather than monetary expenditure.

Finally, with respect to identifying as a "*WoW* gamer" some posters discuss their desire to remain "in the closet" so to speak about playing *Wo*W. They are rapidly confronted by others who take offense to the notion that being a *WoW*-gamer is somehow stigmatic:

> **Malkavos** **Aug 25th 2009 8:26AM**
> No, for the same reason I will never join a WoW related facebook group, wear a warcraft T-shirt, get a horde tatoo, or attend blizzcon. I enjoy playing WoW and all, but advertising that fact to the rest of the world? No thanks.
>
> **Komorado** **Aug 25th 2009 8:54AM**
> @Malkavos Thats what I think too.
>
> **Sven Van Herck** **Aug 25th 2009 9:50AM**
> So you are actually ashamed to play wow? Imo if you are that ashamed of it that you want nobody to know, you shouldn't be playing in the first place.. but that's just me. There's a huge community of ppl that play the game and if ppl in your rl[47] can't deal with you playing if they'd know, I wouldn't really call them friends.

---

[45] "RL" = "real life".
[46] "toons" = "characters".
[47] "rl" = "real life".

pants Aug 25th 2009 11:28AM
@Sven
Oddly, not wanting to advertise your choice of activities has very little to do with being ashamed about them. I play Xbox 360 but I have no desire to buy a t-shirt or subscribe to Official Xbox Magazine. I drive a Prius but I have no desire to join the fan page on facebook or post photos of it.

I'm sure there are things that you enjoy in your life that you're not screaming about to all of your friends. That doesn't mean you're ashamed. Ease up.

Jay Aug 25th 2009 8:16AM
Nope. I'm already paying for 2 accounts...not giving them any more

Nick S Aug 25th 2009 8:48AM
Haha, this.

If I'm not playing or reading mmo-champ or WoW.com, there's always, ya know, real life.

Perhaps most interesting about the above exchange is that even for someone like Malkavos, for whom the idea of "advertising" that they are a proud *WoW* gamer is unthinkable, there is still the allure of discussing the game outside of the confines of the game itself. Nick S., albeit tongue-in-cheek, even references "real life" as an alternative for *WoW*. All of the preceding posts affirm the notion of *WoW* and its ancillaries as being "necessity" for the individuals captured in the dataset, and are representative of comments on other "Breakfast Topics" blog posts throughout the dataset.

Returning to the issue of themes, one aspect that is apparent from a review of posts supporting the identified themes is that there is a great deal of interplay between them. Rarely does any one "Breakfast Topics" blog post have responses which only deal with one topic or theme. Instead, there is an interconnectedness of topics and themes as the posters discuss, debate, and relate ideas between each other (e.g. player class and lore, weapon choice and nostalgia). The interconnectedness of multiple topics and themes recalls Leninger's (1985) conceptualization of themes as being "components or fragments

of ideas or experiences" (p. 60). Taken individually, the posts, topics, and themes may

not appear to be compelling. However, taken as components of a larger whole, they offer

more insight into what a potential RA might be for *WoW*, as well as the motives of its

gamers. Hence, having discussed the major themes present in the dataset, we now turn

towards identifying a synecdoche, which in turn helps more fully illuminate the RA.

Identifying the Representative Anecdote

By reconsidering the previous chapter's assertion that Burke's (1945) notion that

an RA is like a myth in its infancy—that is to say, not strong enough to override

everything else and assert itself but taking its initial steps towards that—the emergent RA

for *WoW* is hinted at by a substantial number of the posts (and from them, themes) within

the dataset. It is important to bear in mind that each of the previously discussed themes

represent components of a larger whole. Taken individually, their contribution to and

import for the RA may seem minimal. However, when taken as aggregate pieces of a

larger whole, they transcend their individual topical aspect and collectively become

something more.

Burke (1945) is clear in his conceptualization that the RA is an actual story. In

my dataset, there was no single story that could identify as serving as the RA. However,

by linking the concepts of the RA and a mythology, for example the "American Dream",

we can gain a clearer understanding of how the RA functions for *WoW* gamers. The

notion of the "American Dream" is a mythology, inasmuch as no single story alone

constitutes it. But, taken collectively, individual stories/myths create and reinforce the

"American Dream" mythology. Whether the individual anecdote is of the house, 2.5

kids, dog, and white picket fence or of an ancestor who arrived at Ellis Island speaking

little or no English with no money who "made it", each individual anecdote collectively comes to reinforce and represent the broader mythology.

As previously asserted, there was no individual story in the dataset which could transcend all others and be held as an exemplar, as the RA for *WoW* gamers. Perhaps this is due to the timeframe when data were collected, perhaps it is due to the brevity of many of the posts, or perhaps it is due to the haphazard, scattershot nature of topic discussion on and within each "Breakfast Topics" blog post. Regardless, the RA does not exist, materially, in the dataset I collected.

However, comparing the RA to the English language provides a compelling analogy. The English language, as a concept, does not exist materially. Despite this, individuals know it is "there" because of the smaller bits that comprise it, which hint at the existence of the larger entity. And, to paraphrase Searle (1975) each of these smaller bits, these "speech acts" reinforce to people that there is, in fact, a language controlling it all.

The previous two analogies might be seen as merely a clever semantic attempt to obfuscate the fact that no clear-cut RA exists in the dataset collected for this analysis. However, I would argue that the language choices and the topics privileged for recurrent discussion and debate made by the *WoW* gamers posting within the dataset hint at a preexisting RA. The fact that the RA preexisted my dataset and is powerful is attested to by the fact that it does not need to be made explicitly present; it's so much in control of the proceedings that the blog posters embrace it as a taken for granted truth.

Even those within the dataset who reject the notion of *WoW* as being something real and powerful, as something that matters, take umbrage with the other posters on the

WoW blogs while employing the language (e.g. jargon) and terms of the anecdote. According to Harter and Japp (2001), this does not minimize or weaken the concept of the RA for a particular piece of discourse: "It is important to remember that a representative anecdote is not necessarily monolingual, rather, it can and does incorporate essential tensions and conflict within the discourse in question" (p. 413).

From the heated discussions previously-provided (among many in the dataset) on various *WoW*-centric topics, the identity of the blog poster as a "*WoW* gamer" solidifies for that individual. The gamer, in effect, identifies themselves with the game, which to them is both real and matters. No matter what subject was being discussed by blog posters, one aspect became perfectly and repetitively clear in their rhetoric: *WoW*, for lack of a better term, is "real". It matters. It is not simply the experiential aspect of playing the game, or the fact that the *WoW* gamers have to pay a monthly subscription service to play it, but rather the fact that the actual "World" of Warcraft as a whole, to the gamers who play and post about it, matters.

In short, the conceptualization "*WoW* gamer" becomes, at least partially, a component of their identity. Therefore, it is critical to examine posts which pertain to the notion of "realness" as well as revisit the importance *WoW* possesses for its players. By doing so, in conjunction with the posts identifying emergent themes from the dataset, the RA may be better illuminated. Several examples support the concept that *WoW* is "real" and "matters" to those who blog about and play the game, as well as the fact that playing *WoW* for these individuals helps shape a component of their identity as "*WoW* gamer". The below examples revisit the notion of a player's character becoming real to them:

Knob Sep 5th 2009 8:20AM

I can't even change the look of my Tauren[48] in the barbershop without feeling like it isn't my character. Today for example I went ahead and changed the skin tone of my Tauren . . . . after about 10-15 minutes of trying to get used to it, I just had to go back and revert to my old skin tone.

Cheesemonkey Sep 5th 2009 8:03PM

I would so switch my dwarf hunter to a tauren if I didn't have tons of friends and connections alliance-side[49].

Hawk Sep 5th 2009 8:13AM

I am definately going to be switching races as soon as that service is available... I just feel that my toons have evolved and taken on a certain persona of their own and their current races may not match the overall view of them I have in my mind.

tim Sep 5th 2009 6:10PM

It's interesting how so many people - even ones who don't RP[50] - see themselves so vividly in their character. I think I'm a bit opposite: I don't RP myself, but I still only do certain quests if it "feels" like my character would do it. My undead rogue - yeah he'll poison the dog and eat the dog's owner.

Hansbo Sep 5th 2009 8:36AM

Well, even though he took it way too seriously, he does have a point. Commiting genocide of dozens of races (many whom are sentient) and then complaining about poison being immoral? Slight hypocracy?

Sqtsquish Sep 5th 2009 4:25PM

I know for one that I refuse to do anything in game that I couldn't stomach in real life- I never rolled a death knight[51] for instance after hearing about their starting quests. Then again that also probably explains why my favorite toon has always been my holy pally, I still enjoy my other characters but mainly I stick with my prot warrior and holy pally since I feel I saving the lives of my team-mates who would otherwise be torn to shreds without my intervention

---

[48] A type of character class such as a warrior or sorceror

[49] As discussed in Chapter One, when beginning the game a player chooses a side or "faction" to be on when they enter the game: Horde or Alliance.

[50] "RP" = role play, in this case referring to a gamer assuming the identity of the character they play (as espoused by lore) and acting in a manner consistent with the lore-dictated character personality type.

[51] A type of character in *WoW* that lore dictates as being evil and which begins the game with quests of terror and mayhem against others.

Zach <u>Sep 5th 2009 8:26AM</u>
When Blizz first announced Tauren Pallies[52] and the upcoming Race Change, the first thing that went through my head was, "Finally! Now I don't have to be a ridiculously effeminate tank/DPS who twirls while jumping and dances like Napolean Dynamite!"

But, like you, I don't think I can do it. I've spent so many hours leveling my main[53], and seen and done so much with my guild on him, that I don't think I could ever change him.

It would feel like I was killing a small part of myself. I know that sounds melodramatic, but when you have spent so much of your time with one character, a part of yourself becomes vested in that piece of code. Yes, I know it's only a game, and yes, i know that my paladin doesn't go home to a wife and kids whenever I log out. But there's still something about these little chunks of programming, at least for those of us who have now gone through so many hours of leveling, questing, raiding, PvPing, and working on professions, that keeps us coming back for more.

So to answer your query: Yes, I do feel that level of connection with my character

winterhawk <u>Sep 5th 2009 10:43AM</u>
I'm ridiculously attached to my main (a blood elf mage) and I would never change him--faction, race, hair color...he is what he is, and I like him that way.

The previous examples began to help solidify the concept of *WoW* as "real" to its players because they demonstrated how invested a gamer can become in a character. Even something as simple as changing a character's hairstyle had emotional resonance for its player.

Another discussion which typified the "realness" of *WoW* for its players was agenda and goal setting. In the following examples, the players discuss goals they wish to accomplish before *Cataclysm* eliminated portions of "vanilla" *WoW* for good:

Theyas <u>Sep 3rd 2009 8:18AM</u>
Grind out the last 150 or so quests in Kalimdor[54]

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[52] "Tauren pallies" = paladins, a type of character class in *WoW*.
[53] "main" = main character one plays in WoW (in addition to "alts" or secondary characters).
[54] "Kalimdor" = a location in "vanilla" *WoW* that will cease to exist upon the release of *Cataclysm*.

<u>Tebla</u> <u>Sep 3rd 2009 12:01PM</u>
That's what I am doing. My newest goal is to have Loremaster[55] before my one
year anniversary is up. I have until Oct 5th.
My list of goals is one of the things I really enjoy about this game. There always
there is a new goal.

<u>dameblanche</u> <u>Sep 4th 2009 4:48AM</u>
The news of Cataclysm made me change my goals drastically: I will become
Loremaster on both the Alliance and the Horde side. at least I will have the
private satisfaction that I have done practically every old school Azeroth quest
before wow as we know it will be gone forever.

<u>Birdfall</u> <u>Sep 3rd 2009 8:36AM</u>
I know it's crazy, but Ashes of A'lar is my big goal. My family is helping me and
we're almost able to get Kael down -- my husband thinks we can do it with 7 next
Sunday if a few switch to specific alts, so we'll see. I plan on blogging about our
strat when we finally have him on farm[56]. :)
Aside from that, I want to do things that help my guild when guild leveling comes
out, and I want to help my friends and family achieve their goals. :)

<u>tonz0phun</u> <u>Sep 3rd 2009 9:31AM</u>
To do: pick up son from ex's house. Get breakfast. Do laundry. Take care of
recycling. Play with son/teach him to say Touchdown. NAP!!! WoW eventually

<u>Rubitard</u> <u>Sep 3rd 2009 10:33AM</u>
If I were to start making lists for WoW, it would mean I'm more organized for a
game than I am in RL. That, my friends, will not do. If I'm bound to be all over
the map in a whirlwind of chaos, then let it be in-game as well as out!

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[55] "Loremaster" = a type of achievement earned when a player completes a specific number of predetermined quests.
[56] Ashes of A'lar is a quest in WoW with Kael as the final boss to defeat before completing it. The author here is
referring to fighting Kael with 7 other players in her guild, and then blogging about their strategy once Kael "buys the
farm".

<u>Amapele</u> <u>Sep 3rd 2009 12:08PM</u>
I have a ridiculous list of seemingly impossible things that I want to do:

- Keep building my pet collection, I don't even want to think of what I've gotta do to get some of those pets. I'm mostly focused on getting quest ones right now as I fear they may disappear with the new expansion.

- Try to get any old world achievements out of the way
- Stop being afraid of arena[57] and get on a team.

- Stop being afraid of raids[58] and start raiding.

- Stop slacking on cooking[59].

And it concerns me a little bit that I could easily keep going with this list...lol.

The above examples further reflect the interplay between reality and *WoW*, in that the posters discuss agenda and goal-setting as they might in real life (in Rubitard's case there is a direct reference to keeping *WoW* equal with real life; tonz0phun discusses balancing *WoW* with childcare needs). These posts represent only a few that discuss the many aspects of *WoW* which are reminiscent of or in some ways mimic activities people do in the real world. There are also posts which discuss undertaking occupations or non-quest related hobbies within the game (such as engineering, hunting, or banking), and posts which discuss collecting items or acquiring pets.

However, perhaps one of the most telling aspects of the quality of "realness" *WoW* possesses for the gamers who posted comments within the dataset comes from utilizing real world analogies or examples. A few of the posts from previous discussion examples throughout the chapter utilize this tactic, particularly when the concept of *WoW* as "real" is challenged.

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[57] "Arena" = playing *WoW* as an MMO with others rather than as a stand-alone single player game.
[58] "Raids" = quests, usually for the purpose of gaining experience and loot.
[59] "Cooking" = an activity in WoW that can be built up like a skill and used to barter for loot.

The next set of examples demonstrated how there is sometimes a "bleed-through" between the real and virtual worlds when posters attempt to convince others—and perhaps themselves—of the quality of "realness" the game possesses. Take, for instance, the following examples which, unlike many of the previous debates addressed in this chapter, incorporate real-world analogies instead of in-game lore:

> **xnn Aug 22nd 2009 8:17AM**
> Goblins do not. God, they do not... not even close. We're talking about a race so greedy, they would steal from their own and sell them into slavery. A race that funds both sides of a war. These are some of the most disgusting atrocities produced by greed in real life... so essentially, I almost think of goblins as a personification of the corruption we see in modern day capitalist society. **(emphasis added)**

> **tulipblossom Aug 22nd 2009 8:28AM**
> They're changing the old world as we know it, almost entirely. And, I can't think of anything more epic than that.
>
> Imagine if where you lived changed drastically, in a similar way? For those of us in the US and Canada, imagine if all of a sudden the states and territories you lived in, surrounding areas, and the geography of North America in general, was shifted and altered in huge ways. There are just no words. And, that's what I feel like we have in store for us with Cataclysm. **(emphasis added)**

> **eenersumbrella Aug 27th 2009 10:25AM**
> I'm definately going to miss everything in the same way you miss a house or town you moved away from. Azeroth has been a home for my characters since the game was released. It has a comforting appeal to it, characters grew up there. There is a big "I remember when" as you run through the different places and just remember what it was like **(emphasis added)**

> **DBriggs Aug 23rd 2009 10:20AM**
> I am excited that the old cities will become the hubs where people gather again. Not that they were deserted, but it is exciting to fight for our homes again. **(emphasis added)**

<u>Alia</u> <u>Sep 5th 2009 12:02PM</u>
Like so many others my true love is the first toon I created. I have alts, but my human retribution paladin[60] will always be my main.

Funny thing is - now that I think about it - she's a character I've been playing practically since I got my hands on a RPG[61] the first time. Baldur's Gate (ahhh, those were the days...), Icewind Dale, Neverwinter Nights, I've always chosen female paladins . . . . the human female paladin is the only one that feels exactly right to me.

<u>Even funnier is that IRL[62] I'm an atheist</u>. **(emphasis added)**

<u>Mrs_Gamer</u> <u>Sep 5th 2009 12:23PM</u>
I'm just like the author of this post in almost every regard. I tend to stay on the path of good or chaotic good for all my characters when it comes to WoW. <u>It makes my stomach loop when I have to do some dasterdly deed that goes against the fiber of who I am personally (life imitating art I guess).</u> **(emphasis added)**

It takes me an hour to change a hairstyle because I'm bored with the look of my 4 year old WoW character, and ironically after a week of the 'new do' I run back to the barber to change the style back to the original. Even my bank alt is a fixture. <u>She's my 'Sims' alt as well. I dress her up in all the best and trendy clothes</u> **(emphasis added)**

<u>redaruroa</u> <u>Sep 5th 2009 1:01PM</u>
I would love to see something like a WOW census. A list of what class vs what race and all that. Also female vs male would be interesting.

As evidenced from the above posts, some posters utilized real-world analogies to consubstantiate the symbolic reality of the virtual world of *WoW* with the real world. Whether equating greedy goblins to capitalists, or the landscape and geography of Azeroth post-*Cataclysm* to a shifted North American landscape, or citing "vanilla" Azeroth as a real community which must be defended at all costs, many posters in the previous examples were clearly seeking out validation for the realness of *WoW* as a viable world and taking ownership of it.

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[60] A paladin is a type of character that lore dictates comes from a religious background.
[61] "RPG" = "role-playing game". The poster references several computer RPG's in the following sentence.

[62] "IRL" = "In real life".

This sense of ownership, of a part of the gamer's identities being tied to *WoW*, is apparent in many of the previous examples listed throughout the chapter. The fact that players would spend even some of their time "away from the game" blogging about the game suggests that their identity is tied up in the game. The fact that they use such emotional language to talk about a made-up place as if it were the hometown of their childhood suggests that their identity is tied up in the game. The fact that bloggers would brag about being "vanilla collectors"—in essence, that they would brag about spending countless hours just rummaging around in a computer world—suggests that their identity is tied up in the game.

The concept of *WoW* as being "real" and becoming a component of the identity of the gamers who posted during the time of data collection, is likely representative of individuals who post on various *WoW*-centric message boards and blogs. For the individuals who post about *WoW* and its ancillaries, there is a sense of ownership which is clear in the way they talk about the game, its "extras", indeed the "World" of Warcraft as a whole.

To employ a simple analogy, a person who views themselves as a KU fan likely owns KU clothing and memorabilia. They may also choose to attend KU sporting and cultural events, donate money, and read and/or talk about KU online in various blogs or message boards (see for example http://www.phog.net, http://www.kusports.com, or http://www.jayhawkslant.com). This is no different from many of the *WoW* gamers who post on the blogs and message boards (including the ones selected for data collection in this study). Many of the gamers, in the example posts listed throughout the chapter, referenced spending time and money on *WoW*, attending *WoW* events such as Blizzcon,

collecting items related to *WoW*, even taking screencaps of areas of *WoW* that would

disappear upon *Cataclysm*'s release as mementos. Whether it is KU, scrapbooking,

scuba diving or *WoW*, the formation of an identity as "KU fan" or "scrapbooking guru"

or "*WoW* gamer" is developed through attitudes and behaviors like those listed above.

Kelly II, agrees with the above analogy, stating that "MMORPG's are models for

the lifelong maturation process of human beings. They're simulators of real life. And,

just as in flight simulators, what someone learns in a MMORPG can be transferred into

real life" (p. 85). Conversely, then, the argument that what someone learns in real life

can be transferred into an MMO makes equal sense, and indeed there are example posts

from the dataset throughout this chapter where the import of real-life analogy to the game

world is employed by the *WoW* gamers.

In the previous chapter, Burke's (1953) book *Counterstatement* was referenced

when discussing the notion that symbols are at their most powerful when they both

follow conventional storylines and reflect real-world experience. The last set of

examples support that assertion. Furthermore, turning that idea on its head, there were

multiple examples cited in this chapter where one poster attempted to convince another or

multiple-other posters of the validity of their argument or perspective as it related to

WoW by citing examples from its lore. While the lore of *WoW* certainly follows

conventional storylines, it is safe to say it does not reflect real-world experience. Perhaps

this is why some posters felt the need to use the real-world tactic of offering evidentiary

support for their assertions as well as offering real-world analogies or examples in their

posts.

One element of this study which may have led to stronger rhetoric from the gamers in their out-game talk comes from its period of data collection. Analyzing a point in time when the entire "world" and culture of the Warcraft community was in turmoil due to the *Cataclysm* announcement allowed for the mining of rich data. Posters discussed the necessity of *WoW*, its "realness" to them, and how and why they identified with it so strongly. There was no single blog post which could be identified as the RA, only a collection of relevant posts from a myriad of topics which speak generally to the notion of the RA being that the "World" of Warcraft is a very real, important place for those who post about it. Therefore, we now move to a discussion of the dominant pentadic element identified from the dataset, that of scene, and from that subsequently move to a discussion of pentadic ratio.

Dominant Pentadic Element

In reviewing the topics, themes, and hinted-at RA from the corpus of the dataset, it quickly became clear that scene was the dominant pentadic element. The primary reason for this is that scene is, of course, of singular and primary importance to the *WoW* gamers who posted in the dataset when discussing the major announcement of *Cataclysm*. Beyond merely the *Cataclysm*-related discussions, however, the aspect of scene was also recurrent in discussions of nostalgia. Several examples of scene being privileged by the *WoW* gamers are listed in posts included throughout this chapter. Despite this, a few more are warranted for increased support and clarity:

MooNinja Aug 27th 2009 8:03AM
I've gone through the old world numerous times. I think I'd miss the old world to some degree, but not nearly as much as I'd enjoy a new and revamped one

Gerik Aug 27th 2009 9:18AM
Northrend[63] has had the best outdoor zones yet.

johnthediver Aug 27th 2009 11:31AM
Bland and boring zones in Lich King[64]? Really? I thought they were beautiful and fun (except ice crown, I hate that place). There was nothing better than landing in the Fjord, ans seeing the green lush zone with giant cliffs

I admin the Borean Tundra was a little "bland"...but it is TUNDRA! Moving on th dragonblight, Grizzly Hills (Although this place looks a little like "Disney's California Adventures" to me) Sholzar Basin...all great and pretty zones.

Sehvekah Aug 27th 2009 4:07PM
Though not an altoholic[65], I can still agree wholehartedly with this. I mean, I loved the old world the first couple times through, there's only so many times one can do those quests

Being able to bring back that sense of wonder while exploring the old world will make it worth bringing a couple more alts[66] through that journey

jrb Aug 27th 2009 8:52AM
i'll add my own ultra-high res panorama gallery. e.g. dalaran, which no longer exists[67].

Click the download button if you want the full res shots. – http://picasaweb.google.com/jethrobrewin/WorldOfWarcraftPanoramas#

Todd Aug 27th 2009 10:07AM
Westfall[68] needs to burn. Seriously, that zone is quite depressing. Burn Westfall... burn.

veil Aug 27th 2009 9:33AM
i'll get nostalgic for teldrassil, ashenvale, auberdine, and the like, since that was my absolute first experience on launch day.
Jason Aug 27th 2009 8:18AM
Yeah I will miss Auberdine and Darkshore[69], I really like the mood, graphics and music there. A lot of people thinks its quite boring there but I find it peaceful. I'm

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[63] Northrend is an "outside" location in Azeroth. Often, these "outside" locations are graphically well-developed and referenced by *WoW* gamers as quite scenic.

[64] Lich King is Cataclysm's predecessor expansion pack to *WoW*.

[65] An "altoholic" is someone who plays a substantial number of different characters in *WoW*.

[66] "alts" = alternate or secondary characters to a *WoW* gamer's "main" or primary character they play.

[67] The poster took high resolution screencaps of various areas in "vanilla" *WoW* such as the referenced dalaran, and placed them in an online photo album for people to view.

[68] Westfall is an area or "zone" in Azeroth.

[69] Areas or "zones" in "vanilla" *WoW*.

pretty glad that blizz are changing the old world though. It brings about a bit of "remember how it used to be"... or "when I was a lad"... we'll see though...

wllmsgame **Aug 27th 2009 8:58AM**
Well a lot are going to miss darkshore, not me personally, considering that the new town is being moved up north a bit... And hey it would be kinda cool to exlore the ruins of that town.

Justin **Aug 27th 2009 8:28AM**
I'll probably run the old world on a server so I can always go back to it if I want.

Uatu **Aug 27th 2009 8:31AM**
I'll miss the old lands. With flying[70] introduced and the lands remade, That 'I'm not supposed to be here' feeling that you'd get from finding a 'forbidden' area will be al but gone.

The waterfall and house near Stormwind
Old Iron Forge
The IF airstrip
The unfinished cliffs west of Stonetalon
Under Stormwind
The hole in Stranglethorn where you could fall through the world
The mountain pass east of Desolace

Aubrecia **Aug 27th 2009 8:34AM**
As someone currently working on leveling an alt, no, I will not miss it, and though I can see the logic behind nostalgia, it should never be the actual reasoning for any actions taken or lack thereof.

The fact is, no matter how fondly you remember questing in old world Azeroth, it is annoying, it is repetitive, and it it boring. WOTLK[71] has refined questing to a fun, streamlined, interesting process where it seems like quests actually have relevance; phasing is only a small part of that. Even compare BC[72] quests to old world quests and the gap between them is massive.

It's been 5 years. The old world isn't something to be proud of anymore, and if anything, it's an obstacle that requires overcoming both for new players and for alt players.

Aaron **Aug 27th 2009 8:43AM**
I am curious lore wise on how many quests they are changing and how many will stay the same. I'm just kinda a lore-geek, and coming into the game at the

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[70] One of the most anticipated changes coming with Cataclysm is the ability of characters to travel by flight.
[71] "WOTLK" = "Wrath of the Lich King", a *WoW* expansion pack preceding Cataclysm.
[72] "BC" = "Burning Crusade", the first *WoW* expansion pack.

beginning of this year, I've had to play major catchup in everything that is going on in the world. I'm hoping they don't change too much

Wesley Morrison Aug 27th 2009 8:41AM
I'm really torn on this. I love the old world. I'm one of those who occasionally just runs through old zones for mere nostalgia's sakes. However, I am really excited about running an alt through the new Azeroth. If only there was a way to keep the old and the new.

Drow Aug 27th 2009 9:30AM
I will miss it. A LOT. Sure, it will be fun, new, and exciting. Just like Outlands and Northrend[73]. But when there, you could always go back to the original WoW. You could level again through the same zones and do the same quests you remembered from 5 years ago. It would bring back fun memories! Even if you're new or rushed the first time through, you could go back and experince the lore that made it what it is today. Now...that's all going to change. Anything "old school" or original you want to do is going to be gone.

The above examples do a nice job of encapsulating a majority of the discussions which take place throughout the dataset that fixate on the pentadic element of scene. Additionally, as with many of the previous discussions in the dataset presented throughout this chapter, there is interplay between scene, nostalgia, and lore. Moreover, the "old-school" versus "new school" dichotomy is also evident, with the former camp exhibiting apprehension or sorrow for the loss of "vanilla" areas in *WoW*, and the latter expressing excitement over the forthcoming new areas and rebuilt "vanilla" areas.

Despite the divergence of opinions between the two camps of posters in the dataset on the benefit (or lack thereof) of *Cataclysm* changing the element of scene for the "World" of Warcraft, one thing is evident: the scene, the "World" of Warcraft is of primary importance for a majority of the posters in this dataset who play *WoW*, either as something sacrosanct, or as something that is lumbering and tired that needs to evolve.

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[73] Areas a player reaches after getting past the initial quests in the "vanilla" areas of *WoW*.

With scene identified as the dominant pentadic element in the gamers out-game talk, we now move to a discussion of secondary pentadic elements, and in turn the dominant pentadic ratio of scene-purpose elucidated from the posts encapsulated within the dataset.

Dominant Pentadic Ratio

Recalling Burke's (1945) analogy that the elements of the pentad are like the finger bones of a hand—that is to say they ultimately all connect by meeting at the hand—we may begin to discuss the element of pentadic ratios as they relate to *WoW*. My initial read prior to examining the dataset was that players previously perceived their interaction through/with *WoW* as an agent-scene ratio. What they seemed to be enjoying about the game is that THEY controlled the scene; their motives (and subsequently their acts) give them some control over the scene.

However, the announced forthcoming release of *Cataclysm* "upset the apple cart" by appearing to reassert that the "true" ratio would actually be scene-agent or even scene-act. In effect, Blizzard's game designers can, and did, assert their will over the gamers vis-a-vis the "sea change" *Cataclysm* promised to bring to *WoW*. From several of the posts listed throughout this chapter, the *WoW* gamers allude to the game as being a haven for them, a "real" refuge where things follow clearly established patterns, rules, and lore. Therefore, it makes sense that many players became upset at their perceived loss of control over the "World" of Warcraft as they knew it for the previous five-plus years. Upon closer review of the body of data and the individual posts contained within it, however, the element of purpose ascended as best interacting with scene and capturing the essence of the feelings held by the *WoW* gamers in this dataset. According to Burke

(1945), the pentadic element of purpose answers the question "Why?'. Irmscher (1979)
expounds on this by stating that by answering the question of "Why?" a scholar
employing pentadic criticism also tacitly asks the question "Why not?". In other words,
what did the agent want to accomplish and why did they use this approach to
achieve said purpose? Why not do it another way?

In the case of the *WoW* gamers who posted within this captured dataset, the posts
are reflective of the rationale behind the latter questions listed directly above. For the
WoW gamers who posted within this captured dataset, *WoW* provides an arena for
personal fulfillment. This may be something which Kelly II (2004) asserts could be
lacking from a *WoW* gamer's real life, or merely something they find more directly from
WoW than other video games. Relating to this, it is also just as important to discuss those
posters who indicated they planned to leave *WoW*, either in the few examples from the
posts listed previously in this chapter, or from the (forthcoming) discussion of the
secondary dataset from Frostbolt (Retrieved: http://frostbolt.com).

For those players who indicated they planned to or had quit *WoW*, the game lost
its sense of purpose for them; they were no longer personally fulfilled enough by playing
the game to justify the cost, time, or both. In a previously-referenced quote by Gahlok,
the blogger who runs the Frostbolt website, *WoW* was cast as becoming too much like a
job to give Gahlok any sense of personal satisfaction: "The game was probably fun until
the last couple of months, for some reason I ended up thinking that *WoW* was just playing
5-6 hours a day, 5 days a week, which seemed like a job" (Retrieved:
http://frostbolt.com/2009/09/25/the-end-of-a-jouney/).

By first asking the question of "Why not?' as it pertains to exiting *WoW* gamers who posted within the dataset, we may better uncover the "Why" for those who continue to play. The posts by *WoW* gamers such as Gahlok who quit or planned to quit *WoW* referenced them having lost their sense of the game as being meaningful; it ceased to provide adequate benefit for its cost financially or temporally. Therefore it stands to reason that for those who continue to play *WoW*, it continues to provide acceptable personal benefit to justify its costs. Again, we can refer to previously listed posts as support for this assertion:

> **wolfsterne Aug 28th 2009 3:55PM**
> Basically...my wife and I are Blizzards bitches and happily so. we play the MMO, the TCG the mini game, we read the comics, the novels.. wear the clothing...go to the Blizzcons...I have already related how much we play per day (which folks were rather supportive of surprisingly) But it's what we do...hell we met at Blizzcon 2005....

> **Cheesemonkey Sep 5th 2009 8:03PM**
> I would so switch my dwarf hunter to a tauren if I didn't have tons of friends and connections alliance-side[74].

> **tim Sep 5th 2009 6:10PM**
> It's interesting how so many people - even ones who don't RP[75] - see themselves so vividly in their character.

> **vinehorn Aug 25th 2009 7:53PM**
> I love World of Warcraft. This game is a hobby just like my other hobbies rugby, weightlifting and computers.

> **Rippchen Aug 22nd 2009 8:41AM**
> because this fiddling with numbers is a minigame all for itself, which can be real fun to a lot of people. there are folks out there, who actually enjoy math.

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[74] As discussed in Chapter One, when beginning the game a player chooses a side or "faction" to be on when they enter the game: Horde or Alliance.

[75] "RP" = role play, in this case referring to a gamer assuming the identity of the character they play (as espoused by lore) and acting in a manner consistent with the lore-dictated character personality type.

The above posts are a but a few contained within the dataset and listed throughout this chapter which are reflective of the element of purpose as it is contained within scene (e.g. a "scene-purpose" pentadic ratio), within the "World" of Warcraft. Players play the game because it is a hobby, because it allows them to socialize, because it allows them to use a particular skill (such as math) in an innovative way. While the specific rationale behind the personal fulfillment of an individual who plays *WoW* is as unique as the individual themselves, ultimately the purpose, the "Why?" for playing *WoW*, for those captured within this dataset, is for personal fulfillment.

The notion of purpose also dovetails nicely with that of motive. As discussed in chapter three, many studies that employ pentadic criticism proudly proclaim that they have identified the dominant pentadic element and dominant pentadic ratio and then stop. However, without taking the analysis one step farther, to a discussion of potential motives, it remains incomplete. As purpose is the pentadic element that most closely aligns with motive (e.g. the "Why?"), we now move to an explication of potential motives that drive the *WoW* gamers who posted within the dataset.

Motives

Above all else, a game should be "fun" in order to ensure people willingly and repeatedly play it. As the dominant pentadic element is that of scene, and the dominant ratio is that of scene-purpose, we now move to a frank discussion of *WoW* gamer motives.

To that end, as previously touched upon in chapter one, the blog discussions for *WoW* gamers recalls Schutz's (1932) notion of intersubjectivity. The game players enjoy the experiential aspect of playing the game, to be sure. However, by talking about and

sharing meaning with one another related to various game topics, the game players are also turning that experience into language to understand not only each other's motives, but perhaps even their own. There is this thing, this game, which many *WoW* players spend substantial time and money on. From the examples listed throughout this chapter it is clear the game is important to most of those who discuss it. By discussing various aspects about the game, a primary motive emerged behind why the posters play this game, why they spend considerable time and money on it, why they identify with it so powerfully.

As stated when discussing nostalgia and earlier in the chapter, part of the hold *WoW* appears to have on its gamers (based on their out-game talk in the dataset) resides in the import, and importance, of the quality of symbolic reality[76] the game possesses, and from that, the intersubjective acceptance that this "realness" is understood and shared by others. As Burke (1945) relates in *Grammar*, language choice elucidates motive, so it is through this intersubjectivity vis-à-vis language choice that motives begin to emerge for the blog posters who play *WoW*.

The majority of *WoW* gamers who posted within the dataset cite or allude to one motive for playing the game: personal fulfillment. This fulfillment may take root in many forms, be it in exploration of another world, attempting an occupation they may lack the aptitude or ability to pursue in real life, escapism, socializing, or many others. Ultimately, however, the motive driving the game was that of personal fulfillment. The

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[76] The quality of symbolic reality here refers to the "realness" of the game for the players, as well as how much the game allows them to obtain personal fulfillment in whatever individual manner they choose (e.g. "farming", questing, social interaction, exploration, virtual "antiquing", pet collecting, etc.).

scene, the "World" of Warcraft enabled the gamers to play the game, and once within it, they could achieve their purpose of personal fulfillment.

Quitting WoW

While there were instances from posts earlier in the chapter where the gamers expressed frustration with either *WoW* or Blizzard Entertainment, there were very few examples from the entire "Breakfast Topics" dataset where the gamers expressed a strong desire to actually detach from or outright quit *WoW*. As noted in the posts reflecting themes as well as the RA and pentadic elements, *WoW* seems to possess an uncanny hold on its players. There were several examples (listed throughout the chapter) of how vital the game is for the players, as demonstrated by their out-game talk. However, this devotion by many of the gamers who take time to post on *WoW*-centric message boards and blogs does not take into consideration those for whom the game has lost its luster.

As discussed both in chapters one and three, a second dataset was captured for this study for comparative purposes from the website Frostbolt (Retrieved: http://frostbolt.com). This website is run by an individual who goes by the internet handle of "Gahlok". The website was initially selected by the criteria and selection process explicated in chapter 3. That is to say, it frequently came up as a top "hit" in various Google search iterations and was, until right before the time of data collection, a fairly well-trafficked blog according to the Google Trends and Big Boards website analyses.

While the number of blog posts and subsequent responses by those who visited Frostbolt was relatively small, an interesting and rather serendipitous event occurred during the time randomly selected for data collection. Gahlok began to voice increasing

displeasure with *WoW*, culminating with a "farewell" post on 09/05/2009 which included a "screencap" of his account cancellation notice and several responses by followers and respondents of his blog expressing shock, disbelief, and even mild outrage.

Gahlok's transformation from avid *WoW* player to a disinterested one, and finally a detached one, is chronicled by his blog posts on Frostbolt. On 8/25/2009, he posted a blog entitled "I'm still alive and kickin'" with the following statement: "My last update was probably two months ago; I have to admit I've been a bit lazy. To tell the truth, for a couple of months I've been getting burnt of *WoW* (more info about this latter on)." After some screencaps and discussion on what he has been doing in his increasingly limited time playing *WoW*, Gahlok then writes in the same blog post "Going back to the getting burnt topic, some weeks ago it was really bad".

Gahlok then follows this up with one blog post on 8/26/09 and two separate ones on 8/29/09 entailing lengthy, detailed posts on how to accomplish certain quests as well as general advice for his readers, and updates on what he has been doing in his *WoW* gaming time. On 8/29/09 he makes light of the fact that after admittedly becoming "burnt" and rarely updating his blog, ""It's kinda funny how often I've been updating lately". In what might be considered attempts by his blog readers to keep him engaged, there are several questions posed to Gahlok (which he answers) and a couple of very lengthy, detailed posts by some readers praising his *WoW* tips and detailing what they are doing with their characters in *WoW*.

However, despite this seeming change of opinion, on 9/05/2009 Gahlok posted a blog with the title "The end of a journey". This blog post began with a screencap

showing "Subscription Successfully Cancelled" and was followed directly by the

following commentary:

> For months I've been getting burnt of the game (booooooooring~), a
>
> couple of weeks ago I took a slight break of the game to see if it helped,
>
> but I can't say I was missing it. So, effective today, my account has been
>
> cancelled. (Gahlok, September 5, 2009).

Gahlok then follows this comment up with several screenshots of him and his

brother at a *WoW* virtual festival called "Brewfest", which is *WoW*'s virtual answer to

Oktoberfest. He then gives his rationale for why he elected to stop playing a game

which, for him, had become a big part of his life and gave him some notoriety in the

WoW community via his blog:

> I played World of Warcraft for over 4 years . . . This is actually the first time I
>
> ever quit, and I really doubt I will come back unless something really good
>
> happens (Cataclysm? Nah, kinda ironic that they are just remaking old content
>
> with just a couple of new things, with all the money they are making—compared
>
> to other companies—can't they be a bit more creative) . . . They are many other
>
> reasons why I got tired of the game (so many stats to keep an eye, having to use
>
> spreadsheets[77] and such, then stats changed and you had to remake it, monotony,
>
> etc.) . . . The game was probably fun until the last couple months, for some reason
>
> I ended up thinking that WoW was just playing 5-6 hours a day, 5 days a week,
>
> which seemed like a job (and not enough room to make other stuff). **There were**

---

[77] In WoW, it is common practice to create handwritten or MS Excel spreadsheets with percentages for battle actions, relative value for items collected, and effectiveness of various items for or against various enemies or activities.

even weeks that I would raid six days per week, there's not much fun about

it. (Author emphasis, Gahlok, September 5, 2009).

There are several notable and interesting aspects to Gahlok's farewell to *WoW* blog post. Chief among these is his admission that *WoW* requires substantial time to play, and substantial outside preparation to play effectively (spreadsheets). Another relevant aspect of the farewell blog is the admission that for Gahlok, *Cataclysm* is simply a repackaged *WoW* with little new content. Recalling a critical point of robust debate amongst the examples earlier in this chapter by the actively-engaged gamers posting in the "Breakfast Topics" blogs, this decision seemed to be a tipping point for Gahlok as it was for many of the *Cataclysm* detractors in the "Breakfast Topics" blog responses.

Gahlok concludes his farewell blog post:

This website is one of the first WoW blogs that came out back when the game was launched (along with Hogit). Ever since a hype for blogs and wow-related websites came out and a lot more people joined the blog ranks. Heck, if you searched in Google WoW Blog my website would come out ranked #1, until a bigger website organization[78] came out and is currently ranked #1, can't really compete (hehe). **I'd like to thank all of you, the readers, for keeping company on my website for so long.** Keep in mind that my site is not dying, as soon as I decide where I'm going I'll probably start writing about it. Probably in a couple of weeks there is more information regarding this . . . **THE END** (for wow—

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[78] Gahlok is referring to the "official" WoW blogosphere, formerly www.wow.com and now www.joystiq.com, which was the source of the "Breakfast Topics" blog and response data used in this study.

deleting it from my computer, new game coming up soon). (author emphasis,

Gahlok, September 5, 2009).

The interesting aspect of the final part of Gahlok's farewell blog post concerns

one of the major themes found in the "Breakfast Topics" blog forum posts, nostalgia.

Gahlok spends time both in this post and throughout his farewell post waxing nostalgic

about the origins of his website, the time he has devoted to playing *WoW*, and some of

the things he did while playing it. Even for those who grow tired of the game, and in

Gahlok's case ultimately quit playing it, nostalgia for the game and what it meant to their

lives is a powerful theme in the out-game talk.

Gahlok's farewell blog post received by far the most commentary from his

readers, with 29 comments as opposed to 10 for the next-closest number of responses to

his other blog posts collected within the dataset. As noted previously, the responses

ranged from well-wishes to shock, and even mild outrage. The rather lengthy (but

important) interchange demonstrates this:

> **Dinaer Sep 25th, 2009 at 5:51 pm**
> Thanks for the memories!
> Yours was the first WoW blog I ever read, and one of my inspirations to blog
> myself. Good luck, wherever your journey takes you
>
> **Jenny Sep 28th, 2009 at 1:50 pm**
> Good luck with other things you do. I know how you feel about getting burnt on
> the game. I canceled my account as well, but I might renew
> The Claw Sep 29th, 2009 at 4:27 pm
> I've never heard of a long-time player who cancelled due to burnout and didn't
> come back, at least once
>
> **Taylonis Oct 4th, 2009 at 2:14 am**
> I was about to say the same exact thing as Dinaer, but they stole my thunder. I
> used to read your blog a lot more a LONG time ago, but I've only recently started
> reading your stuff again. Good luck with whatever you do man!

<u>Wayne</u> <u>Oct 4th, 2009 at 5:22 am</u>
Everyone needs a break every now and again. Like they say the meaning of insanity is doing the same thing day in and day out and expecting different results. Come on Blizzard make something really new and different to keep us interested.

<u>AShadowPriest</u> <u>Oct 20th, 2009 at 12:24 pm</u>
Farewell — there are a lot of prominent bloggers leaving WoW these days. I hope Blizzard is taking notice.

I understand you when you say you were lost in spreadsheets and obtaining an optimal gearset —You can put tons of effort into it, and by and large little will separate you from those who spent very little effort in doing so. By listening to masses of people clamoring and complaining for their little flavor of the minute, Blizzard has diluted the essence of their game
And what has really been gained?

More people taking the easy path of little effort and getting bored quickly when "success" comes all too easily. Players with more dedication, who had fun feeling like they had overcome every possible stumbling block — are losing their patience with the new type of player that dominates WoW. Reading between the lines, that's what I'm seeing.

And Blizzard really only has themselves to blame, for giving in over and over and reversing their prior positions on so many things. They've been listening to the wrong people, catering to the wrong crowd. This isn't the tired old casual/hardcore dichotomy, it's something more subtle, and worthy of consideration.

Dave <u>Oct 22nd, 2009 at 2:14 pm</u>
I have so many WOW related questions to ask you How do I contact you. What could convince you to stay?

<u>anti</u> <u>Oct 25th, 2009 at 5:48 pm</u>
Somehow, I saw this coming – guess it was just a matter of time. I've been reading your blog for over 3 years now, never really commented, tho, I'm not much of a speaker, I guess. But I loved the way you were writing and that kept me coming back here. Actually, come to think of it, it's the only blog I ever read more than just few times.

And your adventures with switching guilds[79] and all the drama – it actually seemed like a story to me, and I was so afraid that you'd quit WOW

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[79] The poster here is referring to previous blogs by Gahlok when he was switching "guilds", or groups of like-minded players who band together for online quests as a team.

Anyway, you've come a long way and, I guess, it was about time to at least take a break from the game. I'm anticipating what you'll choose next, because I'd be sad to see this blog die.

Joel <u>Oct 28th, 2009 at 1:14 pm</u>
Thanks for all the great posts and best of luck beyond Wow!

<u>WoWModel</u> <u>Nov 4th, 2009 at 7:17 pm</u>
I too was an hardcore player, quitting is not really easy, but the game is becoming worse than ever I heard, so it should be easier !

<u>Mage PvP Guide</u> <u>Nov 5th, 2009 at 5:13 pm</u>
I've quite WoW on many occasions. I've cancelled it all, formatted my computer and said I was done. It never works like that for me though. I always have somebody who pulls me back into the game.

shamus <u>Nov 8th, 2009 at 10:21 am</u>
R.I.P. Gahlok

<u>kunu</u> <u>Nov 15th, 2009 at 9:47 am</u>
"The game was probably fun until the last couple of months, for some reason I ended up thinking that WoW was just playing 5-6 hours a day, 5 days a week, which seemed like a job "
I had the same feeling…I stopped 2 weeks ago and do not want to play anymore .

<u>B-rad</u> <u>Dec 6th, 2009 at 6:34 pm</u>
Ive got burnt out on many games. Now i'm trying to be more productive with my time.

<u>dectade</u> <u>Dec 9th, 2009 at 4:21 pm</u>
GAHLOK. sucks broman. leave for iraq for 6months and as im about to come back to raiding, i get this news. well enjoy your days as a free man and email me so i can have your druid[80]. take care bro

It is important to note that while the above exchange is lengthy, it has been pared

down from the original 29 posts, and some posts above have also been edited to remove

extraneous or jargon-laden talk for the sake of clarity. What emerges from the Frostbolt

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[80] A type of character class in WoW, in this case dectade is referring to Gahlok's maximum-level of 80 druid he had played and built up over 4-plus years of gaming. 80 is the highest level a character can achieve in *WoW*. The higher the level, the greater a characters power and abilities.

posters out-game talk is in many ways strikingly similar to the *Cataclysm*-related issues that emerged from the analysis of many of the comments from the "Breakfast Topics" posts. Namely, that the features Blizzard revealed as "new" for *Cataclysm* felt more like a rehash of "vanilla" *WoW* for many of the gamers, along with the fact that for many people, the game simply dominated too much of their free time to feel like a game rather than a job.

At this point, revisiting the "old school" vs. "new school" dichotomy is prudent. In the previous posts made both by Gahlok and his blog followers, there exists clear rhetoric casting the majority of the Frostbolt blog community firmly in the "old school" camp. Several posters allude to how much better the game used to be, or how impatient and annoying the "new school" *WoW* players are. Some cite these "new school" players or their belief that Blizzard is catering to them for the sake of the almighty dollar as a reason to leave the game. While this revelation is not surprising given the fact that Frostbolt was the longest-running *WoW*-centric blog on the internet (and hence most likely attracted and retained long-time *WoW* gamers) it is still interesting to note.

As an interesting postscript to Gahlok's detachment from *WoW*, I continued to follow his blog after his farewell post. There have been three new blog posts since his farewell post on 9/05/2009, coming on 1/05/2010, 6/19/2010, and 9/25/2010. In all of them he writes of his lack of desire to return to *WoW*, perhaps none more telling than the following:

> After three months of stopping the World of Warcraft addiction I can say that I haven't missed the game any single bit, not even when they sent that email saying that I had 7-day credit for accounts that were inactive or something. At this point I

can't really understand why people keeps saying that, after a couple of weeks, or a

month, you feel that you need to go back to WoW (Gahlok, June 19, 2010).

Conclusion

It is clear from the robust debate and passionate opinions *WoW* evokes from the

gamers who post about it that the game inspires strong feelings from many of its players.

Whether the issue is player class, scenery, weapons, or the divisive *Cataclysm*, *WoW* has

demonstrated an ability to captivate millions of subscriber, many of whom devote

countless hours of their free time exploring Azeroth—be it for adventure, social

interaction, virtual "occupations", or simply sightseeing.

Conclusion

Then I stand up for the first time in 24 hours. I can feel the blood rushing to my numb feet. My wrists ache with carpal tunnel nerve swelling. My eyes are smoldering from the equivalent of three contiguous workdays of staring at a computer screen . . . my eyes are closing as I stand in the doorway. Before I collapse, I trudge reluctantly up to bed. I climb in, but my thoughts linger in the universe of malevolent forests, infested dungeons, and corpse-strewn prairies . . . the notion of addiction haunts my bubbling, furious, psychedelic, monster-fleeing, fabulous-wealth-accumulating, powerful-now-and-soon-to-be-unconquerable, is that the newest sword? anyone-know-where-a-good-place- to-croak-golems[81]? how-did-I-become-locked-into-this-world? why-am-I-acting-this-way? what-do-I-gain-from-this? what's-wrong-with-me? dreams (Kelly II, 2004, pp. 6-7).

Introduction

No matter one's orientation to either the world of digital gaming in general or more specifically to Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMO's) such as *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*), it is clear from both the financial and demographic data that it is an ever-expanding, ever-evolving social arena. According to sales estimates presented by Jeremy Nichols from the November 11, 2010 online edition of the St. Louis Examiner (Retrieved: http://www.examiner.com/console-game-in-st-louis/call-of-duty-black-ops-sales-figures-so-far), another multiplayer game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, annihilated every previous video game sales record by posting an estimated 550 million dollar sales figure on its first day of release in the United States and United Kingdom. This figure exceeded the first day take of its hugely successful 2009 predecessor, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, by several hundred million dollars. Interestingly, it also outgrossed the three biggest opening weekends of theatrical releases in history, including Twilight: New Moon ($142 million), Spiderman 3 ($151 million), and The Dark Knight ($158 million) according to the box office revenue tracking website Box Office Mojo (Retrieved: http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/weekends/).

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[81] "croak golems" = to kill a type of monster in WoW

Furthermore, video games are increasingly beginning to recall what Jenkins

(2006) refers to as "convergence culture", whereby the narrative elements in one medium

transcend the limits of that medium by utilizing other media formats. In addition to the

serialization of many video games into novels or comic books (*Halo*, *WoW*,

Warhammer), some video games are being made into movies (Resident Evil, Max Payne)

or vice versa (Terminator: Salvation, Avatar). Moreover, as video games become

increasingly big business, they are no longer limited to the realm of the "average Joe".

The aforementioned *Call of Duty: Black Ops* features a voice cast including Gary

Oldman, Ed Harris, and Sam Worthington, all three of whom are major movie stars.

Video games are a prevalent and increasingly enmeshed social phenomena,

establishing them as an important arena for scholastic investigation. In this study I

examined one particular game, *WoW*, because it is the most widely played MMO of all

time, which provided a wealth of rich data to mine via out-game talk and discussion on

various blogs and message board forums, and due to its increasing popularity based on

aggregate subscription trends over the past 2 years (Retrieved: http://us.blizzard.com/en-

us/company/press/pressreleases.html?101007).

It is important to note, however, that the most recent subscriber data from the

above Blizzard press release shows an increase of only one million new subscribers since

Blizzard last released subscriber data in 2008. Thus, while the trend still remains

positive, the rate of new subscribers has decreased considerably from the robust sales and

subscription data increases from 2004-2008 (Retrieved: http://us.blizzard.com/en-

us/company/press/pressreleases.html). Whether this slowing of the new subscriber rate is

due to *WoW* market saturation, increased competition from other video games or

entertainment options, the depressed global economy, dissatisfaction with *WoW* itself, or some other unknown factor is unclear. This slowing of new subscribers to *WoW* is one avenue which may prove fascinating to explore more fully (more on this later).

But what of those who currently play the game? My intent in this study was to examine the out-game talk by *WoW* gamers which is likely typical of their out-game talk regardless of forum. From this, I endeavored to illuminate the topics that these gamers privileged; what kinds of things were they talking about most frequently and why? This study received a fortuitous break in the form of the randomly selected timeframe for data collection. The announcement of the forthcoming *Cataclysm* expansion pack for *WoW* elicited substantial commentary from the gamers who read and posted on various *WoW* forums, including the ones selected for analysis in this study. Therefore, revisiting— albeit briefly—the results of the analysis aids the reader in better understanding the importance of the study within the larger context of communication studies. Furthermore, it will help orient the study in terms of its limitations as well as its implications for future research applying a communicative lens to the arena of video games.

Results

The findings from the analysis of the gamers' out-game talk on the "Breakfast Topics" and "Frostbolt" blogs revealed some telling themes. As discussed in chapter four, at the time of data collection *Cataclysm* proved to be the predominant issue concerning the gamers who posted on the selected forums for data collection and analysis. This watershed event for the entire "World" of Warcraft proved, time and again, to be an issue the gamers repeatedly returned to when discussing many topics in

the blogs selected for data collection and analysis. These discussions were no coincidence, for while the timeframe for data collection was random, it coincided with the Blizzcon announcement about *Cataclysm*. Given that *Cataclysm* promised to vastly alter many of the standard aspects of *WoW* (various levels, characters, extant lore), it is not surprising that so many individuals who posted during the data collection period privileged it in their discussions.

Even in the other emergent themes identified in the analysis, lore and nostalgia, *Cataclysm* proved to be the looming spectre within which they were couched. All of these emergent themes (lore, nostalgia, and *Cataclysm*) collectively acted vis-à-vis the posts made by gamers as a synechdoche illuminating the Representative Anecdote (RA).

As Burke (1945) discusses in *Grammar*, the RA must be "supple and complex enough to be representative of the subject matter it is designed to calculate. It must have scope. Yet it must also possess simplicity, in that it is broadly a reduction of the subject matter" (p. 60). This seeming dichotomy presented by Burke (1945) does in fact fit the spirit of the posts identified which collectively hint at the RA which appears to preexist the dataset. The RA alluded to by the gamers' posts was that the "World" of Warcraft, for those who play it, is "real". Again, this does not suppose that the players believe Azeroth is a real location, but the events contained within it, the reason they play the game, and the world itself matter to *WoW* players.

This RA appears simplistic upon first glance, but contains scope due to the identification of various themes which collectively unearth it, coupled with the fact that its presence is so powerful that it goes unquestioned. Posters naturally fall into language use and discussions which collectively affirm that power by its tacit acknowledgement,

which provides compelling support that the RA preexisted the dataset. Thus, while no single post from this dataset could be held up as the RA for *WoW*, collectively the posts hint at its existence and power.

Subsequently, utilizing the RA as a lens by which to unpack the dominant elements of the pentad led to the identification of scene as the dominant pentadic element. From the dataset the element of purpose was also identified as a secondary but important pentadic element. Together, employing the "container" and "thing-contained" metaphor Burke (1945) employs in espousing dramatism in *Grammar*, scene-purpose was elucidated as the dominant pentadic ratio.

Finally, after identifying themes, the RA, the dominant pentadic element, and finally dominant pentadic ratio, the study examined potential gamer motives. Unlike several extant pentadic analyses, which proudly proclaim the identification of a dominant pentadic element or found ratio as the capstone of that particular study, I sought to sidestep that pitfall. I did so by taking the analysis one step further to a discussion of the motives which drive the players analyzed in the dataset to play the game. In this particular case, I postulated that the entire analysis was cyclical, namely, that the gamers play the game because it is important and matters to them. Because it is important and matters to them, they begin, on some level, to identify themselves as a "*WoW* gamer", which then leads them back to playing the game.

The quotations found at the beginning of each chapter by Kelly II (2004) allude to this identification, as he was directly discussing his own experiences playing *WoW* in all of them. Notably, throughout this study, Kelly II (2004) is also referenced discussing how much of a time commitment *WoW* is for a "typical" player, as well as how *WoW* can

serve for many players as a surrogate for things that may be lacking the players real life. As a character in *WoW*, unlike in the player's real life, they may undertake a virtual career as a banker or archaeologist they never had the opportunity to pursue, or fulfill the desire to "travel" and explore new realms without leaving the comforts of home. They have the opportunity to seek out and make new friends regardless of physical geographic boundaries on a level playing field without societal constraints or biases against gender, race, age, weight, attractiveness, or any number of demographic categorizations. All in all, the strongest motive driving *WoW* gamers to play the game appears to be its ability to provide something which for them is lacking in reality (even if what is lacking is merely a cheap form of entertainment).

Limitations

The current study is not without substantial limitations. Chiefly, any rhetorical study is limited by the inherent subjectivity of the critic. This limitation is, in theory, minimized by the use of the rhetorical tools selected for analysis of the dataset. These tools are designed to help limit any inherent biases I may possess, nonetheless, the possibility exists that my findings might not be replicated by a secondary analysis from another critic. However, since the dataset being analyzed consisted of out-game talk by *WoW* gamers, the data itself is codified on the page as the words the individual authors used in their posts. In other words, unlike a rhetorical analysis of in-game interaction or gameplay a la Shields (2009) study of the rhetorical purpose of the game *Tropico*, which is subject to differing perspectives by differing players, the dataset in this study is both finite and concrete.

However, while the dataset for this study is both finite and concrete, *WoW*, as an MMO, is not. The game is constantly populated by hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of players across the globe. Therefore, the dataset is limited by both timeframe and scope. My analysis only analyzes a single two-week snapshot in time of the rhetorical outputs of *WoW* gamers from two *WoW*-centric blogosphere websites. This dataset, therefore, lacks the ability to glean further clarity or follow up from the gamers captured within it as it might if done via focus groups, interviews, or online (virtual) ethnography of in-game play and in-game talk. Additionally, while the general parameters of *WoW* are fairly constant, the game is constantly evolving. Old players are leaving, and new subscribers are joining every day. Plus, with the introduction of *Cataclysm* on December 7, 2010, many of the aspects of "vanilla" *WoW* will be altered or outright abolished. This constant evolution of *WoW* means that while my dataset is static, it represents only a snapshot in time for a game which is continuously changing.

Lastly, with respect to the dataset, my sample likely only targets for analysis the more "hardcore" *WoW* gamers and not those who may choose to play the game simply for brief escapism and fun. While my sample timeframe and scope were selected for manageability of data analysis, it is noted that my sample represents only the musings of a small fraction of the 13 million-plus *WoW* subscribers. While preliminary analysis of website traffic and blog commentary suggests that the type of discussions found about *WoW* in my dataset likely reflects typical online discussion about *WoW* (at least at the time of data collection), this limitation is still important to note.

Implications for Future Research

This study takes an established means of rhetorical criticism, and applies it to the previously understudied (though this is rapidly changing) area of video games, and in particular, the unique subset of a massively-multiplayer online game with its own unique culture, peculiarities and intricacies. An initial manner of future study, ideally, would be to have someone replicate the study with the same dataset to further establish the reliability and validity of the present study, and improve upon the current study by increasing the timeframe of data collection and/or employing longitudinal rather than single point or "snapshot in time" style data collection.

Secondly, selecting other message boards and blogs to capture other unique gamers' out-game rhetoric to see if they are discussing *WoW* in a manner similar to those in my dataset is warranted. That is to say, are the findings from my dataset (one year old) still applicable to the *WoW* player of today? At the time of data collection, *Cataclysm* had just been announced, a little over one year later, Blizzard is finally preparing to release it for PC, XBOX, and Playstation 3 gamers on December 7th, 2010. This release date was pushed back 70 days from Blizzard's initial announced release date, and as one representation of the level of anticipation Cataclysm is generating, there is now a website statistically tracking its release against previous Blizzard titles (Retrieved: http://cataclysmreleasedate.com/).

Third, it would be prudent for future scholars to examine the out-game rhetoric of other MMO games such as *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, *Everquest*, and *Asheron's Call*. This would allow for the comparison of various themes across similarly-played but content-different games to see if a common or similar RA exists for MMO's. Moreover,

examining the out-game rhetoric of MMO game players and comparing it to the out-game rhetoric of gamers from other types of games such as first-person shooters, sports simulations, and platform or puzzle games could be of heuristic value in speaking to the "what" and "why" players of a particular genre find their games important. What do those gamers value as important to their games and why? Do they limit themselves primarily to one genre of game, or do they play many types? Is there a cross-genre "bridge", a unifying concept gamers privilege regardless of game type, or do certain games lead to higher levels of commitment and discussion than others? These are but a few of the questions that can be pursued when advancing the body of knowledge on the social phenomena of video games and gameplay.

Fourth, as mentioned in the limitations, this study provides a theoretical starting point for the deployment of rhetorical criticism to in-game talk, and allows for researchers from related areas of online ethnography, interview research, and focus groups to triangulate their findings with that of this study which is couched within the rhetorical method of dramatism.

Finally, as discussed in Shields (2009) conclusions, examining video games as pieces of rhetoric themselves, while incredibly challenging due to the conundrum of interactivity[82], is a worthwhile endeavor. Several scholars, including Shields (2009) have already began this endeavor, however, there is little replicability or scope in the current body of research viewing video games as an artifact worthy of rhetorical study.

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[82] Studying digital games as artifacts themselves is incredibly challenging given that no two players will generally play the same game the same way. This challenge is compounded when dealing with open-ended games such as MMO's where the lack of linearity effectively muddles any type of consistent narrative experience.

Summation

In this study, I endeavored to take a relatively new but increasingly widespread technology—the MMO—and employed the lens of dramatism to better help understand the importance of such types of games for those who play them. In doing so, I argued that the use of traditional rhetorical analytical methods is a valid manner of studying a new artifact, the video game. By examining the out-game talk of the gamers who play *WoW*, I was able to gain more of a "big picture" concept of what the game is and what it means to its players. I believe this is preferential to the prospect of allowing more bias to become introduced by undertaking a solo study of the game itself as a rhetorical artifact.

In the abstract, I stated that by its conclusion, the study will have demonstrated that the field of communication studies should be a "privileged" voice in the study of video games. I attempted to do that by increasing the scope of what is conventionally considered to be rhetorical symbol use, suggesting a new application of Burke's concept of the representative anecdote, and perhaps above all else, by pointing out how material experience and symbol use are related. As evidenced in their out-game talk, *WoW* gamers (in several cases) appear to find the symbolic becoming more important, more "real" than the material world—at least for a time.

Whether one is a fan of video games or not, whether they are an avid player of *WoW* or hate it, one thing is certain: video games are a burgeoning industry across the globe, and *WoW* is a unique game in the levels of commitment and passion it inspires in many of its players. Kelly II's (2004) asserts that the "typical" *WoW* player spends 20-30 hours per week playing. According to Maressa Hecht Orzack, Ph. D., the founder of Computer Addiction Services at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts, and a

member of the Harvard School of medicine faculty, as many as 40% of World of

Warcraft subscribers may be addicted (Retrieved:

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/456551/world_of_warcraft_addiction_fact_or.h

tml?cat=70).

Due in large part to the role *WoW* has assumed as the poster child for internet

gaming addiction, the American Medical Association (AMA) began studying video game

addiction and suggested in its 2007 "*Report of the Council on Science and Public Health*"

that conservatively five to 15 percent of all gamers may be suffering from addiction.

Subsequently, the AMA made a formal recommendation that "video game addiction" be

included in the next edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

While Dr. Orzack (2007) and the AMA (2007) reports do not identify a specific

threshold upon which gaming turns from recreation to addiction, Orzack (2007) does say

that addiction is "spending inordinate amounts of time on the activity and the resulting

social dysfunction or disruption in social interactions could signal addiction" (Retrieved:

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/456551/world_of_warcraft_addiction_fact_or.h

tml?cat=70).

Max Frisch (1957) is oft-quoted as saying "Technology is a way of organizing the

universe so that man doesn't have to experience it" (p. 165). Critics have suggested that

immersive, virtual worlds such as Azeroth from *WoW* provide exactly that kind of

technological escapism. However, based on the data analyzed in this study, it is clear that

for many of its players, *WoW* is important because of the autonomy it grants them that

they may not necessarily experience in their "real" lives. Some play simply for

exploration, some play for fun, some play to socialize, and some play for personal

fulfillment found in ways as different and unique as each individual *WoW* gamer.

That is why studying video games, particularly ones that exhibit such a powerful hold on

its players as *WoW* does, is important. For us gamers, doing so allows us to better

understand who we are, and in some respects what motivates us.

      Referring back to Williams (2006) from chapter two, "…it is not particularly

surprising that attention has remained focused on what games do *to* people, and not what

people do *with* games." Changing the academic culture to become people and process as

opposed to outcome oriented, therefore, is a valuable first step towards privileging

communication studies over other academic disciplines as one of the most worthy voices

in the emerging discipline of video game studies. In the end outcomes and results do

matter, but humanizing those outcomes and results to get at what drives the individual is

ultimately a more worthwhile endeavor, by enabling we as scholars to more fully explore

what surrealist painter Rene Magritte referred to as "the human condition".

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