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Communication Of Self And Cyberlife Through Avatars In Second Life Online Communities

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COMMUNICATION OF SELF AND CYBERLIFE THROUGH AVATARS IN
SECOND LIFE ONLINE COMMUNITIES

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved father Carlton Joseph who encouraged me to strive for academic achievement (Rest In Peace).

COMMUNICATION OF SELF AND CYBERLIFE THROUGH AVATARS IN
SECOND LIFE ONLINE COMMUNITIES

by

KYRON JOSEPH, B.M.S

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

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Abstract

Virtual worlds are becoming more and more recognized for its social capabilities. It's making a splash on the global scale as the use for virtual worlds is surpassing the expected means of the creators. The purpose of this study is to investigate how users in the virtual world of Second Life identify themselves with fellow users through their Avatars through the theory of narrative identity. In the virtual world of Second Life, there are many different avenues that users can express themselves, through the narrative plot analysis these avenues will show the relation to the users and self.

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Keywords: Virtual reality, Avatars, Second Life, Narrative identity

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Chapter 1: An Introduction Into Virtual World

1.1 The Power of Virtual Worlds

There are many people who will spend their last dollar to purchase a gaming console on midnight release. There are also many who spend hours gaming, day in day out just for the love of it. By the year 2013, the video game industry grew to an empire that is known by some, but overlooked by others. In the video game world, there is a lot that goes on, but no one ever seems to pay attention because it is classified as just low class entertainment. For this research project, I discuss how Narrative identity has a major role when it applies to the analysis of people's involvement in video games, in particular in virtual worlds . For this research project, I discuss how narrative identity has a major when applied to the analysis of audience involvement, in particular in virtual worlds. The medium is simply made for entertainment purposes, yet there are others who may argue that it is not worthy of being classed in the same category other forms of social problems and entertainment. However, when the field of entertainment is driven by one of the growing fields in the world today, one can not sit and say it is not important as any other field of study today. Video games and virtual worlds are expanding beyond a new high; it makes more money than your favorite media industry (Film or Television) (Cox, 2014). What goes on in the world of gaming is tremendous. Like any other group there are spinal cords that keep it alive, and in the gaming world they are undiscovered.

From an emic perspective, as a gamer there are certain satisfactions that a video game player gets from playing the game of their choice. Whether it is online or traditional gaming, different gamers have different preference when it pertains to choice of video game. The technology industry is increasing thus taking the art of game playing to an all time high. The video game industry is entering a new era, an era where technology and creativity will fuse to

produce some of the most stunning entertainment (Demott, 2008,p.7). The more realistic a product like video game becomes, the more it takes away from the representative approach of society; “Reality is overcome by hyperreality (Baudrillard,1993). The advancement of video game technologies blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, which keeps gamers plugged in. Hyperreality, defined by Baudrillard is a term used to differentiate the difference between reality and what is just a mocked up version of it.

Day after day, there are thousands of men, women and even children who immerse themselves in the art of gaming (Cox, 2014). For hours at a time, people find themselves behind a game console or computer to gain satisfaction from technologies. However, people who do not understand this deem the gaming phenomena as childish (Cox, 2014). There are gaming networks that host more than 20 million people; and heavy gamers spend an average of 22 hours a week gaming (Demott, 2008). As a gamer myself, I used to find myself committing ten hours or more a week to play video games because I felt connected to another world where everything was anything. Due to games becoming more and more realistic one forgets that they are engulfed in a cyber zone and for those couple of hours the gamer feels in control. The manufacturers have seen the benefits of making these games so life like as the year’s progress. Companies like Microsoft and Sony sold 83 million and 80 million gaming units respectively due to the advancement of the technology (Cox, 2014). Because of the technology, we as humans are falling victims to the greatness that is being given to us. Author Hine states, “We focus on what technology is and what it can do, instead of deciding in advance what the capacities are (Hine, 2000), and this statement truly amplifies the feeling of the manufacturers. They are taking what is given to them right now, to reach out and create video games that are not only sinking in deep in gamers pocket but also in these company bank accounts.

The components of these games along with how realistic these games are, remain the reason that it is drawing in so many users and becoming addictive to them like a drug. A drug so strong that they begin to feel the difference, “Even when virtual reality ‘remains the map’ the map can be a convincing illusion” (Baudrillard, 1993, p.6). To some people there is a stronger bond that is formed when they play their video games than others. They feel a sense of comfort and belonging when they are engulfed in their virtual reality. People use video games to escape the real world and enter the virtual reality where they can feel themselves living their life. In the book, (*Cyber life*) when asked the question if they will do what they do in real life in video games the answer was yes because they can do it better in virtual reality (Demott, 2008); in traditional video games it allow players to be in god mode, this will begin to play on players social identities and the way they view themselves or others within the community.

Gamers begin to share a bond and feel a sense of belonging and in this universe they can portray their character in their own light. The main reason people play is because there are other gamers out there; people know your name, share your interest and they miss you when you leave (Demott, 2008). This sense of belonging is one of the other key pivoting factors that shows a person social identity can be affected by the games they play as well as who they play with. It also shows mostly that a person use gaming mediums as a means of creating another identity. Through a social comparison process, people who are similar to the self are categorized with the self (Stets & Burke, 2000). They choose to shape themselves and keep dwelling in that society, because its where they feel welcome. As a gamer, I can attest that statement, these people share the same interest as you and enjoy the same interest or activities you partake in. No one wants to feel like they do not belong, so through video games people tend to reach out to

others in their community so they do not feel ostracized; people who don't reach out are categorized as the out group (Stets & Burke, 2000)

1.2 Brief History: Rise of the Virtual Worlds

Virtual Worlds have been around for some time. As technology advances throughout the years, they have developed the virtual worlds, as we know it. With the coming of virtual worlds, the creation of "God Games" was being heavily produced. These games are created to simulate and "allow players to manipulate a simulated city, life form, or planet, respectively (McGowan & McCullough, 2002, p.6). When it refers to virtual worlds one can think about what they have seen on television, as a fiction of what virtual worlds actually seems like. Despite we are not at the stages where there is proven to be virtual worlds with large holographic images, virtual worlds have definitely been advancing along the history of its existence. Virtual worlds as we know it is evolving, just like reality, even though we are organisms whether we are alive or dead the world keeps revolving. Virtual worlds operate like a blue print of reality. Even though gamers are not always present in these worlds it is constantly changing and developing, the environments continues to exist; and the entire infrastructure has changed (Lastowka & Hunter, 2004).

Virtual worlds have not been around as long as radio and other forms of technology. Despite the virtual worlds were around not as long before the 1990s the advancement in the field did not come until the beginning of the 1990s. The term Virtual reality became popular after the field began getting developed (Mazuryk & Gervautz, 1996). Virtual worlds as we know it was not as popular then but during that time frame the field was growing vastly in term of popularity. Virtual reality is claimed to be everywhere, according to authors Mazuryk & Gervautz, virtual reality is found in nearly all-new media technologies but as just as many people use the term it is

also misused (1996). Virtual worlds is at the point of capturing the users but the technologies of virtual world did not start as the open technology we know it as today. One definition of a virtual world is: “ A virtual world is a computer- based simulated environment that users can inhabit and in which they interact with others either as themselves or through software agents (bots) or graphical representations called avatars” (Kumar, et al., 2008, p.48)

Virtual Worlds or the term that is more used to describe the term is Virtual Reality (VR) was coined by Ivan Sutherland in 1965 and was use to describe the technology that was becoming popular and stylish of this decade (Mazuryk & Gervautz, 1996). After coning the term virtual reality, the purpose of the virtual worlds were to “make that (virtual) world in the window look real, sound real, feel real, and respond realistically to the viewers actions (Sutherland, 1965). What virtual reality refers to is an immersive and interactive three-dimensional computer generated environment; being a multi- sensory, viewer sensed it is combined with technologies that are required to build these environments (Cruz-Neira, 1993). Virtual worlds seek to operate in real time. These real time interactive graphics with addition of three-dimensional models in combination with display technology gives the user to ability to be immersed in the model world and bring forth that manipulation of virtual worlds. (Fuchs & Bishop, 1992)

In order to understand where virtual worlds have come from, a brief detail into the decades of virtual worlds is important. The first traces of virtual world were between the years of 1960-1962 when Morton Heilig created a multi- sensory simulator (Mazuryk & Gervautz, 1996). This feature was not interactive, however the system was the first approach to a virtual reality but only had the appearance of a virtual world. In 1965, the person who coined the term virtual reality Ivan Sutherland came up with a solution to enhance the virtual world. After Sensorama, the only way Sunderland could have improved the shell of the virtual world is by adding

improvements to already pioneering technology. The ultimate solution was proposed, the artificial world needed to have construction that included interactive graphics, smell, taste, sound and force feed- back in what was called the ultimate display (Sutherland, 1965). After the ultimate display, Ivan Sutherland continued to make headway on the virtual reality.

The creation of “The Sword of Damocles” was the first virtual reality with hardware capabilities (Mazuryk & Gervautz, 1996). The Sword of Damocles saw a slightly different turn when the creator sought to make this virtual world with hardware. A device was constructed where the first Head Mounted Display (HMD) was available for the virtual world. It was supported by stereo positioning for the user head position and orientation. (Balaguer & Mangili, 1993). Five years after “ The Sword of Damocles,” GROPE and Video place were created in 1971 and 1975 respectively. The GROPE was the first prototype to have force feedback, which was brought forth, at the University of North Carolina (UNC) (Cruz-Neira, 1993). How force-feedback began changing the outlook of virtual realities is that force feedback, which is haptic technology, delivers that sense of touch and vibrations back to the user through the device (Robles-De-La-Torre, 2009). In 1975, the artificial reality that was created by Myron Krueger was called video place. The video place concept was slightly different than the previous virtual world mock ups as it took interactive systems to another level. In this virtual world their efforts to make the world interactive continued by introducing new technologies with old efforts. Video place used a different mechanism to try and insure the success of their rendition of a virtual world. Krueger grabbed the silhouettes of users by the cameras that were projected on a large screen (Robles-De-La-Torre, 2009). What this did was, enabling the participants to interact with each other from the luminance that given to them on the 2D screens.

These were the very beginning stages of virtual world creations, before the adaptation of new technologies, and virtual worlds becoming a touch less platform. They seeked to make virtual worlds an interactive feature where the users had the ability to submerge themselves in the virtual world physically. They saw the way of connecting with the user through the different five senses, but as seen thus far they have yet to accomplish this task in its entirety.

As the evolution of the virtual worlds continues, it took a turn into the field of defense. Gearing closer to the 20th century, in 1982 hailing from a medical research laboratory, Thomas Furness at the US Air Force created the virtual world, which was known as VCASS (Holloway & Lastra, 1995). VCASS acronym for Visually Coupled Airborne System Simulator was an advanced flight simulator used in the US air force for training. This type of virtual display reverted back to the use of HMD used by the fighter pilot for display as it described targeting and flight path information. At this point virtual world has begun to take form into different factions. Just like the Internet being founded as a military project, virtual worlds were used as means to aid military personal in their training and progress. As the process to advance virtual world continues creators vowed to enhance the display unit of systems with the constant improvement of the display unit. In 1984, NASA Ames constructed was the Virtual Environment Display (VIVED); this device was said to have off the shelf technology with a new and improve HMD (Gigante, 1993). At this point all the technologies that were being developed for virtual worlds were being used by military and all private. From the beginning of the creation to 1984, none of the products off virtual worlds were commercialized.

In 1985 the first set of commercialized products that deals with virtual worlds began to surface. The company call VPL produced the data glove and in 1985 the Eye phone HMD in 1988, which was the first commercially available VR devices (Cruz-Neira, 1993). After this

virtual world project became the first commercialized, the trend for commercialized VR projects began. On route to advancing virtual world to what we know today, the progress of virtual worlds continued to escalate. The next project to become commercialize was called BOOM (Mazuryk & Gervautz, 1996). In the 1989, Fake Space Labs created BOOM, the process of this type of VR seeked to engage the user more. BOOM was a small box that contained two CRT (Cathode Ray Tube) that was viewable through two eyeholes. The user had the ability to grab the box, keep it up to the eyes and move through the virtual world (Mazuryk & Gervautz, 1996). Coming closer to the 20th century the virtual reality devices stayed physical, because the technologies of virtual reality were not developed. There were more projects to come in the development stages of virtual worlds. In the second half of the 1980s, the University of North Carolina created what is believed to be the first walkthrough virtual world, which was titled UNC walkthrough project. In this rendition of a virtual world they was able to improve systems such as the HMD, optical trackers and the Pixel –Plane graphics engine (Mazuryk & Gervautz, 1996).

At this point the virtual worlds are beginning to expand and increase in efficiency. The worlds were becoming more vast they started becoming more advance in the expansion of the capabilities of the environment. In 1992 a newer more advance form of virtual technology was introduced. Presented with the name the CAVE in 1992 the CAVE automatic Virtual Environment was a virtual reality with a scientific visualization system (Balaguer & Mangili, 1993). The difference with this system was instead of using HMD it projected stereoscopic images on walls of the room however the user must be wearing a LCD shutter glasses. The importance of this approach was to provide a reality with superior quality. The images contained better resolution and the images were spread to a larger field, making the virtual environment

better to interact with, as well as better in comparison to HMD based systems that came in the year before that. The virtual worlds at this point in the evolution process were solely based on environments and advancing the interactive features of the virtual worlds. The final virtual world creation before the technology began advancing to the realm of the video games was being developed after 1992, coming to the post CAVE invention era. The last VR to be presented was Augmented Reality (AR) which referred to a technology that presented a virtual world in which the difference from rest. The goals of this virtual world were to enrich rather than replace (Bryson, 1992). This technology worked by superimposing virtual three -dimensional (3D) objects on real ones. This is the same technology that was used in a previous technology (VCASS), which aided in the fighter pilots simulation.

After all these worlds were created, during this time frame, the rise of the video game industry was becoming popular as game creators started profiting of the industry, and realizing that it can and will be a successful venture to incorporate this type of technology in the video games. Despite the names virtual world and virtual realities were created from the beginning of the invention, they did not begin to take shape and form until after these creations. The whole purpose of a virtual reality is to allow a user to navigate through 3D worlds in real time. In essence, virtual reality is the attempt to clone physical reality (von Schweber & von Schweber, 1995). After this point virtual worlds became on the level where they saw it more profitable to have virtual worlds in video games. Now we have virtual worlds such as *Second Life* where gamers cant interact with other gamers in a virtual world and carry about their processes and live lives regularly in this virtual realm with repercussions.

1.3 Types of Virtual Worlds

Under types of virtual worlds, there are two main different types of virtual worlds, online games and metaverses. Online gaming has been around for over a decade, games such as Quake, which was the first ever first person shooter video game was designed to allow a small group play together (Kumar, et al., 2008). Massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) are designed for a larger scale; they were made to host hundreds of gamers simultaneously. With the MMOG concept, most of the gamers are spread geographically over the Internet and the online games depend on client- server model, “ in which each user runs a client program that connects to one of more machines that run the server program” (Kumar, et al., 2008, p. 48). Some of the responsibilities of the server are managing the interaction between the multiple avatars, objects in the virtual world as well as communication with the clients. (Kumar, et al., 2008).

The other type of virtual world that is taking the most shape is a metaverse. A metaverse is a “3D virtual reality (VR) – based space in which people interacted and communicated with other through their avatars” (Hendaoui, Limayem, & Thompson, 2008, p.88). Beyond entertainment value, game play features and social interaction with avatar, a metaverse is more than just a space for game play and entertainment. The concept of a metaverse is also based on social and economic interactions. Economic interactions are one of the main drivers behind metaverses, using the example of *Second Life*, aside from the communication aspect of *Second Life* goods and services such as clothes, real estate and customization features can be created and sold in the virtual world (Hendaoui, Limayem, & Thompson, 2008)

1.4 Concept of Avatar

In the new technological virtual world, what is prominent is the use of an avatar. In video games that are being created now, there is mostly an option to create or edit an avatar. Avatars

are what are used mainly in these video games is seen as the representation of the user in that particular game. The term avatar derived from the Sanskrit for ‘incarnation’ (de Zwart & Lindsay , 2012), it references to the user as a representation of himself or herself in this reference virtual worlds and video games. The term avatars was first brought in the sphere of video games in the year 1985 for the character in the video game Ultima IV , after it became popularized by Neal Stephenson in 1992 in his cyberpunk classic Snow Crash (Stephenson, 1992). The term avatar can mean or be referred to as any representation of the user including a simple screen name which were constructed in early Multi- User Dungeons (MUDs), a two dimensional icon that was used on internet based forums (de Zwart & Lindsay , 2012). The term avatar was not made completely aware to gamers until early 2000s. Prior to early 2000s when video game characters were not viewed to or referred to as avatars gamers, called them mere characters or players. However, what we understand about the terms ‘avatar’ lies on a range continuum from being relatively simple to complex. As virtual worlds become more complex, sophisticated and immersive functionality of online bearers and identity increases in both virtual worlds and traditional off- line games.

The wanting for the formation of identity changed and became somewhat of a demand when role-playing games (RPG) began advancing. “These formal (RPGs) have taken a variety of forms, ranging from live action games such as How to Host a Murder, to traditional table – top strategy games, such as Dungeons and Dragons” (de Zwart & Lindsay, 201, p.2). The earliest versions of RPG were text based, however, in the late 1970s the text based RPG made the transition and became MUDs. During this stage of the avatar representation process, avatars started becoming more prominent in gaming because of the graphical development (Turtle, 1996). The avatars gain significance because of increasing functionality and visual appearance.

(de Zwart & Lindsay , 2012). As the late 1990s come around, we see new technology changing society and entering a new technological era where video games and gaming have advanced to a new height. Video games started becoming more advance, the development in the virtual reality also took the same path. The RPGs got more developed and because of the Internet, they became more accessed to more gamers. When the games began reaching new heights the concept of RPGs took to a new platform boosting of the Internet and its accessibility and the formation of multi online role playing games (MMORPG) was formed (Filiciak, 2003).

Once the MMORPGs took flight avatars only followed to match the progress of the games being produced. Avatars in the sense are interactive and they come in many different dimensions; an avatar can be a photo a drawing or based on a real person's appearance or look absolutely nothing like the gamer (Hernan Gonzalez- Campo, Garcia, & Murillo Vargas, 2013).

Despite the word avatar derived form the Sanskrit term; the word avatar has developed a different meaning in regards to the usage. With consistency to the original meaning, the word avatar presents itself differently in the modern day. The word avatar can be referred to a representation of an entity (Holzwarth, Janiszewski, & Neumann, 2006). Similar to the other definitions that has been used in regards to avatar, what makes this definition slightly different form the original definition is that the term avatar is referred to as representation in the aspect of picture or animated graphic, which is the way avatars are currently used today. In an example mentioned, an avatar is portrayed as “ A pictorial representation of a human in a chat environment” (Russ, Graber, & Mason, 1998, p.8) or another depiction is “a representation of the user as an animated character in virtual worlds” (Loos, 2003, p.17). These are a few representations that define avatars differently. There are also technological definitions for the term avatar. The technological approach to the term avatar is, an avatar is a “graphical

personification of computers or processes that run on computers” (Halfhill, 1996, p.69).

Avatars were not solely based for the purpose of video games. Given the effectiveness that avatars had in video games, the purpose of avatars were also incorporated in other fields like business world. Avatars were used as mediums of business props to advertise for business. “If avatars enhance the personification of a technology they should influence the purchase process in a manner similar to human sales agents” (Holzwarth, Janiszewski, & Neumann, 2006, p.3). The concept of avatar was taken beyond use for commercial uses. Avatars were used in virtual worlds by researchers to carry on meetings. They took the concept of avatar from entertainment purpose to a world-changing tool. The use of avatars in a metaverse boosts certain features that overcome some of the limitations of other systems. (Haywood, Davies, Kamel Boulos, & Rapanotti, 2014). Avatar has deemed itself as a powerful tool not just a means for gamer’s entertainment. Avatars once used correctly can be powerful tools.

The technology that is put into avatars and the space that operates them can be seen sometimes as childish but more intellectuals are seeing that there can be an alternative purpose for avatars. Avatar based 3D worlds provide new opportunities for collaborations as compared to those in the 2D environments (Haywood, Davies, Kamel Boulos, & Rapanotti, 2014). The use of avatars help one to become immersed in the virtual world while giving the user a different sense of feeling that cannot be obtained through regular human interaction. Avatars can provide the user with better communication skills through voice text or gestures and thus help the users to interact better with each other and rid of any miscommunication that may occur in person.

Avatars however can also be used in a derogatory fashion. Not all avatar usage is positive, as there can be hints of racism when black avatars are used. Even though the operation is taking place in a technological realm, words can still be used to express how one is feeling on

a specific subject matter. In some of these video games and virtual worlds surveys that were done showed that non- white users were greatly out numbered by white users (Lin & Wang, 2014). The authors go on to mention, despite there are multiple options for character customization, the white avatar over the non-white avatar is still predominantly used (Lin & Wang, 2014).

Now that the pathway of virtual worlds has been explained, the purpose of this research assignment is to explore the virtual world of *Second Life*. By using Narrative identity theory, with the methodology of participant observation I will explore the habits of the virtual worlds and observe how the gamers interact with other through their avatars as well as how they identify themselves with their avatars. This study examines the virtual world by using Narrative identity analysis to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do gamers in virtual worlds identify themselves through their avatars in comparison to their actual self?

RQ 2: How are different types of narrative constructed in virtual worlds as opposed to the actual self?

RQ3: How do gamers in virtual worlds identify themselves and relate to other online personas via the use of avatars?

Through out the remainder of this research paper, I seek to explore literature that has been done on the *Second Life*. After the literature is explored, I will present a chapter for research design describing participant observation followed by a chapter on the analysis. The final end to this research paper rounds out with the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Reivew- *Exploring Second Life and Virtual Worlds*

2.1 The Birth of *Second Life*

The 3-D virtual world *Second Life* (SL) was one of many virtual worlds that were created in the 20th century. In particular, SL was chosen because of its features and popularity among virtual world users, in addition to being a multiuser virtual environment (MUVE) (Ralph & Stahr, 2010). Second Life, or SL, was launched in June 2003 by Linden Labs (Malaby, 2011); the platform, however, was created by Philip Rosedale (Hodge, Collins, & Giordano, 2011). Second Life established its difference among the virtual world community because of its game features. It differentiates itself from its competitors such as *World of Warcraft*, *Everquest II*, *Lineage II* because it has no established universal game objective (Malaby, 2011). Most gamers spend their time doing a range of tasks from socializing with other gamers (via chat, most recently voice) or other activities such as dancing, playing games through their avatars or just enjoying the views of the virtual worlds.

Second Life (SL) is classed as a metaverse. These metaverse are slowly becoming popular with millions of users worldwide (Kumar, et al., 2008). Second Life is classed as one of the most populated virtual worlds amongst it competitors .The virtual world industry has Second Life as one of quickest risers in popularity. Statistics from December 1st 2008, accounts SL for having an avatar base of close to 17 million with a monthly count of 1.5 million and a daily count of 80,000 of users in world at any given time (Hodge, Collins, & Giordano, 2011). At this stage SL experienced remarkable growth when its account and user total matched those numbers, which average those to population of small towns and cities. In SL, an established form of currency is used which is called Linden dollars (L\$) and is the form of currency that is used to

make any purchases or renting of property, or for purchasing of clothes respectively in the video game (Ralph & Stahr, 2010). Linden dollars (L\$) could be purchased at the rate of 1 U.S dollar - L\$ 260 (Hodge, Collins, & Giordano, 2011). Not only was the video game becoming extensive, but it's clear that they also seek to make more profits from the use of purchasing in game currency. The virtual world of SL is not simply a social space, but acts as a sphere for economic operations.

SL is becoming an outstanding metaverse. Some of the factors that contribute to this growth are, the social networking capabilities, the collaboration, marketing and the arts of the 3D (Kumar, et al., 2008). In SL there are two other virtual worlds that's associated with the virtual world, *Teen Second Life* and *Project Wonderland* (Hodge, Collins, & Giordano, 2011). *Teen Second Life* (which was created by Linden Labs) serves to facilitate anyone from between the ages of 13-17. Teen SL main focus is based on the promotion of educational advancements. They promote programs such as college fairs; high school-to- college programs and teen socials (Boellstorff, 2008). The purpose of creating this virtual world was that Linden Labs wanted to protect its younger residents, but adults were only permitted access to the environment for educational purposes only. In order for adults to gain access to Teen SL, they must clear background checks and be approved.

2.2 Second Life Appropriateness for Education

Most of the research that was found pertaining to SL in regards to education focuses on the basis of learning. When referring to the paradigm of learning, the primary assumption is that learners “construct understanding by interacting with information, tools and materials, as well as by collaborating with other learners” (Dickey, 2005, p 441). One of the key elements of SL, is that its based of collaboration and social involvement. Using the original concept of social

involvement to root the foundation of a teaching tool is the most effective way to gain success over the medium. The approach that they are taking, which is, learn by collaborating, can be achieved by “sequences of presentational and constructivist experiences” (Dede, 1996, pp 5-6).

When it pertains to constructivist learning, it can be argued that technology enhanced the learning environments. Dickey (2005) states that, it gives access to resources, models, exemplars and multiple types of other cognitive and collaborative tools. Technology has given society multiple means and outlets to help stimulate education. In regards to constructivist learning, two authors add to the argument by saying that “the constructionist metaphor casts technology as a cognitive medium. It becomes a medium for intellectual expression and exploration” (Hay & Barab, 2006,p.283). What becomes relevant now, is the importance of the learning environment. Students are now given the chance to interact more and become engaged in the environment (Dickey, 2005). Virtual worlds however are naturally a social environment because of the multiplayer online capabilities. Because of this, researchers have seen the importance of the social aspect as is tied to the constructivist theory.

Using SL in education, the social aspect of it becomes very important for educators and students who use SL as educational medium. Authors Thompson and Rodriguez mentioned that learning activities that are rooted in virtual environment gives student engaging and gratifying opportunities to learn (Thompson & Rodriguez, 2004). Using SL as an educational tool is just as beneficial for the users as a social medium. Despite the creation of SL was meant to be a social tool, authors have proven that the one of the greatest attributes of learning, is taking advantage of the social aspect of the virtual world.

2.2.1 Second Life in Education

Second Life (SL) is the host to more than gamers, it provides an environment for other non-virtual institutions such as Harvard Law School, Reuters News Service, United States presidential campaign offices, financial establishments and therapeutic communities. The creators view the virtual world as not a video game, but more of an interactive space for communication and social interaction. Due to these capabilities, there are possibilities that derive from the culture of SL, which opens it to more than just being a social world (Boellstorff, 2008).

SL has started to become prominent in education. The use of virtual worlds in education began to touch the minds of those in academic institutions. There are over 100 universities in the U.S that either rent or own virtual land in SL (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009). “Faculty use these spaces to hold lectures or meetings with students, display digital world artwork, hold music performances, host gatherings, and build virtual environments” (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009, p. 2). As an example of an institution using SL for a musical performance, Princeton University SL campus, constructed the Alexander Hall for the purposes of performances in SL. Unlike, Princeton University, the University of North Carolina shared a different take with their SL campus by hosting health clinics. (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009).

SL is a platform that can be used for multiple purposes as mentioned above, one of the key attributes that differentiate second life from other virtual worlds, is the diversity and ability to reach educational platforms and serve other purpose. While still being an online environment where gamers can socially interact with other gamers, SL currently is one of the only virtual world environments to have a specific world for teenagers. In this particular world, they were able to incorporate an educational aspect to the world by allowing features such as educational programs, college fairs and high school to college programs.

The popularity of virtual worlds has increased in the field of education, more than its prior years of existence (Downey, 2014). Second life is now an environment that welcomes academic institutions and provide services for higher learning, however, there are many SL users who are still unaware of the capabilities that second life provide. “Unfortunately their ill – defined history has left many educators, researchers, and everyday users partially informed” (Downey, 2014, p. 61). However, despite the misconceptions SL still provides services for the academics by becoming involved in the academia.

Two years after the creation of Second Life, an institution decided to use the virtual world to pioneer their academic advancement. The proposal was creating an online library for the students that can be accessed anywhere. The faculty at South Eastern University began thinking of ideas and had the vision to use SL as a means to enhance their educational content. After collaborating with another institution in Louisiana, they derived that having a virtual campus will be beneficial (Ralph & Stahr, 2010). The inclusion of virtual world in education marks the shift towards a brighter academic future. It allows users to realize that technology is not just a medium for entertainment, but a medium for the advancement of education. In order to gain accessibility to use a virtual world as a legitimate form of an educational subsidiary, specific methods had to be employed. In regard to the Louisiana schools, the Dean, with the assistance of another speaker, they obtained a Louisiana Board of Regents Support Electronic Learning and Essential Campus Transitions (SELECT) Grant to establish SL islands (Ralph & Stahr, 2010).

The virtual library mimicked that of a real library. There was a librarian- avatar that welcomed the students into the virtual world and interacted with the gamers as it simulated a real library scenario (Ralph & Stahr, 2010). This Louisiana University pioneered the need for a virtual world library. Because of the accessibility shared and the reach to expand to a large

number of students, other institutions saw the benefits of having a virtual library and proceeded to make virtual libraries of their own. Research has shown that virtual libraries in SL have increased to over 260 libraries (Greenhill, 2008). The expansion of the libraries grew to its highest heights, when Second Life Library 2.0 took form due to its collaboration with OPAL (Hedreen, et al., 2008). With the increase of these virtual libraries in SL, it offered the opportunity to enhance the network and develop more professional relationships throughout the country (Ralph & Stahr, 2010). The collaboration of these libraries, only serves as testimony to how developed the virtual community has become. It opened up new doors for doctors, students and educators who all shared the vision for creativity and cultural boundaries within education (Ralph & Stahr, 2010). Through SL virtual libraries, a study discovered, that there is higher productivity rate in the virtual world. This study shows that SL is a platform that was prominent for distance learning, and most of the educators that occupied the Virtual Library have created a constructive and experimental environment, which enhances distance education (Luo, 2008).

2.2.2 Second Life in Higher Education

Five years after its startup, SL began to capture the attention of educators. SL was being considered as one of the next generation technological tools for education (Singh & Lee, 2008). In regard to the concept of SL being an educational medium, the biggest feature of using SL as a learning and educational tool, is the collaborative feature that was introduced in SL. SL innovators provided users a way to communicate and collaborate in the virtual world (Campbell & Trobe, 2009). It specifically helps with those who come from international backgrounds and use SL to collaborate on projects. In addition, there is the assistance of text based and voice mediated communication to help collaboration be more successful (Wang & Burton, 2013). SL

also enhances the learning and creativity process because through the use of avatars one is able to eliminate the process of social disconnection that is usually made in person.

SL has many functions, but from an educational standpoint, the major uses for SL were to act as a meeting place for both students and instructors, a place where instructors can conduct office hours and arrange meetings with their online students (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009). In regard to using SL as an online meeting spot, the author makes the statement that SL is crucial in this aspect because it works better for students who are enrolled in online classes.

Due to Second Life being a virtual community, it contains different tools that can be used in education. SL has the potential to support artifacts of realistic designs that will be too expensive to afford in the real world (Wang & Burton, 2013). All these different support capabilities help assist SL in being one of the primary and best virtual worlds that can be used for education. In the UK, among tertiary education institutions, surveys identified SL as the most popular MUVE for educational purposes (Warburton, 2009). Supporting the author's claims of being considered as one of the top virtual worlds for educational use, there are numerous educational groups that coexist in SL, some of which are the International Society for Technology in Education and The New Media Consortium (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009).

In the world of SL, educators have been known to teach full classes on SL, whereas there are other professors who used the virtual world to supplement their classes (Sussman, 2007). Currently there are three types of teachings that are associated with SL. The first type of teachings were courses that dealt with gaming, online communities and emerging technologies. The second type of teaching associated in SL has to do with the aspects of communication. It becomes a communication medium, where the focus is on the delivering lectures, making presentations, and conducting discussions in the SL. The third type of teaching that is displayed

in SL is the ability to use the virtual world as a learning space. In respect to a learning space, SL acts as a facilitator for conducting in world learning activities that include role playing interactive simulations and education games (Gerald & Antonacci, 2009).

One of the types of teaching mentioned in SL is using the virtual world as a learning space. It is used in respect to technological teachings. SL is a 3D virtual world, which contains the same characteristics as ALICE. The program ALICE is used for computer programming training (Esteves, Fonseca, Morgado, & Martins, 2011). The characteristics are similar to that of the program ALICE, it only goes to show that SL can be used as a form of learning tool where programming is a possibility. The programming can take place by writing scripts while receiving visual feedback from the program and this immediately shows how effective their programming is in the video game (Esteves, Fonseca, Morgado, & Martins, 2011). In addition to the characteristics that SL displays, it mentions that there are several users that have the ability to connect with each other, interact and collaborate simultaneously in the virtual world (Esteves, Fonseca, Morgado, & Martins, 2011). The authors continues to mention that SL allows synchronous collaboration among students due to the capability of two or more avatars having the ability to work on the same project and edit the object while also including their own scripts. What continues to make SL as effective as it is the ability to share programming code among the students that in habit SL.

Aside from the ability to share programming code with fellow students, an important aspect about SL is that students are exposed to an international community of programmers added to an authentic culture and style that each student brings with them (Warburton, 2009). Pertaining to higher education, an integral part of learning is the ability to work effectively with other students in the field. Collaboration among students, domestic and foreign, when it pertains

to technological subject matters, usually understands explanations when taught by other students. Understanding the nature of SL and the capabilities presented thus far, it is shown that SL can be used as an educational tool. The research that has been done in this field currently shows the use of SL as an effective virtual world, as well as an effective learning atmosphere. When Linden Labs created the world of SL as mentioned earlier, the intention was not to create an academic ground but a virtual social environment for entertainment purposes.

Despite teaching over the virtual world of SL proved to be efficient and successful, there were still some complications that arised with communication while educating over SL, but they were resolved with no problem. The problem the students encountered, was understanding what the teacher was trying to explain (Esteves, Fonseca, Morgado, & Martins, 2011). The process of communication that was used was text based and non-verbal. The problem that occurred with text communication was the timing of the messages as it appeared. In SL the conversation window is connected with all the users, during responses, it would appear out of sync with questions being asked and confuse the students. Because of the delayed responses from the teachers it will result in delayed and interrupted conversations among the students and the teachers. One of the ways this issue was resolved, was by utilizing private channels to communicate with the students (Esteves, Fonseca, Morgado, & Martins, 2011); student preferred this method of communication, because it replicated the feeling of private tutoring. In order to fully get in control of the communication problem, voice based communication was introduced allowing teachers to split the means of communication between verbal and non verbal. The teacher would keep several sentences that were usually common, which would be copy-paste ready to provide efficient feedback (Esteves, Fonseca, Morgado, & Martins, 2011).

Using SL as an educational domain is challenging, like any other technological field, there will be expected failures when running your program as an educational tool. There are some advantages to using SL as an educational tool. One of the most obvious advantages is the introduction to technology. By using SL simply as a virtual space, like any other meeting space, the users benefit from social interaction. One mentioned outcome that the authors derived was, SL can provide a platform which is sufficient for learning and assisting with the faculty student relationship (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009). The virtual world setting of SL makes it easier to communicate with each other because of the informal setting of the virtual world. Wentz and Woods who happened to be two of the authors, mentioned, that they are part of the virtual world SL as part of an independent study. The authors contributed that that informal setting of SL appeared to make students feel more comfortable when interacting with the instructor, as well as other students (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009).

While there are benefits to using SL as a learning tool, there are also cons that arise when asked to use SL as an educational tool. One of the major issues that authors had with using SL as an educational tool, was the ethical issue of whether the students' learning was at risk. "The deployment of virtual worlds in higher education is subject to many potential barriers" (Childs, Schnieders, & Williams, 2012, p. 2). The potential barriers that the author is referring to are the ethical issues that were mentioned about students learning. The author believes that this can stem from technical problems which results in the loss of communication (Childs, Schnieders, & Williams, 2012). The time spent learning via online virtual worlds such as SL can bring forth technical problems which will result in a loss of learning. Another reason that was mentioned as a problem with using SL as an educational tool is the credibility. Many lectures shared concerns

about the credibility when students are exposed to incomplete learning activity (Childs, Schnieders, & Williams, 2012).

Majority of times, with programs like SL, there are a lot of cons that come with the program. Just like technology, the cons have to represent itself first before the pros can take over and turn the program into legitimate learning software. With SL, the cons came earlier on in the education process but there were a lot of cons that were mostly based of communication and technological issues. Because SL is a different type of video game platform, gamers had to become familiar to the virtual world. By using SL, there will be limitations and setbacks. The setbacks however are learning how to navigate the virtual world, creating an avatar and communicating in the virtual world (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009). With any other technological field, there will be implications when it pertains to using the software. One of the cons to operating SL, is the requirements to operate the virtual reality. This as a con because of the delay students undergo before being able to access the virtual world to participate. However, with the problem of platform and system requirements another standout is the student willingness. Because of the new technology, sometimes the students may be reluctant and their willingness to try a new technology (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009). Despite some students are excited to partake in online learning, others are not comfortable with the online learning atmosphere. Some students may show or feel anxiety when it pertains to using SL or learning SL (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009).

As the research continues to bring forth valuable insight of uses for SL, besides using SL for library purposes and technological subjects for programming purposes it also can be used as a means for student to learn foreign languages.

2.3 Risk to students - *Deception*

The anxiety the student feels when it pertains to SL can transfer across to other feelings which will ideally lead to cons that are associated with using SL as an educational platform. One of the other educational risks that became present was the risk of deception among students. This is a risk that is classed as an ethical concern because it more so deals with the distrust of students that occupy the virtual world. Author Bennetsen after observing the virtual world of SL, noted that there are two dominant models of interaction. One model of interaction is, to use the virtual words to mimic the real world. Through this model of interaction, in the virtual world, everyone knows about everyone through their avatars and their physical world identity. In this model no one-role plays and the relationship between people are the same as outside the virtual world. This mode of interaction is called Augmentationist (Bennetsen, 2006).

However the risk of deception falls more into the second mode of interaction. Unlike the mode of interaction the second is more private and less communicative as to the first interactive method. What author Bennetsen says in regard to the second method, is he believes what happens in the virtual world of second life stays in *Second Life*. Participants will neglect to reveal their offline identities and in some cases even take offence when asked to reveal anything about their offline identities (Bennetsen, 2006). The name the author derived for these types of participants were Immersionists. What differentiates the Immersionist from the Augmentationist is that notion of sociability. In regard to the Immersionist, they are deceiving the users by not being honest about their real identities. In many of these cases, their real identities may be significantly different from their online identities in terms of gender, sex, ethnicity even species (Bennetsen, 2006). Students begin to feel the type of distrust by other users if they discover their images or avatars were not made in their likeness. For an Augmentationist, this concealing of

identity presents itself as an act of concealment and gives rise to anxieties about who they are really dealing with in terms of a person behind the avatar. From the immersionist perspective, they describe this drive for knowledge of offline identities as disclourism (Amdahl, 2007). For an immersionist the true purpose of being in a virtual world may be to experience identity tourism (Taylor, 2002, p.58) or avibending, (Bennetsen, 2006) as means to experiment with multiple identities or to also experiment with a specific aspect of the self which cannot be portrayed in the physical world. The Augmentationist deems the type of behavior as deception due to the fact that their online identity is one of deception.

The deception that is displayed to students can hurt the trust that is being built by students on virtual worlds. From a student perspective, when the initial trust that has been built and broken by another student, or working with a cohort becomes uncomfortable, the level of work that is produced among students will then become subpar. It then begins to take attention away from the academic task at hand and more so begin to focus on the relationship that cannot be formed with the student due to mistrust. If students are participating in virtual worlds for the first time, then by starting of their experience with distrust among the other students will initially lead to a bad experience for the students.

Added to the risk of deception that can affect a student academic experience, the author also spoke about the possibility of culture clashes in the virtual world. As mentioned before, there were two specific groups of people that are in second life, the Immersionist and the Augmentationist. There are two other categories of people that when the paths crossed it becomes problematic. The two groups that the author mentions are the pseudo- realist and the synthetic sodalist (Childs, Schnieders, & Williams, 2012). The conflicts arise between the two groups from the way they view the virtual world. The pseudo- realists view the virtual world as a

play area “a mere collection of binary codes hosted on a server and projected through a software viewer in which anything goes” (Childs, Schnieders, & Williams, 2012, p.4). The users who view this as code and software have a different approach to the virtual world. Their behavior might be disruptive and can lead to users using the script to control other avatars or recreating objects which can lead to a lag in the simulation (Childs, Schnieders, & Williams, 2012).

On the other hand, the synthetic sodalist are the users who associate the virtual world as having real meaning and relationships (Childs, Schnieders, & Williams, 2012). The problem begins to arise within the virtual worlds, when one group has more attachment to the virtual world than the other. Conflicting behavior arises between the two groups, because one group will be chastising the other group for the connection developed with the virtual world. Some of the users who view the virtual world as just a video game tend to bully the new users as their way of “playing the game” when really the world is an option space for social interaction and academic involvement.

As mentioned above, some of the users that belong to the synthetic sodalist group are the users that are most vulnerable to the running another risk, which is an emotional attachment to the virtual world. “Although some students find the virtual world challenging, many also find it deeply engrossing and engaging” (Childs, Schnieders, & Williams, 2012, p.5). Studies indicate that once a student is given the opportunity to personalize their avatar by changing their appearance, it increases their user sense of self presence in the virtual world (Annetta, Klesath, & Holmes, 2008)

2.4 Communication in Second Life

In the world of Second Life (SL), there is a communication aspect that most authors seem to visit as they go to research for the study of SL. Because of the virtual world capabilities of

SL, some forms of communication are accentuated more than others naturally by nature. One of the major cases that research has brought forward is the notion of non-verbal communication through clothes that is worn by the avatars. The world of SL is open and has no restrictions and therefore has no limitations as to what and whatnot these users can display in terms of behavior and communication. Majority of the communication is non-verbal and one can tell the type of player or what group the player potentially belongs to by the clothes they decide to outfit their avatar in. However, authors argue that through this non-verbal communication, they can deem what behaviors are salient and normative (Turner & Oaks, 1986).

The communication aspect of SL can be studied in many different forms, aside from the non-verbal aspect of communication using avatars, the world of SL can be used to determine how different groups of people communicate as they translate their methods from the real world to the virtual world. Linguistically, different age groups in society follow different patterns when it comes to communicating. The use of slang is considered a discourse marker when it pertains to the youth culture in online communication (Moore, 2004). In addition to the slang, you can tell when a person of youth culture is communicating on virtual worlds because of the use of profanity (Barberi, 2008). Profanity and slang are two ways to distinguish a culture group, however, by analyzing regular text such as emoticons and text construction linguistics can determine whether the user is a part of the youth culture or part of the adult culture.

As the virtual world of SL continues to progress, authors are able to continue their research in the virtual world and uncover more information in regards to communication and how people communicate over virtual worlds whether it's verbal or non-verbal. Appearance in virtual worlds can play a major role in regards to how avatars are used to communicate or express themselves (Martey, Stromer-Galley, Consalvo, Wu, Banks, & Strzalkowski, 2015).

How people communicate through avatars is important in the world of SL. Despite its not verbal interaction, users can determine whom they chose to communicate and not communicate with because of the appearance of the avatar. After research has been done with avatars in SL, authors have derived the conclusion that players mostly customize their avatars that is appropriate to a specific culture or to portray a specific persona. (Merola & Pena, 2010).

The users in SL are exposed to infinite possibilities of customization for their avatars. However, theories like narrative identity explain how users use these virtual worlds to live out an alternative life. Majority of the time they will try to make the avatars in their image. Authors Messinger, Ge, Stroulia, Lyons, Smirnov, & Bone (2008) in their research, found that users in SL create avatars based on their offline appearances, where as some try to improve on their looks making their avatar seem younger. In the virtual world realm, people's avatar is what is used as a representation of their own character. This fits into the non-verbal communication aspect for a couple reasons. Through some of the above-mentioned features like outfits for avatars and text base communication, it all shows how people communicate via their avatars. All these aspects contribute to the design of the avatar, ultimately; the design of the avatar is how a user communicates with another user in the virtual world. Throughout SL, while roaming you will see avatars frequently making gestures to other avatars. Through these gestures they are used to communicate with other avatars. Gamers tend to relay idea and emotions through these gestures as it's a way of communicating without any words (Antonijevic, 2008).

2.5 Virtual Identity

When dealing with narrative identity in virtual worlds, it only fit to mention virtual world identity. Because of the technological era we live in, there are boundaries between reality and fantasy or as its stated, the real and the virtual (Marsh, 2010). Through their avatars and profiles

in the virtual worlds, the users use this to ascertain their dominance in the virtual identities, which is then constructed to meet their desires (Nagy & Koles, 2014). Now that there are virtual worlds to go out and experience a new type of living, there are no more limits as to what people can do. They are no longer limited to the physical realities as they can now go to the virtual worlds where they are provided with a clean slate to create and explore new identities (Kennedy, 2006). Within this new formation of having the ability to create a virtual reality, there are two forms of identity that has to be considered, the real self and the virtual self (Nagy & Koles, 2014).

To understand why the two types of identities are important, understanding virtual worlds are important. A virtual world is an immersive 3D, virtual environment. Due to this feature, the virtual world creates a stronger presence and sensation (Nagy & Koles, 2014). What keeps the users attached to the virtual lives that they create, is the concept that the users engage in real world communication and interaction with other users. What also adds to the process of immersion with the users its because of the function of acting as third place (Nagy & Koles, 2014). The third place that is mentioned by the authors is not part of a social networking site or an online game. These third places are specific virtual environments, that different from each other home, work and acts as a neutral grounds for socializing and experiencing realities (Halvorson, 2010).

Finally, the virtual world tends to serve as a platform for the users, where they can embody their virtual selves (Biocca , Hams, & Burgoon, 2003). This is important because the users use these virtual worlds to immerse themselves, while gaining experience with their virtual self through self-representation and self-extensions, the users do not consider their avatars as

artificial entities, and instead they view their avatars as an extension of themselves as living units (Belisle & Bodur, 2010).

2.5.1 Virtual Identity Model

Dealing with avatar and identity, there is a model that virtual identity follows. The model is based on relationships that are based on the individual level, micro level and macro level. These levels depicted as different structural elements that make up virtual identity (Nagy & Koles, 2014). When a person decides to embark on a journey to establish a virtual identity, he or she has to make decisions through the process of their avatar creation. The online identity process is similar to that of real- life identity development. The virtual identity process can be classed as a “cyclical and continuously iterative process,” which is influenced by a variety of global, individual or community based factors (Nagy & Koles, 2014). As the virtual worlds continue to be an increasing entity, so is the process of virtual identities. Virtual identity is continually growing, in a system within a virtual environment (Nagy & Koles, 2014). The conceptual model of virtual identity integrates personal, relational, social and material orientations. The model however focuses on three different levels that consist of the individual, the connection and the community.

2.5.1.1 The Individual level- The avatars

The individual level of the model plays an important part to the avatar section. Avatars have a crucial role in the identity process for those who are entering a virtual environment (Gorini A, 2011). In virtual worlds, the avatar becomes the face of the user, the connecting point for elements in the virtual world. “Those virtual environments that integrate contextualized narrative elements to a greater extent tend to generate more intense emotional responses, which in turn tend to evoke a stronger sense of inner presence” (Nagy & Koles, 2014, p.281).The

individual level of the virtual identity construction process relies on multiple developments under the category of identity conceptualization (Talamo & Ligorio, 2001).

In virtual worlds, avatars can be viewed as the tools for communication with other residents of the virtual worlds. These avatars are also viewed as “conception of the users self” (Nagy & Koles, 2014, p .281). In comparison to real life, virtual realities creates communication in an unique setting that encourages the form of relationships with each other (Becerra & Stutts, 2008). However, these relationships provide different opportunities for cooperating with other users in the virtual world and through the community (Fetcherin & Lattemann, 2008). The connection that is established between the avatars and the users have formed symbolic meaning in regard to intimacy, friendship and social bonds that contribute to offline existence. There are main features that help characterise the virtual worlds. Some of these characteristics include arousal and pleasure individuation. Others include gender and affinity for technology . After further research, the attribute of escapism is also important as it adds motivation to occupy the virtual world (Mathwick & Rigdon, 2004), in addition to control and power (Hinsch & Bloch, 2009). Virtual world consumption has many reasons, on this avatar level, virtual social behavior accompanied by avatar construction is factors that contribute to the virtual world consumption.

2.5.1.2 The Micro level- the connection

The other level of the virtual identity model is the micro level (the connection). The connection aspect of the virtual identity model is known more as the developmental stage, it serves as the links between individual users as well as the global economy (Nagy & Koles, 2014). The development process in the micro level focuses on narrative scripts, virtual community, material culture and virtual intimacy. Narrative scripts comprises all the stories from virtual life, values and beliefs that are also embedded in the virtual worlds. The narrative

elements that are based on specific experiences relate to a specific user and event that is taking place in the virtual world. On the micro level, the other aspect of connection is the virtual community. The virtual community basically refers to the members of the community and group identification. In virtual worlds, group membership is considered the primary passage to larger communities (Riberio, 2009). Virtual communities are very important factor in the enculturation process. It provides social feedback as well as a sense of belonging which helps and maintain the social aspect of the virtual identity (Taylor, 1997). In these virtual communities, with identity, users develop different bonds, relationships and cultural norms by interaction with other users in the virtual world.

As users become more immersed in the the virtual community, they begin to achieve social status in the virtual world. Through these status, the user begins to gain identification among groups and gain their own perception of social identification. Through communication and interactions, users learn multiple social rules, norms and gain more knowledge about virtual worlds through interaction. Virtual community and virtual material culture go hand in hand. The material culture acts as an extension of the identity of virtual users. The virtual goods that can be obtained such as clothing and other objects, allow the users to become further immerse in the virtual world (Nojima, 2007). In the virtual worlds, when these users begin to purchase the different goods in virtual worlds its based of a level of self expression, hedonic and social needs. These needs emphasize the partisanship that's associated with virtual objects therefore giving the users a sense of status or even popularity among the other avatars in the virtual world (Lehdonvirta, 2009). Added, there may be users in the virtual world who will seem to add more value to objects than others throughout the virtual world.

When users attach such emphasis to objects in the virtual world, authors like (Hamari & Lehdonvirta, 2010) argue that, value along with symbolism in the virtual world is created jointly by both the user and the virtual environment. The virtual objects will tend to have different meanings to different users, however, the value of the object will always be determined by the virtual community.

2.5.1.3 The macro level- the virtual community

The last level of the virtual identity conceptual model is the macro level. The macro level serves as the alternative starting point to the analysis that is presented in virtual worlds (Nagy & Koles, 2014). In the building process of virtual identity, it is built of the guidelines and expectations that coincide with the global and holistic structure (Nagy & Koles, 2014). On the macro level, narrative scripts refer to elements of virtual identity that are based on characteristics of the virtual worlds. The narrative identity represents characteristic adaptations that distinguish personality from the broader traits (McAdams, 1995). One thing to keep in mind, in contrast to real life, virtual worlds have different rules and elements that initially affect how the user experiences and virtual identity.

Virtual intimacy and community on the macro level are viewed slightly differently. Virtual intimacy now refers to intimate relationships among the residents of people in the virtual world. Virtual relationships are often turned to because obstacles were faced in their real-life relationships. However, users view their virtual relationships as real relationships as opposed to playing game in SL (Gilbert, Murphy, & Avalos, 2011). Virtual community however, on the macro level “refers to the collection of virtual groups that represent themselves in a particular virtual world” (Nagy & Koles, 2014, p.285). The virtual groups are important because of their impact on virtual identity formation. Despite social influences are considered corner stones in the

virtual worlds, what needs to be noted is that virtual worlds are different from real life in fundamental ways. Unlike game oriented virtual worlds, the setting that is provided gives more of a fantasy where the social communities are that of special tribes, guilds and groups.

The theoretical framework of virtual identity shows how virtual identity is constructed and shaped based on environment and different elements. It comprises of three levels which all simultaneously impact each other. This helps and is responsible for the meshing entity of the virtual identity and virtual worlds. By presenting a virtual identity model, it helps understand how virtual identity takes its shape in virtual worlds.

2.6 Narrative Identity

There are many ways people begin to identify themselves. Min-ha, (1990, p. 157) makes note of the question which is, “who am I” the notion of identity is not longer who am I but “when, where, how am I?”. This is the beginning stage of identity theory and construction. The construction of the self is a strong determining factor in the foundation for identity theory.

Diverting back to what Min-ha said, “who am I” is important because, as a person searches for their identity, that question is frequently asked in order to begin to discover themselves and who they are. In this process, the notion of identity is then constructed. People now begin to categorize themselves in accordance of how people view them or how they view themselves. Identity then becomes a construction rather than a natural element. Natural element meaning, a person is not born with a specific identity.

As Stuart Hall notes (1996, pp. 4-5) “ Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not by outside difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that, is it only through the relation to the ‘other’ the relation to what it is not, to precisely that it lacks, to what has

been called its constitutive outside that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term- and thus its ‘identity; - can be constructed” .The process of identity construction whether its social identity or narrative identity, there are negative theory construction and positive theory construction.

These differences in construction distinguish the way people view themselves or others. In reference to a person’s identity, they sort themselves accordingly and the attitudes and behavior they exhibit correlates to the identities they place on themselves or on them by outsiders.

Despite identity can be described and defined, what is narrative identity. What is narrative? How do authors view narrative identity? Narrative identity as pointed out by many authors is viewed as an epistemological category that is habitually mistaken for a literary form (Ricoeur,1984). Narrative identity is a phenomenon that is constructed by the individual instead of a type of category that the individual fits into for example in regards to social identity. Narrative identity is a theory that seems to fit people who are very expressive in different forms. The theory is based on describing attitudes and behaviors; “they construct stories or narratives to understand themselves and others” (Vila, 2000, p.235). In the gaming realm, with the creation of avatars and living out a life in a virtual world, one is creating their own story in essence. In these virtual worlds they have their own identities, they strive to attain goals, they build their own stories to tell in the video games that they have full and complete control over. Narrative is a scheme. One of the most cognitive schemes that a human has is narrative (Vila, 2000). With narrative identity, what makes this theory effective is the notion of linking together what is happening in relation to any type of goals that are being achieved from the process. According to Ricoeur (1984) because narrative is an important scheme, it presents itself in a fashion, where the human actions link itself in accordance. This makes narrative very important in the sense of

understanding reality and time. The organization behind narrative is important in understanding human activity. Because narrative is a story, people are able to create their own futures or lives in this case of virtual identity. With the creation of these stories it is said to make the person complete. Narrative identity displays a sense of purpose and direction in human affairs and what makes an individual life comprehensible as wholes (Polkinghorne, 1988).

One of the most important factors when it comes to narrative is the construction of the identities. When a person constructs an identity its selective to what they chose to select in that given identity. This is referred to a type of evaluative criteria in the narrative.

What the evaluative criteria is that according to Somers (1992, p.602), “enables us to make qualitative and lexical distinctions among the infinite variety of events, experiences characters, institutional promises, and social factors that impinge in out lives.....in the face of a potentially limitless array of social experiences deriving from social contact with events, institutions, and people, the evaluative capacity of Emplotment demands and enable selective appropriation in constructing narratives”.

Because of this selective criteria people who narrative identity describe may usually be trying to fulfill some type of achievement that they may not have in this present reality. In order to construct this narrative in such detail, it is mentioned that there has to be a focal point to the narrative. Those focal point are what are used to grasped our attention (Vila, 2000). Once the person developed their focal point and how they want to pilot their narrative its solely dependent on that person on that person on how the narrative is constructed afterwards.

Aside from the focal points in narrative, another key factor is how narrative distinguishes itself. Narrative and Narrativity are linked because “it makes the real into an object of desire and does so by its imposition, upon events that are represented as real, of the formal coherency that

stories possess” (Vila,2000, p.237). This is the process that is use to describe the root behind the narrative. However, in regard to video games and the creation of avatars, carrying about a specific life in the virtual worlds they are creating their own narrative that sometimes depict a real event or event a fictional event. “The notion of sequences of real events posses the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origin in wishes, daydreams, reveries” (White,1981,p.23). White is also saying that sometimes these narratives tend to have attributes that are based of real events, which brings life to the narrative.

Understanding narrative and using narrative identity as the theory of choice is important because of the given circumstance. It is best used to understand how people make sense of themselves. Narrative in this case can be used to see how they portray their avatars; if it’s from a realistic standpoint or if they are they are tying construct a life that is in their imagination.

2.7 The Importance of Second Life and Virtual World Research

There are authors who believe that virtual worlds like second life are simple video games. Games are mainstream and superseding television as a leisure activity (Yee, 2005). Unlike television, virtual worlds can connect people in real time over virtual spaces. Virtual worlds are used to connect millions of people, driving technology forward while generating their own economies while raising questions about “intellectual property, free speech and law” (Ondrejka, 2006,p.111). Digital worlds or virtual worlds in this case provide opportunities for research. Virtual worlds like *Second Life* and *World of Warcraft* houses millions of users from all around the world. The significance of virtual worlds is vast. It can be used to study millions of users behaviours because users spends a significant amount of their time immersed in these virtual worlds (Yee, 2005).

Virtual worlds is a society within a society, they form complete social networks, build businesses , develop and master new skills while the lines between real and digital becomes blur (Ondrejka, 2004). Virtual worlds are becoming just as popular as other entities , the growth of virtual worlds are becoming open to everyone. Virtual worlds are no longer for the elite of the technological realm, players of all skills are frequent virtual worlds now and it s creating a modern melting pot (Ondrejka, 2006).

Virtual worlds need to be studied because it provides so much depth in regard to social experiences, exploration and discovery of new behaviours. In terms of behaviours, games are a code, everything can be easily recorded, scenarios can be tweaked replayed and compared (Ondrejka, 2006). An important factor about video games and virtual worlds, as mentioned in the introduction, its original puporse was for military purposes. There are other fields and professions that don't share this institutional value. Digital worlds, because of their social interactions and their immersion complexity, will attract attention from social fields . The interactions among the residents provide a limitless source of research, it becomes so useful to the researcher because of the continous narrartives that can be told from the behaviour displayed by the gamers. Researchers studying video games are not only benefiting academia but aslo the gaming industry.

While studying video games and the industry it can help reveal barriers that can be broken down in the video games which aids in the development of better games and virtual worlds from information gathered and analysed by scholars. "Games and gamers are impacting society in ways that are onnly beginning to be understood (Ondrejka, 2006,p.114)". Virtual worlds are changing the way of communication and interaction within society and only by studying the entity, society will know about what is taking place in virtual worlds. Behind these

key boards people can convey their own meanings and stories as its impacts others in the same activities (Veerapen, 2013).

2.8 Virtual Ethnographies in Online Communities

When studying online virtual communities, the route that is taken the most is through virtual ethnography. However, the method of study will determine the field. For example, some researchers focus on the geographies of virtual environments while others study social relations and identity (Gillen, 2009). These studies can be carried about through cognitive ethnography, where they study the linguistic practices drawing on Gee's conception of discourses. The author focuses on the language of new communications and distinction between oral and writtern patterns. Added to the cognitive method of study, the author also has another method of study which is virtual ethnography paying attention to literacy practices. When focusing on literacy practices of a study, the author is "applying diverse interpretive methods and reflective understandings to the meaning- making practice of a virtual community, particularly attending to the practices of authorign and reading written multi modal texts (Gillen, 2009, p.67)". How they gatherd their project data for this particular study was from wiki postings which included images captured in the virtual world; forum postings; in- world sensor measurements of how many people are in- world and where every minute; chat logs of near- synchronous dialogues and instant messages; and fied notes (Gillen, 2009).

When studying virtual worlds, most atuhors gravitate to the virtual ethnogrpahy. However, many of the author still embark on their own patterns of study. Unlike the author before who did something different, this author is sticking to the more traditional approach of qualitative ethnographic method. This author used participant observation to gather their information. Other methods of data collection were used as well as qualitative research methods,

such as questionnaires and offline semi-structured interviews. Towards the end of the research, the author also met with four of the participants face to face despite the purpose was not to compare online and offline contexts of social interaction (Carter, 2005). The questionnaire this author had consisted of both open and close questions with the intentions to capture motivations, interest and perceptions, of the respondents who were participating in the study. The author structured the questions in five sections. In addition to the questionnaires, the author had participants write short stories or even monologues about their personal relationship in the virtual world which stimulates an open ended interview process (Carter, 2005).

Chapter 3: Research Design

There are multiple ways this research can be carried out. In order to get the most accurate information out of the virtual world community, using ethnographic research will be the best form of gathering information. However when dealing with virtual communities, the best approach to gathering information is through virtual ethnography. Ethnography plays a significant contribution to the field of research. The use of ethnography is one of the key research methods when seeking out to obtain information about demographics and gathering information about problems, etc. Authors (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012) view ethnography as an approach for studying everyday life. In this scenario, the best method will be virtual ethnography. Taking the concept of ethnography to the virtual world is the best way to gather information about gamers who spend most of their time in virtual worlds. In regard to virtual worlds, the interesting factor lies in how people can easily take themselves to virtual worlds. Through these avatars, virtual ethnography can be conducted because the avatars are the extension of the physical self. The reason for choosing virtual worlds and avatars as my topic of research is due to personal interest in the field of video games. People who tend to carry out virtual ethnography usually tend to conduct research in a particular virtual world and seek research questions that are appropriate to that field (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012).

This study is going to focus on the virtual world Second Life (SL). With the focus on the characters and actions, participant observation falls under the umbrella of virtual ethnography which will be the root of the study. This study will take place online, Second life is a virtual world that can only be accessed through the Internet. By familiarizing myself with the virtual world I seek out to study the process of the virtual world and what it has to entail. As mentioned above, characters, actions and environments are crucial in the study. Like any research project,

the researcher will have their expectations out of the study. What I expect to see in this study is a lot of interaction between the users in the virtual world. Because second life's main goal is to simulate reality as much as possible, I expect that real world actions would be present. In terms of actions, what I expect to see is users interacting a lot in the chat windows. Previous studies that were done on relationships in SL have made notes of strong relationships forming outside of second life. I believe that these relationships begin and stem from the conversations that take place in the local chat windows.

What I also hope to find in the virtual world is interaction with the objects in the virtual world. There are many objects that I believe to be present in the virtual world that grant users the ability to interact with these objects and it will enhance the experience of participating in a virtual world. When it pertains to communication, research shows that there are both voice and text communication. My expectation is to find that the main communication that will be used throughout the virtual world will be text. Judging from the potential cluster that can inhabit the virtual world, multiple people communicating over voice communication can become hectic.

For this study 70 hours of game time was played. Of those 70 hours, 50 hours were used for data collection and the other 20 hours was spent on personal game time, searching for willing participants and getting a better understanding of the virtual world. Despite the method of study is participant observation; I saw it necessary to require some participants to help me with the study. By using these participants I can observe them in their settings while gathering information. From these participants I sought to learn more from their conversations in a group setting than following random participants that are subjected to change on log in every time. I was able to acquire the services of four main participants. These participants go by the acronyms, T, ST, L, H as the first symbols of their user names. Because everything in this virtual world in

searchable, by including the real users names the participants can be searched and found in the virtual world. In order for me to follow the participants around and log what they say, I agreed to not include their user names for privacy.

To do this study and observe well, the users have agreed to have me in their virtual worlds to observe their participants. I will be sitting in on their virtual world discussions or meetings depending on their activity and take notes of conversations. Given the past of some researchers before, during my initial search some of the participant appreciate respect more than anything else in their virtual space or I can be banned or blocked for reentering the virtual space.

3.1 Ethnography and Virtual Ethnography

Ethnography is a qualitative based research methodology (Williams V. D., 2003). When we use ethnography as a means as research, the researcher is seeking out to communicate with a specific community while describing members of this community. When we undertake an ethnographic approach to describing communication; we are referring to exploration of whom, how to accomplish what and under what circumstances (Williams V. D., 2003). Due to ethnography variety, the author has labeled ethnography as both descriptive and subjective but nonetheless still deemed valuable (Williams V. D., 2003).

What makes ethnography standout is the involvement that the interviewer has with the participants. What's critical to ethnographic study is that the researcher documents and describes everything that exists when it comes to the environment and the subjects under study (Williams V. D., 2003). However, with ethnography, a very integral part of the process is becoming accepted into the community. The ethnographic process is distinguished by first being able to define the community, gain cultural acceptance and by being able to identify with different cultural variables (Williams V. D., 2003). In order for me to be able to get sufficient data from

my necessary research groups, they must first accept me before they are willing to answer my questions and from there forth, I can begin to dwell more in ethnographic study.

As mentioned above, ethnography is one of the more prominent research methods. The term ethnography is understood to be the bringing together of method and theory; its also not narrowly defined as just interviews or surveys but participant observation is also a crucial element (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012). What adds to making ethnography prominent is the approach that is taken when going to understand cultures. An ethnographer can approach from two levels an “emic” and “etic” perspective (Geertz, 1983). Most ethnographers take the emic perspective when carrying out virtual ethnography because they seek to learn about their theoretical and pragmatic insights (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012).

Ethnographers use direct and indirect experiences to construct the reality of social setting (Williams M. , 2007). Ethnography is based on textual constructions of reality (Atkinson, 1990), that becomes a product of story telling (Van Maanen, 1995). Transitioning to virtual ethnography, virtual ethnography utilizes the environment it is faced with (Hine, 2000). Making use of the technology its presented with, virtual ethnography seeked to transcend and explore a new possible methodological barriers.

Virtual ethnography is just as similar as ethnography. Virtual worlds are growing and gaining popularity and academic writers made it a task to seek out to do research because of shared similarities with the real world. The term virtual ethnography was coined in 1996, but because a new wave of technology became present and virtual worlds grew, a demand for ethnographic research in these fields was made present. Virtual ethnography was created as a response to do research in communities in which the use of electronic communication provided by a computer is part of the routine (Hine, Virtual Ethnography, 2012). Virtual ethnography is

not used as methods to get rid of old ethnography methods; it is used to incorporate new technologies that are present while utilizing old research methods that are present. Using the same tactics as regular ethnography, virtual ethnography seeks out to find out the importance of social interaction and identity due to the fact that these two phenomena are the most important when it comes to virtual identities.

The term virtual ethnography is not only in the sense of being disembodied; it also carries the concept of being practical even if the process of virtual ethnography is not the real thing (Bengtsson, 2014). When it pertains to ethnography online the field is no longer new. There are other terminologies such as ‘virtual anthropology’ (Boellstorff, 2008) ‘digital anthropology’ or netnography. Virtual ethnography in CMC (computer- mediated communication) shows that there are bodies out there behind the keyboards (Bengtsson, 2014). In regard to data collection and processing, the information that can be obtained through virtual ethnography can be often very rich. However, digital technologies is not viewed as ideal for ethnographic analysis, in order for it to be useful the researcher needs to require specific analytical skills that allow them to focus on the required information (Bengtsson, 2014).

Online communities are most times small communities. These small communities are usually diverse and the community is a suitable environment for users to become immersed in the community. What is also mentioned, in regard to virtual ethnography, and what is always under question, is the degree of authenticity and trust of the participants when undergoing virtual ethnography (Bengtsson, 2014). During the early stages of virtual ethnography, discussions usually dealt with the fact that the researcher does not know who are the participants behind the keyboard (Schroeder, 2011). With relation to authenticity and anonymity, ethics have a role to play in the research process with both the researcher and the participants (Garcia, Standlee, &

Cui, 2009). The virtual ethnography process shares a thin line with ethical reasoning. This type of research allows the researcher to gain research information while not having to partake in the face-to-face interaction with participants.

One of the main differences between the face-to-face and CMC is the theme that is mentioned above which is the notion of anonymity and authenticity. Those factors are usually what determine a researchers method. Virtual ethnographers in the physical world are simply ethnographers that utilize the Internet as an ethnographic reality.

Virtual ethnography, also known as network ethnography, is an ethnographic field method that focuses on social network analysis (Howard, 2002). Network ethnography can either be passive or active; it is done through, “observation, extended immersion, or in-depth interviews” that are conducted through multiple field sites in the subgroups (Howard, 2002, p.570). When the author mentioned ‘field sites’, what he means in terms of choosing a particular field site, the research has to choose a perceived group and select the important traits (Howard, 2002). Virtual ethnography indeed is not a physical place, but where it lacks in physicality, it gains with its importance of social interaction. Virtual ethnography shares a slight difference in the sample bias aside from the classic ethnography. Using virtual ethnography proves to be advantageous to the researcher as it helps manage access into the community they choose. Another positive to using virtual ethnography, is the tracking of participants by the researcher. Virtual ethnography allows researchers to conduct a large population sample while still managing the cases effectively (Howard, 2002).

3.2 Participant Observation

How I will carry about this virtual ethnography is by first creating a second life account. By doing this I am able to create an avatar and enter this virtual world. This will be the beginning

process of my virtual ethnography. By going through with participant observation, I will be able to view the gamers first hand and witness how they operate as and express themselves through their avatars. Participant observation is crucial in ethnography because of the basis it entails. Authors (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012) describe participant observation as not an unreflective engagement; it redefined the way we participate whether it's in person or in avatar form.

Participant observation primarily relates to doing observation of textual exchange, both synchronous and asynchronous within MUDs, MOOs, newsgroups, discussions lists and IRC (Williams M. , 2007). Engaging in participant observation in these online spaces will allow myself and other researchers to bring forth important both epistemological and methodological questions. Some of these questions can range from difficulties associated with both analyzing discourse in textual spaces as well as role of the observer in online setting (Hine, 2000) (Leander & Mckim, 2003). Participant observation is crucial in helping understand how important virtual worlds can be in terms of socializing via avatars and how players will make modifications with themselves through their avatars. Carrying out participant observation in this virtual world is built on the balance of engaging in activity and well as being able to record and analyze data that is being collected.

Participant observation in online communities involves watching both text and images. In participant observation the role of an experiencer is just as crucial as observing. The role of the experiencer correlates to a researcher that has personal experience with the field being discussed (Walstrom, 2004). The term experiencer instead of observer is helpful because in the online community you cannot directly observe the members in the community without experiencing what the community has to offer at the same time. If the community where participant

observation is being used is an offline community, minimal participation of being there is required because of less interaction, which is needed. However, when the observation is taking place in an online setting the opportunity for unobtrusive observation is limitless and the researcher can observe by lurking (Garcia A. , Standlee, Bechkoff, & Cui, 2009). Participant observation most times starts off as lurking by most ethnographers. By lurking, you can gather primary information about the online community and use this to create interview questions. While there can be advantages to unobtrusive observation, there can be ethical issues which pertain to the privacy and the integrity of the people that are being observed (Sveningsson, 2004). Despite the fact that it may be advantageous to reveal that you are a researcher, sometimes asking consent may lead to sacrificing participants in the study. When undertaking participant observation as a researcher, one has to be very careful when they are presenting themselves as a researcher to participants where as some participants may be reluctant to participate and will be all in the same online community.

Using participant observation to collect data is suitable for validity. Doing research in virtual world requires validity because doing observations help the researcher gain a better understanding of the context and study (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). With participant observation partnering it with other qualitative methods will help strengthen the study. With this study, participant observation can help answer research questions build theory or even generate or test hypotheses (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

There are advantages and disadvantages to using participant observation as a research method. Some advantages of using participant observation is, it allows access to “backstage culture” which allows the researcher to get rich descriptions of behaviors, intentions, situation and events (deMunck & Sobo, 1998). Another advantage of participant observation is that it

provides opportunities for viewing participants in unscheduled events. One of the major disadvantages of participant observation is that sometimes the researcher may not be interested in what is happening outside of their participants (deMunck & Sobo, 1998). Added to the advantages and disadvantages of participant observation, ethics is also an issue of concern with the qualitative method. The first ethical issue is letting the community know that you are a researcher and your main purpose is to observe the participants in the field with the intent of studying their activities (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998). Added to the research, the researcher always has to make known that they're here to observe and participate.

Another ethical issue is the sole responsibility to keep the anonymity of the participants in the research. In the final write up of the research project, keeping the subjects anonymity is important for the sake of the field notes being subpoenaed for inspection (Kawulich, 2005).

Another ethical concern that authors mention in the relationship that the researchers can form with participants in the virtual world (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Because of the nature of the study, participants of the study have to develop close relationships and these relationships may affect the study even in an online environment. Since Second Life takes the shape of a virtual culture it can be considered doing cross-cultural research a researcher must note that there will be issues such as inaccuracy of findings or other actions that may lead to the damage to the members of the virtual world (Marshall & Batten, 2004).

Participant observation can be carried about in three different ways (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). The first method is *descriptive observation*. In this type of study, the researcher observes anything and everything with the assumption that the researcher knows nothing. The second type is *focused observation*. This type emphasizes the observation, which is supported by interviews where the participants steer the researcher decision in what to observe. The third type

of observation is *selective observation*. This type of observation focuses on different activities in the virtual world, which will help define the differences in activities.

To ensure a smooth transition with the research goes easily a type of trust was built between the participants in the group and myself. By doing this and establishing my purpose, my goal is to gain the researchees trust so their answers will remain genuine as possible.

In terms of analyzing data from participant observation, by using narrative identities as a basis to deconstruct the avatars, I will be able to analyze the avatars which will in turn help me understand the gamers behind the avatars. The plot analysis incorporates recounting the who, what, where, when, and why- because they are the means of perceiving interpreting the dramas of the plots (Daiute, 2014). The first step of analyzing with the use of narrative identity is to systematize the information from the realities that are being presented. By systematizing the realities (i.e taking notes) between the real life/ and virtual life, capturing the differences in text and action from by the avatars through their gamers.

3.3 Analyzing Plot

In order to analyze the plot, an important factor is plot elements. Plot elements include characters, setting, complicating actions; the plot elements appear to be different depending on the order and combinations (Daiute, 2014). In order to have a successful narrative a combination of elements is needed. Sometimes narrative may include substitutes for setting with human like elements, for example if the trees had eyes they would also be able to see what was going on. Applying plot elements to share experiences is the route most researchers are taking in the narrative plot analysis. How I will begin to analyze these specific plots is by categorizing the plots in different elements. For example setting, character- (primary, plot crucial, secondary), initiating or complicating actions to name a few categories. Studies show that, when it pertains to

plot elements it can be systematized in more adaptable ways in accordance with cultural, personal and sociopolitical norms (Bakhtin, 1986). In some narratives, the setting can be the backdrops for the main action and characters, while other narratives set the story in time (Ricoeur, 1990). Sometimes, narrative can develop numerous complicating actions while there may other plot conflicts that take a series of attempts to resolve (Daiute, 2014). When it pertains to narrative, as the researcher analyzes the plot, careful steps have to be taken in order to not misinterpret the plot and the elements. The most important part of the narrative is ensuring that the elements and the plot analysis are done correctly.

Just like sentences, different languages can be understood differently because of grammar. This is exactly how narrators use plot structure to specify and explore different meanings. “This process of watching perceiving and interpreting with plot is established in cultural development, so it is a reasonable foundation for understanding meaning in research (Daiute, 2014, p.116).” Examining the plot elements in the narratives will bring the plot to life.

When it comes to analyzing how the analysis will be constructed is by using the elements of the plot to interpret what is taking place in the narrative. The categories that make up the elements of the plot is: **Setting, Character, Initiating Action, Complicating Action, High Point, and Resolution/Ending**. The characteristics of the different elements include, **setting**- the details that will be analyzed are where the event is taking place in this reference, which part of the virtual world and the environment i.e. In this disco room or in the Brazil escape virtual world. After the setting is analyzed the **characters** can be next in the same context i.e. an avatar from my group or an avatar from another group. Also added to the analysis of the character the stories that are portrayed from the avatars are important. For example, what is being said about another avatar they encounter in the virtual world or what they are saying in terms of their avatar.

According to (Vila, 2000) the way people represent their narrative about themselves or others is usually how you determine their identity. Another section of the analyzing is the description of **initiating action** i.e. One of the other avatars in the group did not want to be my friend anymore or one of the other gamers did not give me my clothing pack. Another action is **complicating actions** i.e. the avatar that did not want to be my friend anymore decided to have a verbal fight. **High point** of the plot is the turning point of the incident i.e. I did not want to have a verbal fight with her over the virtual world. The last plot element is **Resolution/Ending**, this last category usually shows the final result of all the previous actions, i.e at the end we decided to take the conversation private and resolves it, regaining our friendship. By deconstructing these elements individually they make up the plot of the narrative.

I can begin to code the different aspects of the virtual realities that are being presented by these gamers. While gaming, through conversations that are carried about with gamers, questions can be asked to the gamers that are general and so it appears that I am not soliciting personal information. This information will be used to build a general profile that will be utilized in accordance with the second phase of the research design. After observing these contexts, I can move on to the second phase, which is thematizing the data. During this stage of the analysis I will be looking for patterns or moments, or any indication that keeps recurring which goes along the lines of the thesis questions. To analyze the stories I will be comparing the narratives from the gamers through their avatars as compared to other gamer's avatars in regards to cultural norms. These plot gamers will have through their avatars will act as their framework for events and relation between events in the real worlds and their perception as they live it through their avatars in this virtual world.

After the thematizing phase is completed that will mark the end of the research design.

Once the research design is completed, the analyzing of the data can begin where I lean against narrative identity theory and the notion of creating an alternate reality as a means of escape can be put into effect. The importance of narrative discourse is that it is used to make sense of reality; in most cases as well it is used to make sense of time (Vila, 2000). In virtual worlds those are two factors that are very prominent the notion of time and the notion of reality. By deeply analyzing avatars in correlation with participant observation answering this research question will be a succes.

Chapter 4: The Analysis of Second Life-

Deconstructing the virtual world and avatars.

The ethnographic method used in this research project was participant observation. To rightfully execute this method, I had to create an avatar and immerse myself in the virtual world of SL. How I will analyze the research for this section is through a series of events. The first stage of the findings and analysis will be revealing the data that has been recorded through the observation process. After this step is completed, the analysis of avatars will take place. This section will be the plot analysis. To successfully complete a plot analysis, the plot elements are the most important factors. Plot elements include characters, setting, complicating actions; the plot elements appear to be different depending on the order and combinations (Daiute, 2014).

4.1 Findings

From what has been found in SL, the environment in the virtual world is very vivid. In the analysis phase of SL, by using participant observation in the virtual world I observe and note what the environment and the setting appear like. In the observation process, there are environments that change daily in the virtual world. However, there are some environments that reappear to open to new members. Throughout the virtual world the environments are very vivid. The textures, the movement of objects, the architecture such as the buildings, land and vehicles are all extremely well done for a virtual world of that caliber. A major component in the virtual world is music. From beginning upon first entry in the virtual space, there is music in every world you visit while in SL. The music also varies on the type of environment you visit. Disco clubs, social houses even users private homes and islands all have music. Another added feature to the virtual world is the extra functionality. Despite that SL was made for social interaction in the virtual world, SL has the ability to be the home for many other activities. As mentioned in the

literature review, SL can be used for both educational purposes and social purposes. I have found academic university libraries as well as university meeting areas for students to come and participate in classes and forums. Added to academic worlds and standard built in worlds, SL can be used as platforms for artists to show case their art or even their music through concerts.

Aside from the generic welcome world that's available continuously for the newcomer gamers, London Hyde Park was one park in particular where I was able to have continuous access to by the world owner. At the London Hyde Park the environment was very interactive. For starters, the park is phenomenal in architecture and highly interactive, as the streets model London England and the music is that of a pop nature. There are rides and games that users can interact with that are fully functional. With environments as vast as London Hyde Park, they carry on a big discussion groups. They allow users like myself to come in and observe and even participate as long as there is no disrespect to the locals of the group.

Looking at the avatars in the virtual world, an avatar generalization was constructed judging from what was seen in my time in the virtual world. On entering SL, a general avatar is given with basic clothing for both male and female. The user has the ability to completely customize their avatar in anyway possible with the given free clothing. Once users got into the virtual world they made drastic change to their avatars. Most of the male avatars in the virtual world have the muscular built on average 6 out of 10. The other 4 out of 10 usually have on costumes of different sorts whether it's created or part of a fictional theme. In comparison to the female avatars, 8 out of 10 avatars were hyper sexualized with the remaining 2 out of 10 avatars in costume. What I noticed about the avatar concept in the virtual world, the basic avatars are ostracized in the virtual world. Throughout the virtual world, what are rarely seen are the basic avatars as they are all revamped. Only until your avatar is no longer looking like the starter it

will be very difficult for one to get noticed while in the virtual world. Another feature in the avatar construction in the virtual world is the importance of body parts for the male avatars. Users can go to the adult section of the virtual worlds to purchase these body parts to enhance the sexuality of their avatars.

Aside from the environment and the avatar; another finding in the virtual world is the recurring of specific norms. There are many rules in the virtual world. On entering any new virtual space, creators place strict rules for locals and visitors to view. Added to the norms, the environment and the avatars, there are pros and cons of doing participant observation in the virtual world. Some of the pros of digital world research is it is very easy to communicate with users. There are two types of the communication in the virtual world, voice and text communication. Depending on the environment in the virtual world the communication in the groups will either be one of the two. Another pro of participant observation in the virtual world is the user interface. While playing SL, after getting use to the interface it made navigating in the virtual world easier. Another benefit, the participants in the virtual world are cooperative to participate in the study. Through my study, there were a lot of participants who welcomed me as an ethnographer and were willing to help me with my study.

However, one of the first cons that I encountered while being in the virtual world was syncing time to meet with participants. Because of my time zone and a lot of people being on the east coast and in foreign countries the time difference can be as much as 6 hours difference. What also makes the doing research difficult in online worlds is the interruption from outside participants. There are many participants who break the rules and disrespect the other users in the virtual world. Those specific participants either cluster the text chat or verbally disrupt the flow of things over voice commands. Aside from syncing time and rude participants, another con

about doing research in a virtual world is keeping track of the participants when voice chat is involved. Participants find it easier to use voice because it takes less to type and they can get each other's attention quicker. Added to the negatives of attempting to record data, keeping track of my particular user voices in a cluster of voices is difficult. The last problem I encountered while doing research in the in the virtual world is application failure. Many times while using the online application, once being used for a long duration the application window crashes and forces me to reboot which can lead to missing chunks of the conversation or what actions are taking place at any given time. Out of the conversation logged, there were a couple themes that occurred within the conversations that I made specific note of. The other conversations were sometimes empty where they will usually talk about other avatars doing actions and who can do the best actions.

Some of the major themes the users displayed that I took special note of were social issues, economics in the virtual world and some of the adult activities that take place in second life.

4.2 Analyzing the Virtual Space in Comparison to Reality

The virtual world of SL is vast in terms of its technology and creativity. SL's main goal and objective is to create a virtual space that is suitable for social interaction and allow users to create connections in the virtual world. On entering the virtual world, the process is similar to that of becoming a new member of a sports club for the first time. When you first login to SL there is the avatar selection process, which is followed by the welcome screen. The introductory process is very similar, choosing the necessary gear that suits you, to a welcome at the beginning. In SL after a person creates their avatar from a standard mold they are sent into the introductory world for beginners. In this introductory world, it's a mountainous terrain where the

SL tutorials are taught to first time gamers. This open space, which is used to learn the functions of the virtual world, replicates the equivalent of a beginner's class for the sports club. In a beginner's class there is an instructor that is teaching the student what to do, in SL the instructions are prompted on the screen for the users to follow to get a feel for the virtual world. Some of the controls that are presented are those of motion, interactive tools such as objects and transportation of other virtual worlds, and settings to help change features about your avatar.

After the virtual world prompts have come to the end, the process is slightly backward from a real world process. In the real world, a welcome party is initiated before one embarks on the journey of selecting the gear and getting the practice lessons, etc. at a sports club. However, in SL the welcome party comes after all the tutorials have taken place. At that point you are advised to enter the welcome room for beginners to meet other gamers who are first time gamers like yourself in SL. In comparison to a real world process, one can assume that the human interaction will be similar to that of the real world.

Following the same pattern of a real world setting, other first time gamers are curious about the process of SL, and communication becomes very open. The gamer's messages can be seen by everyone due to the multi interactive text box that is provided. This multi interactive text box replicates that of a round table discussion, and it makes communicating with the other avatars simpler. Another process that replicates that of reality is the notion of labeling. Once you have created your avatar for use, the name you chose to identify yourself will be displayed over your head. The names are displayed like nametags over the user's avatar. This way when a person is talking verbally or communicating over text you can be aware of who is communicating with you or the group.

After the introductory aspect of SL is over, you then are able to explore the virtual world and embark on the journey of building and setting up your virtual world life. Upon making a world jump there multiple destinations that a gamer can travel to, and these destinations are labeled by categories. The list of categories that represent the different destinations that SL has are as follows: What's Hot Now 32 destinations (subject to change), Featured Events 20 destination, Editor Picks 13 destinations, New Come Friendly 7 destinations, International 4 destinations, Chat Hot Spots 6 destinations, Clubs 15 destinations, Adventure/Fantasy 8 destinations, Games 8 destinations, Beaches 10 destinations- Romantic 8 destinations, Adult 13 destinations. Those categories that are presented, it's made for the gamers to be able to explore and connect with other gamers in the virtual world. However, there are many more destinations that users have access due when they go to the search menu. Looking at the categories, the virtual world attempts to replicate as much as possible what is available in the real world for the SL users to have a full experience of another complete life in the video game. It touches on the aspects that are important for people to have an enjoyable experience, for example, chat rooms clubs, international spots and beaches to reiterate a few of the groups mentioned above. Author Baudrillard mentions that reality, as we know it, is being overcome by "Hyperreality". The technology that goes into these virtual worlds gives gamers the sense of being alive. In that virtual world they are able to roam free, meet people, interact and do what they please without any consequences (Baudrillard, 2012).

To get a better understanding of how in-depth the worlds are, I began to explore some of the virtual realms to see how detailed these realms are. One of the first virtual rooms I decided to visit was a chat room. Most of the chat spaces that are presented through out the virtual space are created environment with scenic background and music. The type of music they play in the

background are usually songs you would have heard on the radio in the early 2000s. The background is highly emphasized as the trees and water etc. in the background are vivid. In the book virtual ethnography, author Hine, emphasizes that we only focus on what technology is and what it can do, rather than deciding in advance what the capabilities are (Hine, Virtual Ethnography, 2000). Another key feature of the game is the change of days in the virtual world. Through out the time in the virtual space the days change between night and day as well as the climate, which goes from sun to rain. Thus far I have not seen any snowfall and maybe that climate depends on the type of destination.

Thus far it can be seen that the virtual world tries its best to mimic the real world. With the different environmental features and attributes that are shown it can be seen that the virtual place that is created is made to keep the gamers interested and feel a sense of reality while immersed in the virtual world.

4.3 Analyzing Environments in Second Life

The environment in SL has an important role to play when it pertains to analyzing the plots in the virtual world. Depending on the environment in the virtual world, you can determine the actions that are going to take place in the virtual world. One of the virtual worlds I frequent, London Hyde Park, is the most suitable environment for avatar interaction. The virtual space is a large city environment with parks where users can come and sustain many multiple conversations at their will. A big part of a plot analysis is the environment. The environment in London Hyde Park is suitable for open friendly conversation because of the mood set in the environment. The open lite area with buildings and trees in the park gives it a relax feel in the virtual space. Everyone is usually gathered in a group (central meeting place) where they are able to see each other avatars while they interact (Figure 1). This adds to the Interaction process

because they are able to see whom they are communicating with daily. The music that plays in the virtual world is that of pop, house and indie music. The users in London Hyde said the owner created this virtual space as a social space. The main purpose of the space was to act as a social club for users.



Figure 1.1 (London Hyde)

The users here carry on their discussions, use it as a common meeting ground before they teleport to there. This environment is their third space. Authors refer to this third space as their environment, which are socially constructed and built form, their perceptions meaning and values to serve their ideologies (Caruthers & Friend, 2014). In conversations at Hyde Park participants feel like Hyde is their home away from home. Despite it's not said directly, users make it known that conversations stem from the mood of the virtual world. Users in the virtual worlds identify themselves not only through their avatars but also with their property. They use this space as a place where they can live their second life, which intersects with the virtual representation of themselves (Wall & Williams, 2007). From the participants who were assisting

me with my study, only one of them had a place of their own. This is an excerpt from a conversation with that said participant:

9:07pm Kj – How much did you pay for the virtual space ?

9:10pm L – well I pay rent to my dad real life husband. I just pay how much I can when I can.

9:11pm Kj- So how does it work, like is it one big house that gets rented out lol

9:13pm L- well we are above the base level like 2000 meters up so I have a piece of virtual space for myself.

The user L identifies with her avatar in the same way she relates with her real life. She pays rent in this virtual world to her dad's real life husband. She likes the fact that she has a responsibility and it her avatars responsibility to make ends meet in the virtual world. L believes that this is her way to liberate herself while standing out as an avatar. In the virtual world, owning property is the significant to owning property in reality. It gives the user a sense of status among the other users in the virtual world; it gives their avatar sense of significance in the virtual world because they are equivalent to their real selves. In the continued excerpt from the logged conversation that was used the:

9:15 pm L – I mean yea this is me you know, I like my home its my space no one can come here uninvited I feel like I have my own thing here, I even pay rent in here like I own this place.

9:15pm KJ- so do you feel like liberated lol

9:16pm L – I mean yea, its my place it make me feel more alive in the virtual world you know, like this is all me bought everything for the place, own everything no one can take this I paid my hard earn money for this.

She relates the virtual world to her actual self, she feels as she says “more alive” because in this virtual space she is in control, maybe a bit more controlled situation than she has in

reality. The environment acts as the platform for all actions to take place. Whether you own your own place in the virtual world, or go to specific environments to interact with the users, the types of environments speaks volumes on the user and what they are trying to accomplish through their avatar.

4.4 Avatar Identification

In the virtual world, two of the key players in the narrative identity process is the users and their avatars. Through my time in the virtual world, I was able to see some of the interactions by these avatars and developed some themes about the life in the virtual world. The initial purpose of the research was to see how users identify themselves with their avatars and how they identify with other users in the virtual world. In SL, how one can tell the nature of the users is by the environments and the conversations these users have in the virtual world. In the area London Hyde, the users that visit the virtual world have one thing in common. Most of the users there came for the social aspect. They are there to hang out, just as if they were in the real world hanging out with their friends. The users in this park, already built a solid relationship due to their prior relationship built with each other. These users already spoke about their avatars and what their avatars mean to them while in that virtual space. From the time I spent there, I can tell the users identify closely with their avatars. The participants who I paid attention to on a regular, will usually have their avatars in different clothes at least two or three times a week. Gamers now create their online representations, called avatars, in the form of graphical designs that take on more and more realistic detail. These avatars are not ephemeral and spurious creations: players spend considerable time selecting and customizing them and then interacting with others online (Yee, The demographics, motivations and derived experiences of users of massively-multiuser

online graphical environments, 2006). These avatars are the true embodiment of the users; this is how they show themselves true their users.

In the virtual world, there are multiple things that users can do to identify themselves with their avatar. There are different avenues and worlds in the virtual word that encouruages users to participate. Not all the particpnats are very forward in what they do in the virtual worlds. Users either keep it in their private chats, or confine it to their own specific homes in the virtual world. One particluar user shared with me some of her actions in the virtual world, also informing me that there are many others like her ,but most are reluctant to share with researchers because it feels like invasion of their privacy and their lives. Some users in the virtual world identify differently with their avatars by building separate lives and living out these seperatre lives and sometimes bringing it into the real world. The user L in particular lives another life in SL but she has transferred her activities. The user uses the virtul world to role play but more importantly participate in her BDSM activities. “L” in the virtual world, is potentially a different person from the real live she lives. The user “L” seeks pleasure in “owning” people as this is part of her BDSM activites. This is a piece of the excerpt from the conversation log:

9:56pm Kj -so what do you do for fun?

10:00pm L- you really want to know?

10:00pm L – well I own people lol so im looking for more people to own. How you feel about being owned by someone?

Of all the people I have encountered in the virtual world, L is the only user that was willing to share openly what takes place in the virtual world. Through her avatar, she exhibits her sexual prowess as she controls and demands actions from these people virtually. Being a dominatrix in the virtual worlds seems like a far reach , as everything can be done over voice

commands and text with no indication of action. However, “L” has other methods to ensure that her submissives are truly cooperating with her request. She currently owns 4 people and gives a description of some of her commands to her subs :

10:26pm- Kj- what the type of thigns you make them do

10:27pm L - I basiclaly have them do whatever I want follow me around in here confess their love for me give me their linden basically anything I want them to do.

10:28pm – Kj – which one was your favourtie one.

10:29pm L- one sub I own I use to make him sitat his computer in a thong wearing heel as well as another thong just gagging him with clothes pins on his balls and d**k and two on his nipples while talking to him.

10:30pm- well damm lol savages out here boiiiiiii lmao

10:31pm L – what a sissy he is such a punk you know.

10:33pm KJ-so how would you know if he was actually doing what you told him to do.

10:34pm L – well I would actually have him send me picture to make sure he was doing it and from them on I just trust that he is doing what is told but I still demand pics randomly to make sure he is doing what is suppose to be done.

“L” is one member of a large population of deviants in the virtual world. This is one group that is heavily populated but not open to the public, unless a particular user knows where to go. The user uses her avatar not only as an embodiment of her self, but as a means to live to carry out another life. Compared to other users in the virtaul world, some of the other members I have intereacted with uses SL as a social tool because of the interaction they get from the other users. Some of users had this to say about SL:

9:19pm- H – oh yea man SL is deep so much fun a lot of people use SL as an escape you know, we all just come here to hang out and talk about whatever and just be in each other company its actually really cool.

9:20pm- ST- yea I mean iv been talking to these guys for years, and its cool like once you build a connection, find a group of people you gonna like talking to then it slowly becomes your home you know.

The way these users feel about SL, there is no doubt that many other users feel the same way about the virtual world. SL can be used as means of escapism, because in this virtual world the users are at free will to do whatever they wish without being judged and criticized by the population. The virtual world act as safe haven for people who want to express themselves in a particular manner while still being able to be social and build potential relationships. Some of these spend years in this virtual space because of the high level of social interaction and relationships that they build in the virtual world. User “ST” she says, she has been speaking to people for years, and its because of the connection that was built along with the finding the right niche of people. She also mentions that once these things are discovered the virtual world will slowly begin to come your home. In second life, people can can fall in love or even express their anger easily, however, it's the enchantment of the computer that creates the realm for relationships possible but also act as the psychological terminal between external reality and the the minds of the users (Salter, 2011). Relationships are important in the virtual world, the type of the relationships in the virtual world determine how the users identify themselves.

4.5 Avatar Relation to Other Users

In the virtual world of SL, the users rarely speak about their relationships in the open because they value their privacy in the virtual world. Only until they are ready to make it known,

the users will let the world know of their relationship status. In SL however, there are many relationships that stem from the virtual world and are carried into reality from outside reports.

One of the participants said this to say about reasoning and relationship in second life:

9:21pm- KJ I see, how often are you guys online?

9:22pm – H- nearly everyday for 3-4 hours, its our hang out.

9:22pm – ST - kyro like I said you gonna become crazy its serious, I log on everyday even if im sick because I know my other friends are waiting for me. You build relationships in the virtual world and when you have people depending on you , you make it your duty to come and be in their company.

Users in SL, build these connections in the virtual world that is stronger than non gamers seem to believe. As mentioned by “ST” you develop these relationships with users, regardless of their personal health or situation they feel the need to make themselves present because their friends are waiting on them. It appears to me that the users feel like their second lives are running away from them. “ST” says she makes it her duty, she tasks herself with coming to the virtual world because of the relationship she is building with the other users, this fond social interaction with other avatars is important to sustaining the purpose of the second life.

In the virtual world, there are many users who are willing to put virtual relationship before real ones. The relationships they build gives them more satisfaction than physical relationships. There are entities in these virtual relationships that give users a sense of satisfaction. There are many users in the virtual world who feel the same about virtual relationships over physical ones.

10:37pm- L – I mean I know some people in particular who are in relationships on SL and wont give real life ones a chance because they love their person behind the avi.

10:47 Kj- Sorry my viewer shutting down, but I mean how do they know that the person behind the avatar has more to offer than a physical relationship. There are things a person in real life can do that you can't get in the virtual world not so?

10:55pm L – Its fine you are using the SL viewer huh? But yea I have been in a second life relationship and because of the communication and trust you develop with this online person you begin to grow with them in terms of being in a relationship.

The user “L” mentions that her friends are very reluctant to participate in real life relationships because they love the person who is behind their avatar. It does not matter that the relationship may have no physical end, what matters to the users is, they can build a strong base of communication and trust for their virtual relationships. However, there are many relationships that made it to the real world, all from different parts of the world including major countries such as Canada, London and U.S.A (ireport, 2008). Without trying to pry, I asked the user about her relationships in the virtual world. She, like many other online participants, believed in online relationships. As mentioned, she took a chance with the online relationships because of the type of communication she built with the participants and users. This is what she has to say about her relationship:

9:25pm L- 1st one was hey im bored you live close by wanna meet up the 2nd one was a whole year and a half of us being best friends and causing trouble to one day her saying I have cancer and a 6 year old and no one to help me out at home can you come up here I quit my job packed my sh*t moved up there for a month then problems at home caused me to have to leave, but she is now cancer free.

9:29pm- Kj wow that's awesome, the second one that is. You're a really nice person to just drop everything and go do that for someone you never physically saw.

9:30pm- L-I still love her I hugged her after havign to shave her head for and I even liked her brat.

In the user's "L" both relationships, both times she was able to take the relationships to the real world. Without any type of physical contact she was still willing to go out of her way to meet these other users and in one instance take care of them. From an observaitonal standpoint, there is an entity about Second Life that renders it very suitable for relaitonship building. The social aspect that presents itself the virtual world deem it a fit environment to build relationships.

4.6 Avatar Identification through Conversations

In the virtual world, one of the main ways I have observed how users identify themselves with other users is through the conversation they carry. Desptie all the users will be in one group there can be multiple private covversation taking place behind the scene. The group identity is what keep users coming back to the virtual world, the interaction in the groups are usually the driving factors. In relation to identity, people come to see themselves as members of one group/category in comparison with another (Stets & Burke, 2000). This is the case with with identity, the concept can be applied to identity in virtual worlds. At this point unknown to the general viewers, the foundations for potential long lasting relationships are being developed. In SL, when users want to speak personally they have the option to remove themselves form the group chat and partake in a private chat. This is noticable because the above the user avatars they don't register as idle. The more impersonal relationships that are formed can come through the regualr conversations that are taking place in the virtual world.

During the some of the conversation, what can be noted is, the users respect each other opinions as individuals In the virtual world. When they are having debates and discussions, yes

there may be slight back and forth between the many members but you can tell there is a general respect and open minded attitude that is showed among the group. During one of the many conversations that I logged during the virtual world again this is how the group dynamics of the conversation would go:

9:23- H- yea there is some drought issue in California I think they be running low on later if im comprehending right.

9:23pm ST- what about like dam I mean I don't know california well

9:23pm- H- Well yea I know there trying to solve some desalination issue there are having with the sea water and then maybe it will get fix.

9:24pm T – I know in like foreign countries like Norway they use natural energy to prvide for their citizens.

9:24pm- ST- So what about the dams I know they are close to the ocean right I feel like they should have some

9:24pm- KJ- Well I believe there are trying water desalination

9:25pm- H- You know what Kyro you might be right dude I think they are trying to work on some type of water desaliniation process out there.

9:25pm- ST- I feel like they should have the money to build a plant tho it should be easy for them to do they have the necessary money.

9:26pm- Kj- I t may not be that easy , you know how issues like these work with the issues gotta get pass and bills gotta pass as well as got to have it approved by the state.

9:26pm- ST- Kyro you know your right again, you a little smart kid arent you I like you, but yea it s a process for them to do all of that they will need a lot of paper pushing and big funding.

From the above conversation, you can tell the users in the virtual world talk to each other very formally in some groups. Through social conversations, and interaction in the group settings, the way users in the group view each other is somewhat like equals. Without being thoroughly able to ask the users how they feel about other users, the way they have regular conversations can tell that the users agree and accept each other as fellow users in the virtual world. In SL, after observing the patterns of the users, I have come to the conclusion that they treat their virtual selves in every aspect like their physical self. Even though the process is virtual and the world is open, the feelings do not have to show that exactly. In accordance to what (Yee, The demographics, motivations and derived experiences of users of massively-multiuser online graphical environments, 2006) said about users displaying their aggression easily, in virtual worlds the users will be more likely to show how they feel about people who tend to break rules or disrespect them in the virtual space. One day in particular I was able to catch a piece of the conversation where they were discussing a violator. I noted that most times they never speak on their likes or relationships but this is the first time the users expressed any type of emotion in the group. This is what was said in the group:

10:21- T- yea as I was saying, he was like so disrespectful like he kept flying and bumping into other people avatars it really started pissing other users off.

10:21pm- ST- so why you did not just tell him to leave I mean it clearly says respect other people private space in the virtual world you know.

10:22pm – T -well yea but he was like a super douche but you know I'm not on the admin so I did not have the power to kick him out I was waiting for you to show up so I could have gotten him kick out.

Identifying themselves with other users usually comes about in a situation where users are aggressive. As compared to the real world, many people don't believe in sharing their feelings but will openly let their aggression flow. This is the same trait in the virtual world. Users are trapped behind their avatars and computers, it is easier for the users to act on their difference without having any consequences. In the virtual space as well, other than not respecting people's space in the virtual world, they have the ability to disrespect users through communication as well. Despite no specifics were said however, one of the users made note of an incident that took place where a user was disrespectful to other users.

10:36 ST- disrespectful, don't get me started on those who are rude over voice and text as well it's ridiculous.

10:36 T- I had to intervene one time, this guy was completely going off on this other person in the local chat in this other chat room I was in.

10:36pm T – Now I would think that the dude would just leave, but it looked like he was talking to another user that's why he did not leave.

10:37pm ST- did they eventually remove the other guy?

10:39pm- T- no he left for himself because everyone started ganging up on him and I guess there was another troll there so he did something to him.

10:40pm –ST- I know they hate being trolled by someone better than them that's always funny to look at.

From observing in the virtual world, I have concluded that in regards to users identifying with other avatars is just as similar as in the real world. Because users have the option to private chat, it makes it difficult to really get into their lives and minds without invading their privacy while they are in the virtual world. Even though users come to the virtual world as a means of

escaping the real world, there are some qualities they choose to leave behind because this is their perfect world, this is there eutopia.

4.7 Second Life in Relation to Popular Culture

The virtual world of SL relates to popular culture just as much as reality. The issues SL portrays are opposite to the issues that are faced in reality. In the virtual world of SL, situations such as racism, sexism and religion were not major issues. While exploring the virtual world, participant observation methodology allowed me to experience the virtual world first hand. The issues mentioned above thus far have not made themselves present, however, a form of rejection stems when a person fails to customize their avatar. In comparison to reality and popular culture, the standard average white male is accepted in society because scholars such as Arnold and Levis speaks about this high brow high culture that promotes the Anglo Saxon white dominance that we see in society today. However in SL, even if a user created the average white male / female avatar, that user will likely to be interacted with. My avatar that I created is a male white avatar (Figure 2.1). Before the customized look of the avatar it took shape of an average white male in society today. The question of, am I not interacting enough with other users was the reason for the lack in sociability? But the reality was, my avatar was simply to plain. I showed no character or difference or looked like I belong to any groups of the sort. After interacting with some of the users in the virtual world, I was given assistance I was able to change the look of my avatar and add some character to my avatar (Figure 2.2). Multiple users approached me with invitations to join their groups, become part of their circle or networks. By doing this I would have to give up my regular image and wear the costumes that promotes their factions. As fun as it would seem, it would have taken away from my focus of observing users in their natural element without having to devote all my time to group activities.



Figure 2.1 (Original Avatar)

When it pertains to issues on racism, and gender biases they were not discovered yet. Initially, the selection process only allowed a user to create a standard avatar that is white or black male or female, but then has the ability to customize their avatar's personal features more in the settings. This then allows the user to give their avatar any ethnicity they chose along with skin color.



Figure 2.2 (Customized Avatar)

Worldly issues however such as religion and gender have not been a problem in the virtual world. There are many female avatars present in SL, and they are highly accepted and the

number one socializers in the virtual world. In terms of sexuality, there are many avatars you see throughout the virtual world that appear to be gay or bisexual. Judging from the clothing they wear it can be assumed that the users are of different sexual orientation. The only way this can be confirmed is through verbal confirmation or some of the conversations that you encounter in the open. In SL, the community for sexual activities is vast. In comparison to reality the creators of the virtual world made it possible for users to engage in sexual activity in the virtual world freely. Users in SL share what they knew about the virtual in regards to illicit activity:

9:13pm T –oh you was adventuring on the dark side huh yea there is a lot of that in second life.

9:13pm H- yup do you know there is a lot basically illegal activities like sex trafficking in SL.

9:14pm Kj- wow that really serious there, how is that even possible in a virtual world.

9:14pm ST- I think it happens when people go to the adult worlds and ask people for sex and when they take them to the virtual world or their private worlds they trap them and don't allow them to leave.

Activities like that, show the type of deviants in the virtual world. It shows examples of how different narratives can be constructed throughout the virtual world. Illicit sexual activity in the virtual world, adds to show how people use their avatars as well as construct their identity in the virtual world.

The purpose of the virtual world is to mimic the real world in all forms and fashion. By doing so, it is making the virtual world harder for those who submerge themselves in it, here by granting the virtual world of Second Life, just as successful in the foundations of relationship building and social interaction. When these things are made present there is no change in interaction with the users.

Aside from the basic issues such as religion, gender and sexuality, another way the world of SL relates to the physical world is through economics. In SL there is a lot of commerce that takes place in the virtual world. The creation of clothing, architecture, and different items keep the SL economy booming. In relation to John Fiske and the popular economy, the commodities that the users set purchase from other consumers through Linden Labs are no more than pleasure and social identities to display to other users in the virtual world (Fiske, 2009). Speaking with users in the virtual world they proved that there is a strong economical base in the virtual world.

8:18 pm H- Wel yea some people work a lot to make money actually live the lavish second life you know.

8:19pm- Kj I could imagine what do they do like in terms of some jobs that is.

8:19pm T- well there are many ways you can make money in second life.Umm you can becom a Dj, a model or build stuff.

8:20pm T – Just like that Dj he probably gets paid in linden bucks don't know how much tho it depends.

8:22pm Kj- that's tight do any of you all have jobs

8:23pm H- T has one she is actually pretty good at it to.

8:24pm T- im an arcitheat, I build stages and and set for concerts and shows in the virtual worlds.

8:30pm T- well there is what I do which is build and sell sets and stages for concerts, but there is also real estate. A lot of people buy virtual property and hold on it to and resell at a higher price just like real life. Virtual real estate is a big big thing.

8:32pm H- hah don't forget the models haha.

8:34pm T – yea how could I forget the models, exotic dancers and well as you know the DJ, umm I think party host get paid to.

Users provide the commodities, they spend time to create and produce these commodities but potentially run the risk of being not compensated enough. However, in SL you can see the financial economy at work. What Fiske mentioned in regard to the financial economy, cultural commodities circulation can go from producers to distributors (Fiske, 2009). The users in SL are the producers, and they distribute their products to Linden Labs (the distributors) for sale through out the virtual world. What also adds to the benefit of the virtual world economy is the ability for users to cash out in the real world.

8:40pm- K – so is there a way to get the money in real life?

8:41pm T- yea there is a way to get the money in real life, it's a little process tho but you can still get it, like I know people who made six figures from working in second life. So the ones you see there 24/7 probably the ones who have way more money than people may think.

The virtual world of SL can be compared to that of reality and popular culture in many ways. However, in regards to avatar and avatar identification, there is still more which can be learned from the virtual world process. To truly get more details and in-depth reasoning more time will have to spend in the virtual world, maybe even embarking on fully committing to a virtual world life for more than 2 years. Nonetheless, the virtual world of Second life goes deeper than the surface, with respects to activities and economy; the virtual world is growing and slowly thriving. Participant observation allowed me to interact and immerse myself in the virtual world to experience some of the processes first hand, allowing me to take a peak into the virtual world. With the use of narrative identity, the line can be drawn as to understand why these users can become so submerged in the virtual world, these are their stories, this is how they want to live

their lives this is how they feel comfortable and to many their get away form the real world that this very same virtual world tries so hard to emulate.

Chapter: 5 Conclusion

5.1 Research Summary

From the beginning of the virtual world era, virtual worlds have come a long way in its functions and process as well as technology. When virtual worlds started making its appearance between 1960-1962 the creators of the virtual world would not have known it would have gone so far in its processes. The term virtual reality was coined in 1965 by Ivan Sutherland as it was used to describe technology that was starting to gain fame and popularity. What first started as a multi sensory simulator that did not have interactive features, the technology for virtual worlds began to grow from there (Mazuryk & Gervautz, 1996). The slow growth of virtual worlds moved onto higher heights with the addition of hardware to its processes, giving it the first HMD (Head mounted display) to the virtual world, the technology began taking off. Going from head mounts to new force feedback, the virtual world began to grow more and more in style, popularity and functionality.

The increase popularity of the virtual world brought about new attention from other departments to put its services and technology to better use. Getting closer to the 20th century in 1982, medical research facilities at the US Air Force decided to create a virtual world known as VCASS. This creation was used as an advanced flight simulator, to help assist the US Air Force increase and sharpen the skills of their pilots faster and more cost efficiently (Holloway & Lastra, 1995). At this point the thought of using virtual worlds as a social sphere was unheard of. Companies were trying to use this technology for military purposes or simply seeing where the virtual world technology could be taken. In the year 1992 the virtual reality made another step in the forward direction with the virtual environment called CAVE. This virtual reality was a scientific visualization system, instead of using head mounts like other displays; it projected the

stereoscopic images on walls of the room and with the addition of the LCD shutter glasses a reality was provided with superior quality that was better than any other system (Balaguer & Mangili, 1993).

After the CAVE era of virtual world creation, virtual world technology started becoming more advance, beginning of the new types of virtual world start becoming present. The two notable virtual worlds started taking shape, which were online games and metaverses. The online gaming started shortly after the Internet phase, and has been around for over a decade when it introduced games such a Quake. The era of the MMOGS began and here you start seeing virtual worlds being transformed and really used for more of a gaming platform. The online gaming community at this point started to flourish. Gamers from around the world can log in on one particular domain in the virtual world and play the same game with each other. As similar to the metaverse, this is where online virtual reality games like second life begin to take form. The metaverse is what makes online virtual communities such as the one in this study Second Life popular. The uses of metaverse was to provide a platform for social interaction and economic relationships between users and designers to create more than a simple video game, the purpose was to create something of more substance with more features to keep the users interested in the virtual world and from the likes of Second Life online community this has proven to be a success. However, with the introduction of the new metaverse and online gaming community, avatars began gaining importance in the virtual world and are one of the primary points of the research. The avatars have major importance in the virtual world process; they act as an embodiment for the users, and through these avatars the users live out their lives in the virtual reality.

Virtual worlds are known for their social attributes, however after research was done, it was shown that virtual worlds could be used for many other avenues other than being a social entity. The virtual world can be used for education and learning purposes. Research has shown that the virtual world of *Second Life* has all the necessary features to teach and carry out classes and virtual discussion through the use of the virtual world. When it pertains to *Second Life*, it is considered as a technological environment that is appropriate for boosting the platform of education. Because of the social aspect of *Second Life*, it becomes a very important medium for educators and students to be able to communicate. *Second Life* gives access to resources, different models as well as multiple types of cognitive and collaborative tools (Dickey, 2005). All these features lead to show that the virtual world is ready to handle academic prowess. Once institutions realized that the virtual world is suitable for academia, over 100 universities now either rent or own virtual land in the *Second Life* (Baker, Wentz, & Woods, 2009). The virtual world craze was spreading and now its being use for more than social interaction and meeting new people. The academic component was added to it and institutions faculty used the virtual world to hold lectures or meetings and even go as far as hosting musical performances and display digital artwork. The presence of academia in the virtual world began to grow even more. Institutions even saw it beneficial to have a library in the virtual world.

Libraries was not the only high point of using virtual world in education. After analyzing the virtual world, educators realised that *Second Life* obtained capabilities to teach technical subjects like computer programming. Due to *Second Life* being a 3D virtual world, it contains programs that have the same characteristics as ALICE, which is used in computer programming training (Esteves, Fonseca, Morgado, & Martins, 2011). The capabilities and functions of the virtual world started making it possible for even one of the most delicate subjects to be taught

over the virtual world. As there are many pros for using the virtual world for education there were some notable cons as well. The cons that the educators came up with mostly derived from communication issues rather than technical issues. Due to the both medium of communication (talk and text) and sometimes the delay in text in the chat window, educators felt like the communication between faculty and students would be a problem and would affect the students willingness to learn and participate in the study. Aside from the communication problems what could also pose a threat is students being reluctant to participate in the study because of it being a new technology.

Studying a virtual world expanded my knowledge as young researcher. It permitted me to stumble across many avenues of research in virtual worlds. The virtual identity model is split into three sections the Individual level- the avatar, the micro level-the connection, the macro level- the virtual community. Each category explains the different levels of the virtual identity model which basically makes up the virtual world of Second Life we know today. These elements show that the virtual world of Second Life is constructed with the intent to model the environment and the different elements that it's made of. However, in order to really understand how the users in the virtual worlds operate, understanding Narrative identity was the main theory which helped explain how users carried about their processes in the virtual world. It explained how the narrative process is important to the users because in their thought process they try to fulfill some type of accomplishment through their avatars in the virtual world.

Narrative identity is crucial in this development because the gamers create their own stories that they intend to live out in the virtual world, as it is due to an embodiment of themselves. While a gamer searches for their identity, they begin to view themselves by how they are perceived by others as well as how they view themselves. This is where the identity

process begin to form and the narrative identity process begins to take shape. Narrative is an important scheme, so it presents itself in a different form of fashion where the humans begin to link its actions in accordance (Ricoeur 1984). With narrative identity especially in virtual worlds, “They construct stories or narratives to better understand themselves and other” (Vila, 2000, p.235). Narrative identity is important to users in the virtual world because through narrative identity you are able to understand how the users act in the virtual world. Studying Second Life and virtual worlds is important because it’s a growing field. The new leisure activity is considered to be video games which is more popular and taking over the role from television. Virtual worlds are slowly becoming a society within a society, they form complete social, economical networks everything just shy of being able to feed yourself from the virtual world. There is so much depth to the virtual world that renders the virtual world a solid place of research.

Carrying out this research the best way I figured possible was through participant observation. Participant observation in online communities involves watching text, images and actions of the users in the virtual world. Participant observation in the virtual world is crucial as the observer plays an important part in the research process. The observer, who is essentially the experiencer, is the one who has the personal experience in the field. The reasons for using the term experiencer instead of observer is helpful because in the online community it is said that you cannot observe activity you can only experience it. Using the method of participant observation helped with the validity of the research. The observations that were done in the virtual world will help get a better understanding of the virtual world and what it entails. Despite there were many pros to the research there were also cons to the research. The ethical issues that surrounded participant observation was one of the challenges I worried about while undergoing

the research. However, I did not encounter those problems which were attachment to the participants and anonymity problems with the users.

5.2 Discoveries in Second Life

The research that was undergone turned up many results and lead the way for new conclusions. During my time spent in the virtual world, I have concluded that virtual worlds particularly Second Life is far beyond the expectation. After studying the the virtual world, many things were uncovered. Having prior knowledge about the virtual world , I know from the basis, that the level of social interaction in the virtual world was high. Participants met in the virtual world and form unbreakable relationships. However what I did not know was how users truly identify themselves in the virtual world, as well as what other attributes are there in the virtual world. While trying to uncover how user identify themselves in the virtual world, I came to the conclusion that participant observation was not the best chose method for the study. Due to Second Life mirroring so much entities of the real world, the people and their behavior tend to do the same.

What was grasp from the virtual world however, users are emotionally attached to their avatars. It proves the theories that the avatars are embodiment of the users. Users live their lives through their avatars. Aside form the social interaction in the virtual world, users can truly live out separate lives in the virtual worlds. The virtual world can provide for every possible feeling besides the satisfication you get from a hungry stomach. The more you play Second Life, the more you uncover. The culture of people is vast, as the virtual space is not limited to one country alone. In terms of sexuality in the virtual world, all genders and sexuality are present because of limitless avatar customization. Users can go beyond to insure that their avatar looks like them, walk like them and thanks to voice communication even sound like them.

There are many avenues to the virtual world one in particular that I found interesting is the economical aspect of it. Before getting involved in the virtual world I was aware of the potential to be employed, however, I did not know the extent. In the virtual world of Second Life, there happen to be an array of jobs one can hold in the virtual world. This element is so magnificent that people can obtain the money from the virtual world. There are users out there who make a living because of jobs they hold in Second Life. Its safe to say that the only element you cannot bring from the virtual world to the real world is real estate, vehicles and clothes. However, money and relationships, two of the biggest elements of a person real life can be brought into the real word. There is a strong communication aspect that stems from Second Life, this virtual world can be the future of interactive gaming. It can even be argued that the virtual world may no longer be considered a game but that of a multi purpose online community . From the social aspect of the virtual world, to using the virtual worlds as an educational platform, Second life has grown beyond the expectations of the creators.

After conducting the research I have derived with these ansewrs for the following research questions. In regard to RQ 1: How do gamers in virtual worlds identify themselves through their avatars in comparison to their actual self?, the gamers or in this case users are very close to their avatars. In the virtual world, the users see the avatars are as extension of themselves, or for others who live out another life in the virtual world a different version of themselves. A lot of the users treat their avatars as if the avatars were real. In comparision to themselves in the real world, not all users structure their avatars from their image and likeness. Some users prefer to create different avatars because it shows and reflects what image they would have preferred to have in the real world. Where the avatr customization is endless, there are many users who use white avatars. The question whether the user behind the white avatar is

actually white and not a different complexion remains the questions as not many users like to disclose that type of information unless a really close relationship is formed with the users.

When it pertains to the second research question, RQ 2: How are different types of narrative constructed in virtual worlds as opposed to the actual self?. In the virtual world, the users have the ability to live out dreams they have in the virtual world. In reference to narratives in the virtual world, the users have the ability to create their own stories for themselves through their avatars. The narratives are constructed in different themes in the virtual world. These themes can vary from the different virtual world the users visit in the virtual world. For example, there are users who role play in the virtual world and participate in activities like BDSM like one of the participants in particular. The narratives the users seek out to create are different from the ones in reality because there are no rules as apply to the real world. There are no boundaries forbidding them from doing the activities they want to do as in comparison to the real world. In the virtual world the user have the ability to create whatever narrative they feel fit for their avatar.

The last research question reflexes on the interaction of the users through their avatars. RQ 3: How do gamers in virtual worlds identify themselves and relate to other online personas via the use of avatars?. In the virtual world, because they the process replicate that of reality so much, users communicate through their avatars regularly like they would in the real world with other avatars. They respect other users avatars like they would respect a person in real life. However, in the virtual world they pride themselves on following the rules of the virtual world. Due to the avatars being extension of themselves, they pride themselves on respect and respecting other users in the virtual space. Through their different forms of communication the users communicate with each other, and where as sometimes fatal attraction occur from the looks

of the avatar, it all comes down to the user behind the avatar for confirmation. A lot of the users in the virtual world connect through conversations of various topics of the sort. Through these conversations they really express themselves and form the social bonds that are spoken of between the avatars.

5.3 Unexpected Qualities of Second Life

When this research first started there were some qualities in the virtual world I did not expect to be present. After the research was completed, it showed that the virtual world had many other avenues present. One in particular the strong economical community that was present in the virtual world. Though jobs is another way users in the virtual world can construct their own narratives, there are many occupations users can take up in Second Life to help their economic situation in the virtual world. Similar to the real world, the thriving business in the virtual world is virtual real estate. Most of the people who make the significant amount of money in the virtual world comes from virtual real estate. In Second Life, all the hard work that these users put in to earn their virtual money is not in vain. There is a process that the users can go through to get their money to the physical world. Despite the process is lengthy it still can be done.

Another unexpected quality of Second Life is the different possibilities that come with the virtual world. After research, it is shown that the virtual world can be used in education. The virtual world can be used for lectures discussion and even presentations. The virtual world even has the capabilities to teach subjects such as computer programming. Prior to the research, there was no knowledge that the virtual had so many extra capabilities in the virtual world. This can set up new boundaries for the virtual world and potentially give new purpose to the virtual world. Through second life there is a possibility it can reach out to students who are not interested in

school but swerk more interest in virtual worlds and video games. This can now leaves suggestions for the push of the virtual world to be used more in education in differetn levels of academia.

5.4 Classic Ethnography vs Virtual Ethnography

The data for this research project was gathererd soley using a virtual ethnography method of participant observation. Doing this research showed the difference between using classic ethnography and virtual ethnography. Using virtual ethnogtaphy is just as difficult as classic ethnography. There are misconceptions that virtual ethnography is easier than classic ethnography and that it wrong. Practicing virtual ethnography is difficult. You are not able to have that face to face interaction with the participants like classic ethnogrpahy. When you are getting your answers through virtual ethnography you have to really go of trust and hope that they are being honest because you cannot tell from their expressions or reactions if something is wrong or right. One disadvantage to using virtual ethnography as to classic ethnography, is the logging of data. With virtual ethnogrpahy especially in virtual worlds, you run the risk of loosing data when message window crash or computer malfunctions.

Using virtual ethnography oppose to the regular ethnography was the best way to conduct this research project. By using participant observation, it really allowd me to get in depth information in the virtual world process. Being able to participate helped me as an ethnographer really understand the process of the virtual world. Using the classic ethnography woud not have allowed me to get this first hand experience in the virtual world.

5.5 The Journey of this Research

When is started this research project I had no idead where the fianl resutl would bring me. The original roadmap for this thesis was based of narrative identity in virtual worlds.

However, after spending time in the virtual world, I realised that there is more to the virtual world than meets the eye. Second Life is vast, and there is layers upon layers of activities in the virtual world. These activities made it very difficult to stay focus and remain with the initial research. Like any researcher, after observing a specific nature long enough you being to see the connectivity between elements in the virtual world. This research took me from focusing on identity to uncovering new avenues such as Second Life use in education, as well as the use the strong economical presence in Second Life. This thesis project open up avenues for different study to take place because of the different aspects that can be studied from the virtual world under study.

5.6 Expanding Second Life

On conclusion of the assignment there are many avenues of this research that could be done differently to improve the outcome of this research. Inorder to develop this study more, on how avatar identify themselves with their avatars, focusing on one attribute of the users lives such as relationships, economics or their activites will be the best option. Second Life is a broad playing field, by narrowing down a specific attribute to investigate the research then becomes more central, focus and information can be more centered. The research can take a step up from the individual level and even visit the group level. Studying group identity in the virtual world can help understand the social interaction and what makes it prominent in the virtual world. There are many chat groups and small communities in the virtual world, by infultrating the communities and using a diffferent method of ethnography other than participant observation more information can be gathered. Through a different approach more can be uncovered from Second Life. With more time spent in the virtual world, with the use of a different method more questions can be answered about the virtual world, giving a new life to the entity.

Studying narrative identity in the virtual world can be developmental for both academia and the virtual reality of Second Life. The studies has open up many new avenues to discuss topics that can change how outsiders view the virtual world of Second Life. As I conclude this study on Second Life, I hope that my research can stimuale others to go deeper and uncover the true gems of the virtual reality of Second Life.

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Vita

Kyron Carlton Joseph was born in Trinidad and Tobago. He graduated from the Arima Government Secondary School in 2007. Before achieving his Bachelor in Multi Disciplinary Studies with focus in Digital Media Production at University of Texas at El Paso in the spring of 2013, he attended the University of Kentucky where he studied Telecommunication. Mr. Joseph became the Graduate Assistant for UTEP Track and Field and was a fall Intern for UTEP Athletics Video Production.

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This thesis was typed by Kyron Carlton Joseph