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Hybrid Interactive Rhetorical Engagements In Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs): Examining The Role Of Rhetors And Audiences In Generative Rhetorical Discourses

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EXAMINING THE ROLE OF RHETORS AND AUDIENCES
IN GENERATIVE RHETORICAL DISCOURSES

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Acting Dean of the Graduate School

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YOWEI KANG

2011

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Taiwan, and the diligent people who live in this island country.

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MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAMES (MMORPGs):
EXAMINING THE ROLE OF RHETORS AND AUDIENCES
IN GENERATIVE RHETORICAL DISCOURSES

by

YOWEI KANG, M.F.A., B.B.A.

DISSERTATION

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 OVERVIEW OF COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAME APPLICATIONS

A strong economic rationale supports the growing importance of computers and video games in society, warranting growing intellectual interests in this emerging topic. The virtual GNP of the *Norrath* in *EverQuest* is analogous to the world's 77th richest economy (Krotoski qtd. in Kent). The apparent result of such economic and scholarly attention is also due to an exponential growth in the number of gamers in the past few years. Global revenues of digital games were estimated to reach about \$20 billion (Raessens and Goldstein). Recent data in "2007 U.S. Video Game and PC Game Sales....," provided by The NPD Group, a leading global provider of retail and consumer marketing information, also found U.S. sales of computer and video games hardware, software, and accessories generated revenues of about \$18 billion, a 43 percent increase from \$12.5 billion in 2006. According to the same report, in 2007, sales of all computer and video game categories experienced double digit percentage growth from 2006 to 2007: video game console software (\$6.6 billion and 153.9 million units sold), PC games (\$18.8 billion), console hardware (\$5.12 billion in 2007), portable software (\$ 2 billion and 77.5 million units sold) and total videogame software (\$9.5 billion) (The NPD Group, Inc.).

The latest data released by the Entertainment Software Association in its report, *Video Games in the 21st Century: The 2010 Report*, states computer and video game companies added \$4.9 billion to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The total revenues of sales grew from \$7.0 billion in 2005 to \$10.5 billion in 2009. The industry contributed disproportionately to the overall U.S. economy and GDP in spite of recent economic recession (Entertainment Software Association). Sales of computer and video game units grew from 226.3 million in 2005 to over 273 million units in 2009 (Entertainment Software Association; Siwek). Between 2005 and 2006, the entertainment software industry contributed to the real national GDP growth and exceeded its share of GDP by four times (Entertainment Software

Association). The computer and video game software industry also experienced rapid growth of 10.6% between 2005 and 2009 when the overall U.S. economy grew only about 1.4% during the same period. On the basis of a Pricewaterhouse-Cooper's report, the Entertainment Software Association indicates the trend will continue and global sales of entertainment software are likely to reach \$48.8 billion by the year of 2011 (Entertainment Software Association).

Computer and video games impact many other facets of our society and are becoming a popular recreational pastime for many Americans (Bryce and Rutter; Kafai), covering a range of the demographic spectrum (Raessens and Goldstein; The NPD Group, Inc.; Yang, Roskos-Ewoldsen, Dinu, and Arpan). As a result, new online behaviors emerge among gamers. Many gamers practice *grinding* to play basic and entry level avatars to turn them into powerful and skillful avatars for virtual sale later on (Kent). The exchanges of currencies through the transactions of virtual goods and services generate new terms such as "ludocapitalism" and "gold farming" that attest the increasing influence of the virtual world (Dyer-Witherford and de Peuter). In 2004, eMarketer's data report 108 million videogame players and the number is likely to grow to 126 million by 2008 (qtd. in Yang, Roskos-Ewoldsen, Dinu, and Arpan 143). According to *Expanding the Games Market* by The NPD Group, Inc., 63 percent of the U.S. population plays video games in the forms of console and portable games, PC games, or by cell phones or i-Pod devices. Almost 30% of its 5,039 online survey panelists in the study said they spent more time playing games this year than last year, while 40% of them said they spent equal amount of time (The NPD Group, Inc.). Popular MMORPGs are played at a global scale. For example, *World of Warcraft* attracts players around the world with two million subscribers in Europe, two and half million subscribers in North America, and five and half million subscribers in Asia (Blizzard Entertainment, Inc.; Kent).

Researchers also found similar widespread impacts among children (The NPD Group, Inc., "Amount of Time Kids Spend Playing Video Games is On the Rise"). About one third of children (from

toddlers to tweens to teens) spent more time playing video games than the previous year (The NPD Group, Inc.). The NPD Group's report, *Kids and Gaming*, also found children between ages 2 and 17 spent 39% of the time on online games (as opposed to offline games). Another report by C&R Research also found over 50% of teens aged 9-13 spent time playing videogames alone or with others online (Lane). The increasing usage of computer and video games for entertainment and pleasure among all demographic segments supports the importance of understanding various phenomena related to computer and video games, gaming behavior, and impacts of playing computer and video games.

In order to better understand the popularity of computer and video games, it is revealing to examine longitudinal technological developments influencing the rapid diffusion of this innovation in our society. Historically, one of the most successful games ever developed was created by a Russian mathematician, named Alexey Pazhitnov (Consalvo). The game is called *Tetris*. In 1958, William Higinbotham developed another popular game, called *Tennis for Two* (Kline et al. qtd. in Consalvo 124). The first computer game was developed in 1962 by hackers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The game, *Spacewar*, ran on the world's first minicomputer, DEC PDP-1 (Laurel). The first commercial computer game, *Computer Space*, was developed in 1971 (Wolf and Perron), and *The Magnavox Odyssey* (1972) and *PONG* (1972) represent the first home game systems and commercial hits, respectively. Although, historically, videogame technologies were developed from an academic setting, the technologies have developed so rapidly that they became a phenomenon essential to contemporary human life. The varieties of these early games and the evolution since that time also have transformed themselves to enable gamers to manipulate their digital world.

Since their inception over several decades ago, computer and video games employed various platforms, ranging from console games, arcade games, handheld portable devices, and computer games (Consalvo). Console games are the most profitable segment in the industry and are often sold under the brand names such as Microsoft's Xbox, Sony PlayStation 2, Nintendo's GameCube and Wii (Consalvo).

Rapid advances in networking technologies such as high-speed broadband wired or wireless Internet further transformed the traditional single machine, stand-alone video game into a colossal cyberspace playground that enables gamers to take part in the interactive and synchronous gaming experience from any phone with Internet connectivity (Guins). With the convenience of a global Internet linking all gamers, some of these console gaming devices connect to high-speed and broadband networks to enhance gamer experience (Ye and Cheng).

The subsequent development of the computer and video games as an industry has been influenced not only by a global broadband infrastructure (such as the Internet), but also by fast-evolving gaming platforms which dictate how and where players interact with the games. On the one hand, the advances in broadband infrastructure help enhance the further diffusion of computer and video game players to join the gaming community. On the other hand, the development of computer and video game platforms expands the experience of gamers. Historically, these include personal computer, console, CD-ROM, Internet, and mobile devices. Some of the primary and most recent platforms include HDTV, and mobile gaming devices. Because computer and video gamers continue to demand better and more involved gameplay experiences through enhanced audio and visual stimuli, this trend has led to increased purchase of HDTVs. In 2007, an estimated sale of \$73 million in HDTV is due to the popularity of the XBox 360 game console (Entertainment Software Association). The excellent sound and video qualities of HDTV enable gamers to maximize their gameplay experiences. Recent developments in mobile technologies, services, and gaming applications further enable gamers to access computer and video games anywhere and anytime they prefer without the constraints of physically-connected networks.

The following section provides an overview of computer and video game research to help contextualize the background of this dissertation project. I provide an extensive review of literature on computer and video game studies. I also offer an overview of Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) because they are the focus of the present study.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAME RESEARCH

Exponential developments of the digital game industry in recent years have generated enthusiasm among scholars from diverse disciplines to explore this phenomenon (Raessens and Goldstein; Wolf and Perron). Research topics related to rhetoric and writing studies include interactive narratives (Crogan; Frasca; Juul; Mul; Neitzel), identity (Filiciak; Turkle) and learning (Gee; Prensky). However, communication scholars have examined unanticipated media effects of digital gameplay; topics include violent and aggressive behaviors among players (Baldaro, Tuoizzi, Codispotic, and Montebanocci; Chambers and Ascione), addiction to digital games (Chuang), gendered gameplay behavior (Hussain and Griffiths), and adoption of new game technologies (Chang, Lee and Kim). Wolf and Perron claim that digital games have become “the hottest and most volatile field of study within new media theory” (1).

Although a systematic study of computer and video game research can only be traced back to a few decades ago, confusion and instability of terms are often attributed to rapid technological changes associated with the delivery of gameplay contents and experience. The confusion is caused by the fact that this domain of study is often approached by multi-disciplinary scholars more comfortable with different terms that touch on various aspects of computer and video game research. For one instance, the terminology for digital games is sometimes used interchangeably with “electronic games,” “videogames,” or “computer games” (Raessens and Goldstein). As Raessens and Goldstein explain:

‘Electronic games’ and ‘digital games’ are generic terms that include arcade games (stand-alone games played in public locations or arcades), video games played on a dedicated console connected to a TV set or other display, and computer games, those played with a personal computer either off-line or online. (xii)

Furthermore, depending on the aspects of computer and video game researchers, different terms are employed in their studies. For example, Raessens’ and Goldstein’s conceptualization of games mainly

focuses on the platform and connectivity where gamers can play. The terms “video games” and “computer games” are used interchangeably by many books that provide platform-specific definitions to the entire field of computer games (Kerr). Meanwhile other game scholars (Haddon; Herz; Poole; Wolf) provide more specific distinction about what constitutes games (on arcade machines), video games (on personal computer and console), interactive games (two-way interactivity between game and gamers), or digital games (the digitalization process in which games are designed). On the other hand, Kerr proposes a comprehensive term, digital games, “to refer to the entire field and to embrace arcade, computer, console and mobile games in all their diversity” (3). Kerr captures what “digital game” can mean that “a digital game could refer to a game played on arcade, cabinets, on PC or MAC, on consoles like the Playstation 2, the Game Cube, and the Xbox, on mobile devices like mobile phones or over the internet” (4). Similarly, Consalvo and Dutton also employ the term, digital games, to refer to arcade and handheld games, computer games, console video games, and other gaming devices. In the sections below, I follow these scholars’ conceptualization of digital games and use “digital games” when referring to any types of games delivered through online or offline and by a variety of gaming devices from arcades, consoles, personal computer, to mobile devices (Consalvo and Dutton; Kerr).

Raessens’ and Goldstein’s edited book, *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, best captures what is considered to be the most important topics in digital game research. This book divides the research of computer games into five areas: design, aesthetic, reception, cultural, and social issues. Under each area, Raessens and Goldstein collect articles that can best study the domain of digital game study: 1) game design (Raynauld; Prensky; Salen and Zimmerman); 2) reception of gamers (Calvert; Holmes and Pellegrini; Gunter; Griffiths); 3) games as a cultural phenomenon (Bryce and Rutter; Edwards; Klabbers; Richard and Zaremba; Turkle); and 4) games as a social phenomenon (Goldstein; Griffiths and Davies; Schleiner; Rushkoff). Despite the comprehensive coverage of Raessens’ and Goldstein’s book, the study of digital games from a rhetorical theoretical perspective is missing.

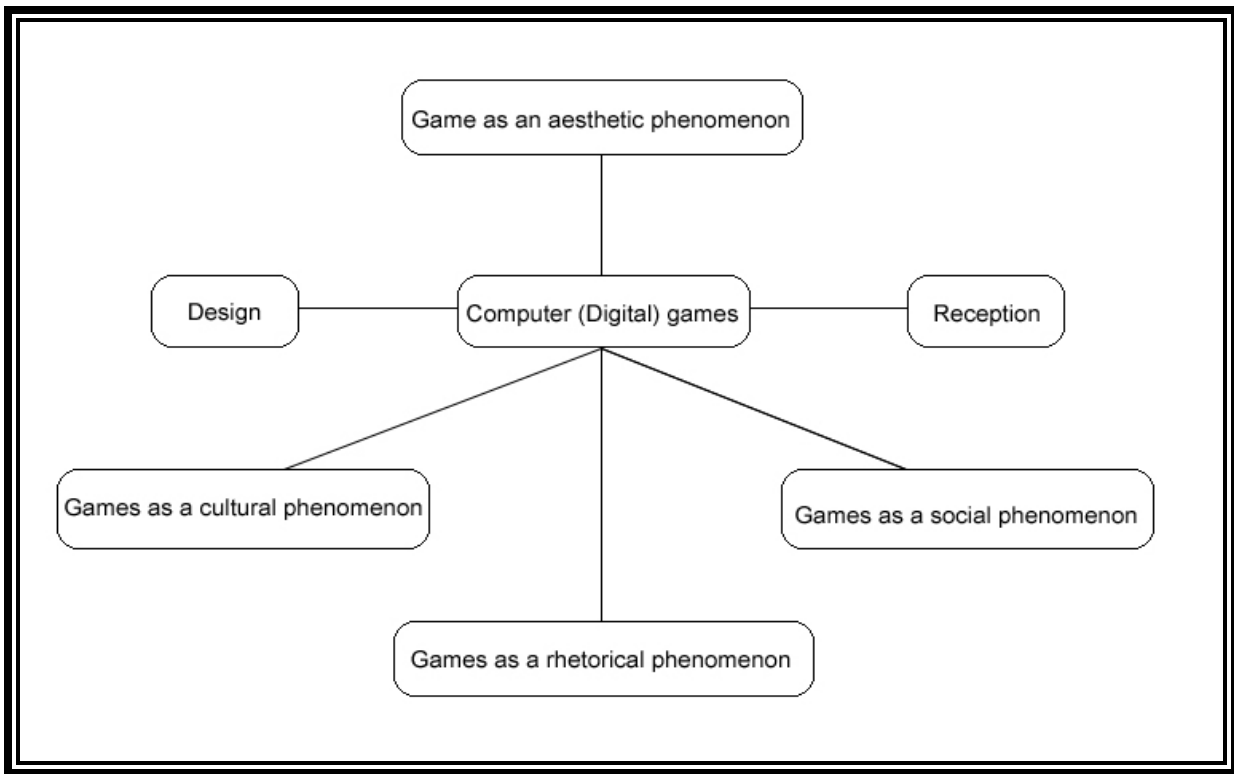


Figure 1.1: Dimensions of Digital Game Studies. (modified from Raessens, Joost, and Jeffrey Goldstein. "Introduction." *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*. Eds. Joost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein. Cambridge, M.A.: The MIT Press, 2005. xi-xvii.)

Therefore, I propose the addition of computer games as a rhetorical phenomenon as shown in the revised figure above (Figure 1.1) to address the critical role of rhetorical theories to better study games as an emerging research domain. I argue, even though other dimensions proposed by Raessens and Goldstein address these important aspects of computer games, computer games should be conceptualized as a rhetorical phenomenon to address the relationships among rhetoric, aesthetic, persuasion (reception), interface design, and social change agents. Playing digital games is a rhetorical act that involves the manipulations of symbols to persuade participants during gameplay. Therefore, the study of digital games as rhetorical acts helps understand the intensive rhetorical manipulations during gameplay.

As Bizzell and Herzberg claim that “the study of rhetoric generated not only an elaborate system for investigating language practices but also a set of far-reaching theoretical questions about the relationship of language to knowledge” (2). If digital games are not treated as a rhetorical phenomenon, it is less likely for game scholars to understand the persuasive practices and expressions that computer games generate. Similar to traditional and classical rhetoric that seeks to delight, entertain, educate, and persuade, the study of digital games and gameplay experiences will enable game scholars to uncover what creates positive gamer experience, which can be used to design better game systems, to understand the aesthetic experience that gamers feel, and to examine the social and cultural consequences associated with digital games and gameplay.

Modified from Raessens’ and Goldstein’s framework, Figure 1.1 includes a new component indicating game studies should examine the rhetorical aspects of digital games. Aesthetic, cultural, social phenomena, design, and reception have long been the important areas in rhetorical study. In “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change,” Ellen Cushman discusses the social aspects of rhetoric in motivating civic participation in communities. Rhetorical scholars (e.g., Barry Brummett and Michael Leff) examine how rhetoric generates knowledge and how knowledge is created. The long-standing tradition of studying rhetoric as how to create and deliver persuasive discourses has been thoroughly studied by contemporary rhetorical scholars (e.g., Ann E. Berthoff; Kenneth Burke; Karen LeFevre). In spite of overlapping topics of interest, I reason, without conceptualizing rhetoric as an important component of contemporary game studies, game scholars are less likely to unveil the richness of computer games as a field of rigorous academic study. Furthermore, emphasizing the study of digital games as a rhetorical phenomenon is critical to establish a clear domain of this emerging field of study.

Past studies of digital games have often centered on the classification and explanation of game genres (Consalvo and Dutton; Frasca; Herz; Kafai; Kerr; Poole; Subrahmanyam and Greenfield). However, normative and descriptive approaches have their limitations. For example, Kerr categorizes

games by examining what characters, plots, and actions are created or what actions, simulations, and strategies are required for gameplay. Other game scholars (e.g., Herz; Kerr; Poole; Lindley) develop similar typologies for analyzing different game genres. These typologies of game genres provide game researchers with useful parameters to compare different games in their analysis. Despite these attempts to categorize computer games, problems and criticism arise because of many difficulties in accurately categorizing games (Kerr). Scholars have nevertheless continued to develop a typology for game genres to guide their study of a variety of digital games.

In order to respond to criticisms, game scholars have introduced elaborate and non-game-related parameters to characterize and categorize games. For example, in 2007, Elverdam and Aarseth develop an elaborate typology (see Figure 1.2 below) as an analytical framework to cover all digital games. The typology develops from time-space, virtual-physical, player composition-relation, struggle-game state parameters to categorize all digital games into eight broad dimensions to characterize digital games. Because a full-length discussion of Elverdam's and Aarseth's typology cannot be justified, I employ some components of Elverdam's and Aarseth's typology to examine *World of Warcraft*, a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) that will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 2. The application of Elverdam and Aarseth's framework enables game researchers to examine the spatial (i.e., virtual vs. physical space), temporal (i.e., external vs. internal time), interpersonal (i.e., player composition and relation), and task-oriented (i.e., struggle and game state) dimensions of digital games. This approach helps researchers to go one step further to mainly compare platform variations in digital game research.

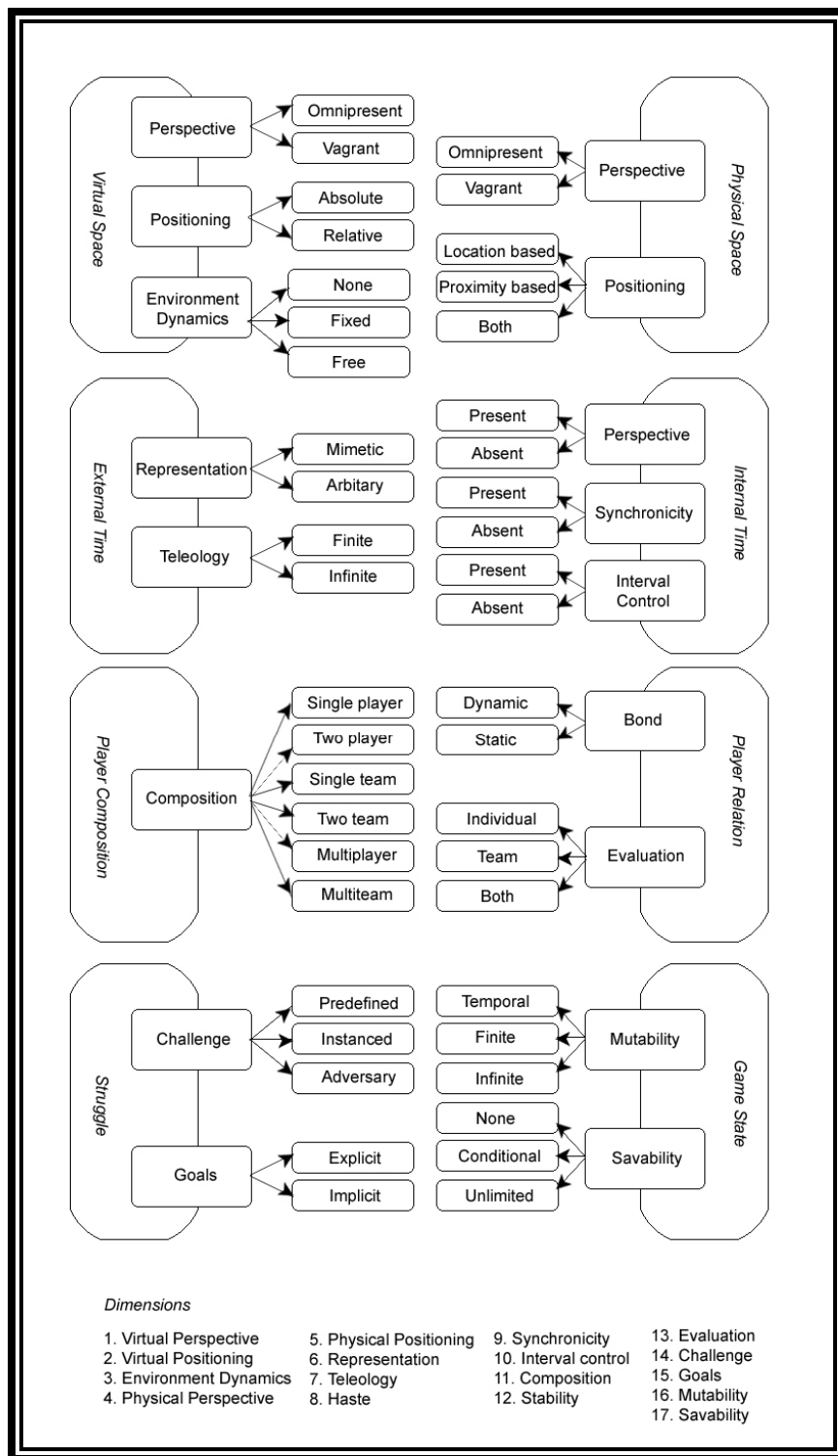


Figure 1.2: Overview of Game Typology Model. (from Elverdam, Christian, and Espen Aarseth. "Game Classification and Game Design: Construction through Critical Analysis." *Games and Culture* 2.1 (2007, January): 3-22, p. 21.)

Among these advances in digital game applications, Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), MMOs, MMOGs have attracted much attention from game researchers (Chuang; Steinkuehler and Williams). In the following section, I will discuss the history of MMORPGs and its salient features. Furthermore, I argue why scholars should examine MMORPGs as an emerging rhetorical domain of study.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAMES (MMORPGS)

MMORPGs refer to any computer network-mediated games where thousands of gamers are role-playing simultaneously in a graphical and 3-D environment (Filiciak; Hussain and Griffiths). Popular MMORPGs include *Ultima Online*, *EverQuest*, *World of Warcraft*, and *Second Life*. With the advent of the Internet, MMORPGs increasingly depend on networking technologies to link global gamers to collaborate with others to complete some tasks. Steinkuehler and Williams define technical and collaborative features of MMORPGs as “graphically two-dimensional (2D) or three-dimensional (3D) videogames played online, allowing individuals, through their self-created digital characters or ‘avatar,’ to interact not only with the gaming software but with other players” (886).

Historically, MMORPGs are evolved from text-based and non-graphical multiuser domains (dungeons, or MUDs) or object-oriented MUDs (or MOOs) popular in the late 1990s (Bartle; Mortensen; Ye and Cheng). By definition, a MUD is “a multi-user domain, multi-user dungeon, or multi-user dimension, all of which are referring to the same thing, an environment where multiple people may be logged on and interacting with one another” (Mortensen). MOOs are developed from MUDs with a distinctive feature to allow users to perform object-oriented programming to alter how the server will interact with players (Bartle). As a more modern and technologically-advanced multi-user game, MMORPGs have been in existence since 1997 when *Ultima Online* was introduced by Electronic Arts (Burrill). The digital game is based on *Ultima*, a game released in 1997. *Ultima Online* allows gamers to choose and develop their own identity in

an immersive medieval world (Burrill). Some contemporary titles of MMORPGs include *Black Thorn* (2006), *Final Fantasy XI Online* (2002), *Lineage II* (2004), *Tales of Arterra Series* (2006), and *World of Warcraft* (2004).

MMORPGs are one of the most interesting innovations in online digital games (Hussain and Griffiths). Unlike earlier games delivered through offline stand-alone consoles and less-than-satisfactory multimedia capacity, networked MMORPGs allow players “to create more than one character (avatar) per server to maximize their gaming pleasure and experience” (Kerr 117). As Kerr points out, the ability to choose a character and construct a gamer’s own identity in virtual space often leads to a very different gameplay experience. Similar enhanced gameplay experiences are often reported for all gamers who play MMORPGs, such as *EverQuest* and *World of Warcraft*. For example, a study by Taylor reports a drastically different gameplay experience in playing *EverQuest* in which players characterize their pleasurable experience as the result of a sophisticated combination of mastery and exploration, team play and identity, and social interaction in the virtual game community.

Among many noteworthy features, role-playing is one distinctive attribute of MMORPGs, the youngest form of role-playing games (Dorman). Role-playing enables gamers to create a fictitious character in the fantasy world of MMORPGs. By choosing a character within the game, gamers around the globe collaborate and interact with each other through their online avatars and identities, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, age, and gender (Hussain and Griffiths). Burrill succinctly describes the process of role-playing and the impact on gamer experience:

With character and behavioral choice permitted, players can perform against assumed essentialisms, creating a rich and dynamic online field of slippery signification, where gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and other categories of identity can be readily altered without the knowledge of other players. (499)

This study does not intend to explore gender and ethnicity representations in games (Cassell and Jenkins). Neither will this study conduct game- by-game analysis of gender and ethnicity stereotyping in videogames (Cassell and Jenkins). Instead, this study takes a holistic angle by examining what gamers will experience during MMORPG gameplay and aims to characterize such experience as a rhetorical phenomenon that demonstrates their unique rhetorical practices and expressions. I argue, unlike the physical world where gamers are categorized on the basis of their demographic attributes, the virtual world created in the MMORPG environment enables gamers to assume any character with adapted online identities. As a result, race, gender, income level, and other demographic attributes can no longer play an essential role in determining how human beings interact with each other and the digital environment. Money for play, equipment, and high-speed Internet often account for gameplay behaviors. Avatars assumed by gamers in MMORPGs enable all players to interact with each other with whatever identities they would prefer.

In addition to role-playing, game scholars have explored the impacts of spatial characteristics on gameplay experiences in digital games (Flynn; Gee; Lowood; Selfe and Selfe; Steinkuehler and Williams; Williams, Ducheneaut, Xiong, Yee, and Nickell). Both MUD and MMORPGs are studied extensively as a social space where gamers meet and interact with each other (Dibbell; Donath; Rheingold; Turkle). Among these studies, one of the most interesting and relevant perspectives is to examine how virtual space in MMORPGs impacts gamer experience. Do interactions of the gamers in virtual space contribute to their enhanced gameplay experiences? How would the role-playing of MMORPGs contribute to the creation of gameplay experiences different from other game genres? Fuller and Jenkins suspect that the ability of the gamers to move through elaborate virtual gaming spaces with assumed avatars has led to a richer experience than what other game genres can offer. MMORPGs create a fantasy virtual space where gamers can interact and role-play. MMORPGs, like the popular

World of Warcraft, are composed of different mythic elements that can contribute to “the unique stylistic milieu that provide a context for gameplaying experience” (Krzywinska 384).

However, if digital games are to be studied as a rhetorical phenomenon, rhetorical scholars need to examine questions pertinent to the justifications of this academic endeavor. Important questions to be asked include: Can the disciplinarity of game studies become an important sub-field of rhetorical studies? Should game rhetorical scholars examine the rhetorical manipulations during gameplay? What will be the role of the audience in the persuasive process in a digital game environment? Given the multimodal interactive discourses in digital games, what types of methods should be employed to examine game rhetorics as a new domain for rhetorical research?

This dissertation proposes gamer interactions and gameplay experiences in an immersive gaming space should become the new domain of game rhetorical study . The study asks and intends to answer the following questions in the chapters below.

Question 1: How do gamers feel about and describe their gameplay experiences?

Question 2: How do gamers express themselves and persuade each other during the gaming sessions?

Question 3: What are the characteristics of these persuasive expressions and practices?

Question 4: What will be the theoretical and methodological implications of studying the rhetorical manipulations of gamers in a digital game environment?

1.4 JUSTIFICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although digital game research has often been marginalized and ignored as a serious academic research because of its content (Bogost; Humphreys), scholars are compelled to examine this emerging field due to the increasing importance of the digital game industry, as well as the exponential growth of their users (Wolf). As a result, in the past decade, scholars from various disciplines have rushed to study

computer games. In addition to these commercial justifications, the popularity of MMORPGs also makes the technology “intensely social” (Humphreys). Role-playing and interactions with other gamers in the virtual space have generated new research topics to examine, such as notions of self, identity, representation, collaboration, and social interaction.

Although scholars have identified potential areas of research in games, many have criticized the lack of theories in digital game study. Most game theories are borrowed from media research, which constitutes “theoretical imperialism” (Mallon and Webb 2009). As a result, Mallon and Webb point out there is a lack of analytical tools, methods, and interpretative approaches that have further hindered the development of game research as a distinctive discipline.

The lack of methodology is another area that concerns many game researchers. Aarseth laments the lack of methodology and theory of game studies and notes that games “are analyzed willy-nilly, with tools that happen to be at hand, such as film theory or narratology” (1). Kücklich also criticizes narratological theoretical approaches to study games by stating that these approaches have “failed to yield valid results because they could not ‘read’ the games they were studying. Literary scholars were simply too absorbed in these fantastic worlds to pay attention to the rules governing that (game) universe” (1). In responses to these criticisms and laments as to what will guide researchers to study digital games, Steinkuehler argues the importance of studying games:

Games are an extremely valuable context for the study of cognition as inter(action) in the social and material world. They provide a representational trace of both individual and collective activity and how it changes over time, enabling the researcher to unpack the bidirectional influence of self and society. As both designed object and emergent culture, g/Games (a) consist of overlapping well-defined problems enveloped in ill-defined problems that render their solutions meaningful. (97)

Because of games constantly change due to the interactions and manipulations of players using symbols to persuade and convince other players, the rhetorical study of digital games will help advance game theory by examining the persuasive manipulations during gameplay. In McAllister's *Game Work: Language, Power, and Computer Game Culture*, he justifies why digital games can be studied from a rhetorical approach and what analytical units should be examined to study digital games:

Computer games are comprised of rhetorical events that work to make meanings in players. These rhetorical events are constructed primarily out of: (a) developers' and marketers' idiosyncratic, homological, and inclusive ideologies, and (b) players' (or more generally experiencers') interactions with the systems put in place by the developers, which are also influenced by their own idiosyncratic, homological, and inclusive ideologies. The set of ideologically determined meaning-making rhetorical events that comprise a computer game is designed to transform players in some way. Since all rhetorical events take place within the context of the dialectic, where various kinds of struggle are always being engaged, the rhetorical events of any given computer game are also always complicit in those dialectical struggles. Since dialectical struggles are never wholly discrete, any given computer game-related rhetorical event is always connected to other rhetorical events and struggles that are not game-related. (31-32)

To summarize, McAllister's discussion above provides justifications for why a rhetorical approach to study digital games is appropriate because the interactions between gamers and game designers are a dialectical process in which meanings are created, negotiated, and situated in the digital environment.

The emergence of MMORPGs has also created a new situation where "rhetorical events" not only occur between game designers and gamers, but among gamers themselves when they form a team to complete a raid or a mission. These interwoven "rhetorical events" continuously "write" or "rewrite"

game designer's rhetoric as a result of intense gamer interactions during gameplay. Therefore, the emergence of MMORPGs is important to game scholars because of the intense gameplay experiences felt by gamers in such an immersive environment, characterized by constant interactions with other gamers, with the game design elements, and with the overall socio-cultural milieu created in MMORPGs. Such intensive multimodal engagements with digital games are significant at individual, social, economic and political levels (Yee). Taylor contends persuasively, "The growing phenomenon of MMORPGs presents a fascinating opportunity to look at the ways game space becomes interwoven with online community and role playing" (21). MMORPGs are not only an innovative gaming platform that enables gamers to role-play and interact with other players around the world, but also offer a social space in which interactions among gamers are made possible to simulate a rhetorical situation where persuasion is facilitated.

Furthermore, incessant persuasive expressions and practices are required if MMORPG gamers want to succeed in a team-based raid or mission. Without such intense and engaging online and synchronous collaboration among game participants, the experience of playing MMORPGs will be similar to playing a stand-alone or off-line digital game. The process of persuasion is contingent on how gamers interact with the game they are playing as well as other gamers inside the gaming space. Persuasive expressions and practices are essential for gamers to collaborate with each other in a raid or a mission. Without such close cooperation, MMORPG players are less likely to create a synergy critical to the success of their raid or mission. To use Elverdam and Aarseth's framework, MMORPGs constitute a complex gameplay experience created by the spatial, temporal, interpersonal, and task-oriented dimensions in games. The teamwork is often performed through the use of avatars interacting with numerous in-game design elements. The use of avatars as a "collaborative fiction" (to use Mark Stephen Meadows' term) where rhetors and audiences co-generate their gameplay experiences in gaming sessions demands new perspectives in studying digital games.

My study will focus on the study of gameplay experiences with digital games as a rhetorical phenomenon. My approach will go beyond the study of interactive narratives and texts created in digital games. This approach also goes beyond structural, design, and aesthetic approaches as presented in the conceptualization of game studies (as in Figure 1.1) (Raessens and Goldstein). Instead of studying digital games by examining the social engagements of the gamers (Humphreys), I emphasize the hybrid interactive rhetorical engagements by players who take part in the interactions in the digital game space. Specifically, I intend to argue the hybrid interactive rhetorical engagements experienced by the gamers demonstrate both the causes and outcomes of their persuasive expressions and practices. I further reason by closely examining these rhetorical expressions and practices, digital game scholars will be able to understand the emerging applications of digital games as “persuasive tools” (Bogost).

A more comprehensive definition and discussion of *hybrid interactive rhetorical engagements* (H.I.R.E.) will be provided later in this chapter. However, modified the concept of social engagement (Humphreys), hybrid interactive rhetorical engagements can be defined as what gamers will experience and feel from a complex persuasive interplay of textual, audio, visual, and kinetic rhetorical elements when playing digital games. Rhetorical engagements of the gamers are also derived from a series of rhetorical events made possible by the interactivity, immersion, interconnectivity, and role-playing functions abundant in MMORPGs. Furthermore, engagements with the digital game and other gamers are also the results of continuous persuasive exchanges during gameplay.

The approach employed in this dissertation is both conceptual and methodological, attempting to understand digital games and gamer experience. I want to situate my study within the rhetorical tradition to examine various rhetorical elements (e.g., audio, visual, textual, and kinetic) and their influence in entertaining, educating, informing, and persuading gamers. I will also study the fluidity of persuasive roles among game designers (rhetors) and gamers (audiences) in creating persuasive expressions and practices in the gaming space where rhetorical actions and events are situated.

This dissertation also aims to better understand digital games as an emerging domain for rhetorical research and contribute to the expansion of research areas for rhetorical theories. For example, through her study of interactive narratives Warnick criticizes the limitation and insufficiency of past rhetorical theories in studying digital games. She points out, “[T]raditional rhetoric focused on the author as source and persuasion as the aim of communication, or it followed the Ramistic tradition in emphasizing the figures and tropes of style. Neither of the above approaches seemed suited to analyze the disorganized, open texts found in cyberspace” (60). Because, rhetorically, the roles of game designers (rhetors) and gamers (audiences) are fluid and interchangeable in a rhetorical manipulation; this poses challenges to the underlying assumptions of many traditional rhetorical theories that assume a more static role of rhetors and audiences. Therefore, it is important to examine if existing rhetorical theories are capable of analyzing these hybrid interactive rhetorical engagements in response to recent digital game development.

1.5 HYBRID INTERACTIVE RHETORICAL ENGAGEMENT IN DIGITAL GAMES

Recent scholarship in game studies has begun to examine the experiential aspect of digital games and gameplay (Banks; Consalvo; Murray). Consalvo argues games “are not simply a text to be read, but an experience to be had, and so we must also consider the performative level of gameplay” (173). Rhetorically, playing digital games can be equated with involvement in creation, delivery, and comprehension of symbolic acts (Klabbers), in which gamers try to make sense of symbols, icons, characters, scenes created by game designers, but at the same time they also want to understand what other gamers say and act. To explain gameplay experiences further, I reason when gamers enter into a digital game by adapting themselves to structural and aesthetic design elements within the game, they learn the narratives from game designers, as well as other gamers, and transform and construct their own identities

through the adoption of online avatars. Such experience is what Klabbers characterizes as, “engaging in embodied experience” (1).

In examining digital games in general and MMORPGs in particular, rhetorical scholars can conceptualize gamer interactions in digital games as an object that can be studied and analyzed to develop a game rhetorical theory. What characteristics do these interactions take? How can rhetorical scholars approach the dynamic, intensive, and non-linear interactions that gamers have experienced? Most importantly, how would this encompassing analysis of digital games shed light on how to better understand digital games as a rhetorical phenomenon? My position in studying MMORPGs focuses both on the rhetorical events of how gamers interact and the subsequent gameplay experiences they feel during the intense, immersive, and interactive gameplay events. Most importantly, this dissertation examines persuasive rhetorical expressions and practices that lead to the intensive and multimodal rhetorical engagements experienced by the gamers.

In this dissertation, I have created a term--*Hybrid Interactive Rhetorical Engagement* (henceforth, H.I.R.E.)-- to examine gameplay experiences when gamers take part in any digital game. The conceptualization of H.I.R.E. is discussed below. “Hybrid” refers to the multimedia capacities which advanced game technologies can provide by offering their users audio, visual, textual, kinetic elements during gameplay. In particular, in MMORPGs, gamers constantly exchange textual and audio messages to collaborate on completing their tasks during gameplay (Juul; Vorderer and Bryant). Visual elements are also enriched with broadband connection and blue-ray PS3 game devices. Devices such as mouse, joystick, and even virtual reality glove enable gamers to physically move their avatars in the virtual gaming environment. Real-time voice chat/communication is also possible through utilities such as *Ventrilo*, *MorphVox*, and *Xfire*. These technological advancements provide players enriched and intensive gameplay experiences.

Another important aspect of H.I.R.E. is interactivity that will be discussed below. Interactivity is another key attribute of digital games and is viewed as an important part of the engagement experience encountered by the gamers (O'Brien and Toms). Although interactivity is a term with several different meanings (Kiouisis), in the context of digital games, it refers to the process that a gamer can modify, based on the context and characters involved, the state and happening in a digital game by some action through an interface (Grodal). Interactivity embedded in digital game devices and gaming environments allow gamers to conduct real-time communication, modify gaming spaces, and navigate the digital game environment (Ryan). For example, a gamer can explore and respond to the gaming environment by interacting with the game interface, type in chats to converse with other gamers, and enjoy the pleasure of terminating an enemy by similar motor actions.

Engagement with digital games is both the reason and the result that gamers want to play MMORPGs. Therefore, the level of engagement that gamers can experience in these environments cannot be understated because it constitutes an important part of their rhetorical experience. Engagement and immersion are two concepts that are brought up when describing digital game environments and gamer experience with these games (Douglas and Hargadon; O'Brien and Toms; Vitanza). For example, many game researchers have often characterized a gaming environment as engaging (Humphreys; Pickering), and immersive (Ryan; Vintanza). For example, Sony's *EverQuest* was also called "EverCrack" in gaming community because of its addictive qualities (Burrill). Digital game designers and publishers usually want to create an engaging experience, so gamers will keep coming back. Steinkuehler argues:

Games are *designed experiences* (Squire), and as such, their study requires an understanding of the full range of human practices through which players actively inhabit those worlds of rules and texts and render them meaningful. (97)

Despite several initial approaches to characterizing and conceptualizing gamer interactions in a digital game environment, the term, "engagement," is more appropriate and comprehensive in

describing the process and the result of gamer experience in MMORPGs. Engagement is a psychological concept that refers to how and whether gamers are satisfied with their gameplay experiences and how immersed they feel in the experience (O'Brien and Toms). As such, rhetorical engagement can be defined as the interpretive, sympathetic, and interactive engagement with all game design elements that gamers are exposed to that have the purposes of educating, informing, entertaining, and persuading them (Tavinor). Furthermore, the concept can be extended to examine interactive rhetorical engagements with other gamers during gameplay. Such an experience can be said to be similar to hearing a speech, reading a novel, or watching a movie that can persuade, excite, or inspire the audience. Unlike the latter conventional rhetorical discourses, gamers (in particular those in MMORPGs) can take the role of the characters and have a more embodied hybrid interactive rhetorical experience. In other words, MMORPGs enable gamers to become an active rhetor to create rhetorical discourses to persuade other gamers to follow a strategy, to create plots unique to each gameplay session, and to experience the twists and turns as gamers co-write an adventure and fantasy novel similar to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

H.I.R.E. can be used to describe gamer experience when playing MMORPGs. The experience is designed and predetermined by MMORPG game developers (Humphreys). Meanings are to be created by all game participants during gameplay, so gamers do not feel a complete waste of their time. In her article, "Immersion, Engagement, and Presence: A Method for Analyzing 3-D Video Games," McMahan argues gamers often feel immersed when they play digital games because they are "caught up in the world of the game's story (the diegetic level)...[and they show] love of the game and the strategy that goes into it (the nondiegetic level)" (68). Furthermore, she also uses Jeremy Bentham's concept of "deep play" to refer to the situation when "a player reaches a level of near-obsessiveness" (McMahan 69). "Deep play" refers to "a player accessing/accumulating layers of meaning that have strategic value" and when a gamer is knowledgeable about "all the monsters and the different schools of magic"

(McMahan 69). A sense of “deep play” during a gaming session may be a result of engagement and immersion felt by many gamers.

In the previous sections, I focus on the rhetorical nature of H.I.R.E. during gameplay. The new phenomenon requires rhetorical scholars to study persuasive manipulations when playing MMORPGs. Furthermore, because the study of H.I.R.E. investigates MMORPG gamer experience beyond the persuasive intents of game designers (rhetors), the concept of H.I.R.E. aims to capture the multiplicity of gameplay experiences by examining the role of participating gamers (audiences) and their fluid role as rhetors during gameplay. In the following chapter, I provide an overview of *World of Warcraft* game to describe its abundant rhetorical manipulations.

Chapter 2: World of Warcraft Game Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of one of the most popular MMORPGs, *World of Warcraft*, and discuss the background of the game and its relationship to the concept of *Hybrid Interactive Rhetorical Engagement* (henceforth, H.I.R.E.). *World of Warcraft* is a commercial, graphically rich and advanced game that simulates a three-dimensional virtual world where gamers can create avatars with humanoid bodies to interact with other players (Mortensen). In “WoW is a New MUD,” Mortensen claims using a combination of graphic interfaces, mouse, keypad, keyboard, commands and short-cuts created by game designers and developers, *World of Warcraft* enables its players to interact with a variety of play styles, “both [in] a more social version and a more competitive version, and also accommodates these through different servers, dedicated to either role-play (RP), PvP, or PvE” (Mortensen 398). *World of Warcraft* is also known as *WoW* among online gaming communities, and I will refer to it as *WoW* throughout the remainder of the dissertation. In this chapter, I discuss the background of *WoW*, its game features which lead to an engaging and immersive experience, and implications for rhetorical theory and game rhetorical study.

2.1 BACKGROUND OF *WORLD OF WARCRAFT* GAME

Right after its first launch by Blizzard Entertainment in November 2004, *WoW* has surpassed other MMORPGs in the digital game market (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore). In 2005, *WoW* was one of the most popular and successful massively multiplayer role-playing games, with more than 6 million subscribers in the world (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore). According to a Blizzard Entertainment press release on July 24, 2007, over 9 million subscribers are playing *WoW*. This shows a dramatic increase of 3 million subscribers within 3 years. The rapid diffusion of *WoW* within a very short period of time shows people are attracted to it for varying reasons discussed below.

First, *WoW* players seek instant gratification from the immersion and engagement during gameplay (Krzywinska). Gamers often become addicted due to the highly immersive and engaging gameplay experiences. Colby and Colby's observations may help explain why *WoW* is immersive and engaging. They argue *WoW* has an active community outside the gaming space where gamers can interact with each other regularly. Moreover, Colby and Colby explain *WoW* is "a social game that requires player negotiation and cooperation" (307), resulting in intensive and intimate social relation-building among gamers.

Second, *WoW* embodies a mythical and imaginary gaming space where players work together. When playing *WoW*, gamers create the mythical narratives and characters in the gaming environment. Gamers will also assume a mythical avatar to complete a mission or raid contextualized in the fictitious historical landscape. In "Blood Scythes, Festivals, Quests, and Backstories: World Creation and Rhetorics of Myth in World of Warcraft," Krzywinska claims, "[o]ne of the pleasures of playing in the "World" of Warcraft is becoming part of its pervasive mythology" (383). Seay, Jerome, Lee, and Kraut argue this type of game can create an opportunity for players to escape from their daily lives. Other scholars have explored game design features such as characters, themes, stories, and setting to account for the success of *WoW* (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore). They argue like other MMORPGs, *WoW* is based on a medieval imagined universe where gamers select their character avatar and interact with other gamers to complete their tasks (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore). In the same article, Krzywinska observes, like *EverQuest* and *EverQuest II*, *WoW* offers "its players ... fantasy to create a virtual world that offers players the opportunity to inhabit such worlds within which to play and interact with others in the guise of heroic adventurers" (383).

In summary, *WoW* is designed to create a gaming space where gamers can collaborate and negotiate with other players to co-create an immersive and engaging gameplay experience in a mythical world with chosen identities. To accomplish these objectives, the design of *WoW* is to enable gamers to interact with other players using avatars, metaphors, concepts, and tools from the virtual medieval period. What is created in the virtual world is equivalent to the concept of game as “designed experience” (Squire) in which a wide range of human practices is conducted by gamers to “actively inhabit those worlds of rules and texts and render them meaningful” (Steinkuehler 200). *WoW* gamers are required to select or create their own avatar characters designed by game developers. Interactions among gamers, though dependent on tasks, missions, and circumstances, are still scripted and pre-determined. As demonstrated in Figure 2.1,



Figure 2.1: Level 30 Warhorse: *Paladin Warhorse*.

(Source:<http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/info/basics/mounts/paladin/ss1.jpg>)



Figure 2.2: Two Players Riding Their Mounts.

(Source:<http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/screenshots/images/basics/mounts/ss0009.jpg>)

the landscape where *WoW* is situated is a medieval setting where game designers include horse-riding as a

way of transportation in this created virtual world. Furthermore, the avatar in Figure 2.1 resembles a medieval fighter in front of a medieval building. Similarly, in Figure 2.2, the medieval themes are repeatedly used to create the historical setting in which *WoW* will be played.

Playing *WoW* involves the process of selecting an avatar character to represent players as their virtual identity in the gaming space, so multimodal rhetorical discourses can be generated. *WoW* gamers first select a character from one of the opposing factions of *Horde* and *Alliance*. Although a detailed discussion of how avatar characters are selected or created is not possible, the participation in *WoW* usually begins by selecting or creating one of the characters below from the factions and races. The *Horde* race has the six races to choose from: *Orc*, *Tauren*, *Troll*, *Forsaken*, *Blood Elf*, *Goblin*, while the *Alliance* race has another six races to choose from: *Dwarf*, *Gnome*, *Human*, *Night Elf*, *Draenei*, and *Worgen*. Furthermore, there are ten classes in total and each class belongs to certain races (World of Warcraft Cataclysm <http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/info/classes/index.html>). Refer to Table 2.1 for images of these characters.

Table 2.1: Images of Different Races in WoW.

(Source: <http://us.battle.net/wow/en/game/race/>)

Alliance	Images	Horde	Images
<i>Dwarf</i>		<i>Orc</i>	
<i>Gnome</i>		<i>Tauren</i>	
<i>Human</i>		<i>Troll</i>	
<i>Night Elf</i>		<i>Forsaken</i>	
<i>Draenei</i>		<i>Blood Elf</i>	
<i>Worgen</i>		<i>Goblin</i>	

For example, *Hunters* are described in the *WoW Game Manual* as “a unique class ... because it is primarily a ranged attacker... To support the *Hunter’s* ranged attacks, this class has two main advantages: a loyal pet and a wide array of movement-restricting spells” (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004-2007, 84). The *Hunter* class (Figure 2.3) is available for *Night Elves*, *Dwarves*, *Orcs*, *Tauren*, *Trolls*, *Blood Elves*, *Draenei*, *Humans*, *Worgen*, *Goblins*, and *Forsaken*.

Other classes are designed for certain races as well. For



Figure 2.3: The *Hunter* Class.

(Source: <http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/info/classes/hunter/>)

with a variety of abilities, are

offered to: *Night Elves*, *Tauren*, *Worgen*, and *Trolls*. The following table shows a total of 182 in-game characters are made available to *WoW* gamers (Table 2.2). As a result, gameplay experiences can be greatly enriched by the large amount of game characters to choose from.

Table 2.2: A Total of 182 In-Game Character Possibilities.

(91 Race and Classes Combinations * 2 Genders)

Races Classes	<i>Draenei</i>	<i>Dwarves</i>	<i>Gnomes</i>	<i>Humans</i>	<i>Night Elves</i>	<i>Worgen</i>	<i>Blood Elves</i>	<i>Goblins</i>	<i>Orcs</i>	<i>Tauren</i>	<i>Trolls</i>	<i>Forsaken</i>
<i>Death Knights</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<i>Druids</i>					√	√				√	√	
<i>Hunters</i>	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<i>Mages</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
<i>Paladins</i>	√	√		√			√			√		
<i>Priests</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√
<i>Rogues</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
<i>Shaman</i>	√	√						√	√	√	√	
<i>Warlocks</i>		√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√
<i>Warriors</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

The large number of in-game character possibilities, combined with mythical and historical elements in *WoW* enables different gamers to seek a new kind of gameplay experience, different from traditional off-line or non-MMORPGs. After gamers choose their own avatars from different factions or races, these avatars with in-game designed capabilities allow gamers to engage with other players to accomplish a raid. As an objective-based strategy game, *WoW* players encounter similar rhetorical situations in which they need to persuade other players, so that resources can be put together and actions can be coordinated to achieve intended objectives (Colby and Colby). The multi-dimensional nature of playing *WoW*, as social, objective-based, and communal (Colby and Colby), will lead to a highly engaging interactive gameplay experience for all *WoW* players when competitive and collaboration increase gamer enjoyment (Ducheneaut and Moore).

2.2 HYBRID INTERACTIVE RHETORICAL ENGAGEMENT IN *WORLD OF WARcraft*

Gamer experience in *WoW* begins by creating or selecting an alter ego from nine characters and eight race classes (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore). The number of classes and races are later expanded to 10 for each category (Table 2.1). After players select their characters to reflect their own ego, they will fight with each other in a fantasy world, *Azeroth*, inspired from authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore). Once gamers select their egos and alter egos, the next step is immersing them into the game, where they begin the interactive experience. *WoW* players can express their personal feelings and build their competence through the construction and accomplishment of their characters (Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler). These in-game characters are indispensable representations to embody *WoW* players to accumulate knowledge, skills, reputation, and resources for their characters (Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler). They are instrumental for *WoW* players to interact with other players socially (Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler). Researchers have argued MMORPGs players seem to generate high emotional involvement, strong social bonds and relationships, and multifaceted social interactions (Beavis; Turkle; Yee).

Game scholars claim playing the *WoW* is an almost hypnotic and addictive experience. For example, Mortensen says it is “overwhelming” (405), which means gamers have expected to move their characters “around quickly, gauge the distance to nearby dangers, and read and reply to written messages from other players, using several features of your keyboard and your mouse/joystick or whatever input device is your favorite. It encourages and demands multitasking to be played skillfully and well” (Mortensen 404-409). Castronova attributes gamer experience to rules and rewards that are capable of shaping their behavior. Seeking to advance their avatars to the next levels, *WoW* gamers will become emotionally committed and goal-driven (at both individual and community levels) to tackle a long sequence of challenges (Castronova). In sum, the experience is interactive and engaging.

Playing *WoW* engages participants on several levels to create H.I.R.E during gameplay. First, the nature of MMORPG gameplay experiences is said to be “intensively engaging” and “intensively social” (Colby and Colby; Humphreys). By “intensively engaging,” Humphreys refers to the immersive experience of players at both diegetic and non-diegetic levels. To borrow from McMahan, gameplay experiences are immersive because gamers are “caught up in the world of the game’s story (the diegetic level)....[and they show] love of the game and the strategy that goes into it (the nondiegetic level)” (68). It provides a “deep play” experience.

Second, by “intensively social,” both Humphreys and Mortensen refer to interpersonal and group experience encountered by *WoW* players. Colby and Colby point out *WoW* is a social game, meaning gamers need to constantly negotiate and collaborate to fight off challenges. Individual players need to rely on other players’ characters to train, obtain information and resources, and to form group and intergroup cooperation (Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler). In-game characters of the players, as embodiments of their self-identity, enable them to experience intense social interactions with other players (Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler). The side effects of such intensively social experiences often lead many gamers to become addicted to the game because it creates social or pseudo-social interactions with other gamers online. For example, role-playing is one distinctive feature that gives MMORPGs its name and generates a high level of engagement among gamers. Gamers can select a character to represent their online identities when participating in *WoW*. Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler claim that many players end up feeling psychologically attached to their in-game characters, and consequently keeping the same ones for months or years.

Third, *WoW* players are also capable of expanding their social networks outside and inside the gaming space through the formation of guilds (Chen, Sun, and Hsieh; Jakobson and Taylor; Taylor). Although role-playing is an important feature of *WoW*, one of the most attractive features of *WoW* is its ability to form guilds that make it possible to interact with other gamers around the world through the

connection of the Internet. Guilds refer to “formal player organizations” that allow *WoW* players to act together to accomplish joint missions (Chen, Sun, and Hsieh 293). Guild activity and structure are also viewed as representative of gamer’s social networks and online interactions (Chen, Sun, and Hsieh). The selection of a faction can have great influence on gamer experience (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore). Within guilds, *WoW* gamers often obtain strategic, psychological, social, and emotional support to enhance their gameplay experiences (Taylor; Williams, Caplan, and Xiong). When *WoW* players begin a gaming session, gamers can join a guild which is “a more permanent form of association than the temporary quest groups” (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore 284). After joining a guild, guild members can then assume a guild identity by showing a “guild tag” below their name and wearing a custom “tabard” (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore). With guild membership, gamers also access a private group chat channel exclusively for the members in the same guild (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore). With the support of other guild members, *WoW* players are not only playing a highly immersive and engaging role-playing game, but their gameplay experiences are also enriched by multimodal textual, audio, video, kinetic interactivities and construction of social and communal relationships with other gamers. Such a unique gameplay experience will lead to an intense level of H.I.R.E.

In the discussion below, I aim to expand upon the relationship between gaming mechanics of *WoW* and the rhetorical nature of H.I.R.E. First, I argue that the selection and the creation of in-game character avatars are rhetorical because gamers often identify with the characters they select to interact with other players (to use Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification). The selection of characters often represents how gamers would like to represent themselves in *WoW* (Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler). The purposeful selection of a virtual representation in *WoW* can be perceived as persuasive expressions employed by gamers to represent themselves during gameplay. Although the anonymous online environment allows gamers to assume multiple identities of their selection, *WoW* gamers are likely to adopt identities that are “an amalgamation of their actual and ideal selves” (Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler

531). The process that gamers decide how to represent selves in *WoW*, as well as identification with their own and other players' characters is significant in rhetorical theory. To further elaborate Burke's concept of identification in *The Rhetoric of Motives*, being able to identify with another person or character is critical to persuade another person successfully. By nature, the selection is similar to any rhetorical practices that rhetors use to persuade their audiences. As Burke argues, persuasion is possible only when a person can identify with the audience. As Burke says in *The Rhetoric of Motives*, "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (55). Because many *WoW* activities involve collaboration among gamers to work in guilds to accomplish common missions, gaming sessions are similar to rhetorical situations where gamers act like rhetors and audiences to persuade each other by means of different persuasive expressions and practices during gameplay.

Second, I reason *WoW* provides an excellent opportunity for rhetorical scholars to examine a new rhetorical domain that addresses the roles of rhetors and audiences, the engaging and immersive rhetorical experience shared by both, and persuasive outcomes of such online interactions in an emergent rhetorical situation (i.e., *WoW* gaming space). Bitzer defines a rhetorical situation as "the context in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourses" (1). The proposition of this concept leads rhetorical scholars to examine the situation that invites rhetors to create discourses (Bitzer). Playing *WoW* resembles a rhetorical situation where gamers create multimodal rhetorical discourses through their in-game characters and activities. Consequently, a highly intensive rhetorical experience is created for *WoW* gamers because of these online interactions. Krzywinska posits *WoW* has "a structural function; [it] play[s] a role in shaping the experience of the game world and its temporal condition; and [is] also apparent in the registers of style, resonance, and rhetoric. Each of these contributes to the high fantasy ambience of the game and provide in different ways the means of locating players meaningfully in the game world" (384). Krzywinska's arguments point out the unique characteristics of *WoW*

rhetorical situation and the subsequent rhetorical discourses created in *WoW*. The designed gaming mechanics enable *WoW* gamers to interact with other players in a scripted manner. The intensive nature of gameplay forces all players to concentrate on and engage with the game. Rhetorical discourses created during gaming activities are objective-oriented, social, and aim to accomplish important goals among gaming communities (Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler).

Third, I argue that *WoW* also offers a particularly useful context for examining how H.I.R.E. is created, maintained, and developed among the *WoW* gaming community as a result of the gaming mechanics by game designers. For example, *WoW* uses numerous mythic forms, structure, and content, either visual, textual, audio, or a combination of these, to construct a fantasy world where gamers are immersed in the gaming environment (Krzywinska). Krzywinska's conceptualization of gamer experience in *WoW* succinctly makes the connection among gamer experience, rhetorical theories, and H.I.R.E. Gamer engagement with *WoW* is also attributed to the participation of other players (Williams, Caplan, and Xiong). Gamers create their own characters in the *WoW* gaming space whether other players also create their characters to interact with players around the world (Williams, Caplan, and Xiong). *WoW* participants use a variety of multimodal rhetorical discourses to persuade each other and accomplish their goals. H.I.R.E. is created as a result of designed gaming mechanics and participants' engagement with the game. As such, H.I.R.E. can be viewed as the ultimate persuasive rhetorical expressions and practices that gamers in *WoW* use to persuade other gamers. In addition to functioning as a rhetorical practice, H.I.R.E. is also maintained and developed with the growth of individual players' characters when advancing through the hierarchy, as well as the number of guild members.

I will use several screen-captured gameplay interactions to demonstrate how the selection and creation of character avatars influence H.I.R.E. of *WoW* gamers. There are several means by which gamers interact with each other in *WoW*. These include the selection of in-game characters, modality of

rhetorical discourses, and the interaction of guild members. The following discussion provides examples of the process.

First, the categorization of the character class is important because the discussion shows how gamers not only select but also create their in-game character avatars. For example, *Orcs* are designed as green-skinned characters. *Orcs* are

considered to be one of the most prolific races in the land of *Azeroth* (WoWwiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Orc>). The background and history of a character is important for gamers when selecting which character they would like to represent themselves in *WoW*. For example, the

characters of *Orcs* are brought to *Azeroth* through a gateway, called *Dark Portal*, to fight with human beings for their own

survival and because of the influence of *Burning Legion* that refers to “a vast, innumerable army of demons, infernals, and corrupted races who seek to destroy any trace of order in the Universe” (WoWwiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Burning_Legion). Gamer experience is co-created by their interaction with the in-game characters, the game environment, and other gamers of the same or different guilds. For example, a gamer can customize the look of an *Orc* to equip the character with a new look, weapon, and outfit.

Second, as discussed in Chapter 1, H.I.R.E. refers to a state of intensive and interactive gameplay experiences when interacting with other gamers in the *WoW* context. Their gameplay experiences are enhanced by the abundance of visual, audio, textual, and kinetic interactivity as well as immersive interactions with other gamers.



Figure 2.4: Using Talent Points to Customize an *Orc Warrior* Character.

(Source:<http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/info/basics/characters.html>)

WoW is a “designed experience” for gamers (Steinkuehler 200). For example, *WoW* combines both history and myth to create “mythic structures, forms and rhetorics” to create a coherent world that relies heavily on “mythic structures, references, and resonances” (Krzywinska 383). As such, the *WoW* gaming environment is equivalent to a virtual rhetorical situation that invites rhetorical discourses from all gamers. H.I.R.E. is created, maintained, and developed when all gamers take part in responding to the rhetorical situation:

[*WoW*] is made up of “an assemblage of different—fictional—races and cultures; each has its own fictohistorical background (within which a variety of secondary myths and legends are found). As with the real world, particular myths inform the different worldviews of inhabitants, and they arise out of the putative historical experiences of each “race.” These have a profound effect on gameplay, the interpellation of the player into the game world, and the way players are regarded by others ... as a form of intertextual resonance, its mythology furnishes the game with a “thickness” of meaning that promotes, for players, a sense of mythological being as well as encouraging an in-depth textual engagement. (Krzywinska 383)

Krzywinska thoroughly describes how the mythical elements in *WoW* contribute to different gameplay experiences. The rich history of in-game characters enables *WoW* gamers to be immersed in a historical and fictional situation where they select avatars best embodied to their actual identity. Discourses and meanings are created through their participation in the pursuit for treasure and to conquer a sequence of challenges. Engagements with the gaming environment also are increased with pseudo-social interactions with other gamers in the community, resulting in addictive and immersive gameplay experiences encountered by many *WoW* players.

Third, interacting with aesthetic and design elements in the virtual environment constitutes part of H.I.R.E. experienced by the gamers. When gamers log in to *WoW* and begin their quest in *Azeroth*, characterized by a very detailed 3-dimension environment (Duchenaute, Yee, Nichell, and Moore),

immediately they are immersed in this medieval fantasy world. Gamers can either act alone or form a team to fight and kill fierce creatures and monsters when exploring the vast virtual landmass in two continents (i.e., *Azeroth* and *Kalimdor*) (Duchenaute, Yee, Nichell, and Moore).

Fourth, there is an array of mechanisms allowing identity and interactivity available to *WoW* gamers when interacting with each other. For example, under the disguise of their online identities (avatars), players can communicate with other gamers through a variety of channels (Mortensen). Both written and spoken languages are now made available to gamers thanks to the advances of networking technologies. Gamers can now communicate freely as Mortensen vividly describes below:

Communication in-game between players happens in writing through several different channels: say, yell, tell, whisper, world channel, guild channels, and other channels defined by the Game Masters or developers. Say is heard/read in the same area/room as the character speaking, and the other channels have different range. There is also a system for players to send each other “letters,” digitalized simulations of snail mail. (402-404)

How will multimodal interactivities contribute to the generation, maintenance, and enjoyment of H.I.R.E. among *WoW* gamers? Will different modality of interactivity lead to varying levels of H.I.R.E.? Past literature on computer-mediated communication has found out that compared with texts, audio/voice chats tend to create a communication situation more akin to a face-to-face situation (Williams, Capalan, and Xiong). Other theories (such as media richness theory) seem to support a positive relationship between the richness of medium information and relationship-building. Because the construction of social relationship among guild members in *WoW* is an important part of gamer experience, it can be assumed that multimodal interactivities commonly found in *WoW* will contribute to H.I.R.E.

The screen-captured gameplay images (Figures 2.5 and 2.6) below provide some support for the statement above. The figures show the advanced design features which enable *WoW* players to see who is playing, their characters, group membership and expertise levels. As demonstrated in the gaming sessions, gamers can “talk” to each other by typing conversation. Their “conversation” is conducted in textual format. With advances of computer and networking technologies, *WoW* is capable of voice/audio conversation among players if they desire. Built-in audio files and *emotes* enable gamers to express their feelings and thoughts. At this stage, video is not part of the *WoW* gameplay experiences yet.



Figure 2.5: Showing Players' Profiles from the Same Raid.

(Source:<http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/info/basics/images/raidgroups/ss1.jpg>)



Figure 2.6: Talking to a NPC Fishing Trainer through Text Messages.

(Source:<http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/info/professions/fishing.html>)

Emoticons by gamers and game designers are created to imitate standard social actions to enrich gamer's identification and interactive experience. Gamers can greet, say goodbye, dance, smile, kiss, frown, and even hug each other by using emoticons. Furthermore, emotions can be also expressed using what is called *emotes* (Mortensen). These emotes are said to be highly individual (Mortensen). Mortensen provides the following examples about how *emotes* are used to enhance gamer experience. “/em reaches up to wipe sweat from her eyes, leaving blood from her gauntlet smeared over

her forehead.” With /em command, the sentence will be translated by the program as an *emote*. A character’s name will be added for a specific situation. For example, “Agirra reaches up to wipe sweat from her eyes, leaving blood from her gauntlet smeared over her forehead” (Mortensen). *Emotes* can also be used to describe movement of the avatars as shown in the video clip below.

The gaming clip demonstrates that the *WoW* designers embed various *emotes* commands to enable interactions with other gamers to resemble real-life social interactions. For example, gamers can “hug”, “cry”, “kiss,” “eat,” “point,” “laugh,” etc. Furthermore, gamers can decide if their conversation will be shared among only guild members, within a group, or should be treated as a whisper. These features enable gamers to have similar experience as they are interacting with others in a real life situation.



Gaming Clip 2.1: Using *Emotes* in *WoW*.

As discussed above, in-game design elements created by game developers are rhetorical in nature because gamers need to use these tools to persuade other gamers during gameplay. As Murray points out in her book, *Hamelet on the Holodeck*, computer media provide “defining ability to execute a series of rules” (71). These author- or rhetor-related elements are referred to “the core practice of software authorship” (Bogost 4). To conclude this chapter, several scholars (such as Murray; Banks; Consalvo) argue gameplay is not just a pleasurable experience, but it should be viewed as a performance of gamers in an emergent rhetorical situation in the *WoW* gaming space. The concept of performance is similar to what Aristotle said about delivery in persuasion (Bizzell and Herzberg). As a result, it can be argued that gameplay is a rhetorical act where

many players interact and persuade each other to accomplish a task. H.I.R.E. is a cause and an outcome from a series of rhetorical expressions and practices in a different rhetorical situation when gamers make various decisions about their virtual self-representations (i.e., avatars), subsequent online interactions with players' rhetorical expressions and practices, and with those among other gamers, and the ultimate gratifications obtained once a raid or a mission is successfully completed. Although discussions in this chapter have divided *WoW* gamer interactions into the selection of in-game characters, the formation of guilds, and the construction of multimodal rhetorical discourses in responses to a unique gaming situation, it is important to study H.I.R.E. among *WoW* gamers from a holistic aspect to better explain the dynamic gameplay experiences many *WoW* players encounter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 SUMMARY OF RHETORICAL COMPONENTS

In Chapters 1 and 2, I examined persuasive gameplay experiences in gaming sessions as a rhetorical phenomenon. Gamers interact with each other in the rhetorical space of videogames where rhetorical acts are performed to respond to the persuasive manipulations of all game participants. When gamers assume their roles in the gameplay acts during their gaming sessions, they utilize multimodal rhetorical discourses to persuade each other to perform the tasks leading to more a pleasurable and immersive experience they seek for when taking part in the game. In previous chapters, I proposed the term, H.I.R.E., as a new rhetorical term to describe this rich and interwoven rhetorical phenomenon *WoW* gamers often experience during gameplay. H.I.R.E. constitutes an essential component of gamer experience in *WoW* and is produced by a combination of multimodal rhetorical manipulations such as textual, aural, visual, and even kinetic interactivities, as well as socio-psychological gratifications as a result of game participation and interactions with thousands of players involved in the game by forming guilds (Williams, Caplan, and Xiong).

In order to examine H.I.R.E. as a rhetorical phenomenon encompassing different manipulative uses of rhetorical expressions and practices by game participants, I propose an integrative method to analyze digital game rhetoric that demonstrates rhetorical interactions among gamers, in which persuasive acts occur during gameplay. This integrative method follows recent discussions on what is the best approach to study game rhetoric. An integrative method is most comprehensive to examine the multiplicity of game rhetoric as claimed by many game scholars in the literature. For example, in “Game Studies and Beyond,” Wolf claims scholars should investigate the dynamic and interwoven relationship of rhetorical components in digital game studies. He contends new methods should be employed to analyze the worlds experienced by gamers “through the window of the image and the way in which the image becomes a tool in the hands of the person controlling its point of view” (Wolf 117). The proposed approach is similar to Hocks’ study of digital

rhetoric as “a system of ongoing dialogue and negotiations among writers, audiences, and institutional contexts,...on the multiple modalities available for making meaning using new communication and information technologies” (632). I contend continuing dialogues and negotiations among gamers are the representations of their rhetorical expressions and practices situated within a pre-designed game environment created by game designers. I further argue, in order for gamers to generate persuasive acts or to be persuaded, gamers need to make sense of the symbolic and rhetorical artifacts co-created by gamers and game designers. In other words, the examination of gamer experience enables game rhetorical scholars to investigate the fundamental reasons of why people are persuaded to play. Moreover, in the process of examining H.I.R.E., I aim to study the multimodal interactivities in rhetorical persuasive expressions and practices provided by the *WoW* platform where dialogues and negotiations are facilitated by game designers, gamers, and the game technologies.

3.2 AN INTEGRATED METHOD TO ANALYZE DIGITAL GAME RHETORIC

Current research in gaming can be broadly divided into empirical-quantitative and humanistic-qualitative approaches that examine this important area of study with diverse ontological, epistemological, and philosophical assumptions (Williams). Consalvo and Dutton observe game scholars who use empirical research methods often examined either gamers or the games themselves. Empirical research methods on behaviors of the gamers often use experiment (Cai; Smyth; Williams), questionnaire survey (Jansz and Martens; Shien and Cheng; Williams), and in-depth interview (Schott and Horrell; Yates and Littleton) (Refer to Consalvo and Dutton for a complete list of literature review). On the other hand, researchers who are interested in digital games themselves often content analyzed different types of games (Elverdam and Aarseth), game violence and its effects on aggression (Kinder), portrayals of woman or minority characters (Heintz-Knowles and Henderson; Okorafor and Davenport; Ow; Schleiner), socioemotional and task communication (Peña and Hancock), or the presence of avatars

(Heintz-Knowles and Henderson; Okorafor and Davenport) (Refer to Consalvo and Dutton for a complete list of literature review). Qualitative and humanistic game researchers have also adopted a critical cultural approach to examine ideological assumptions in digital games (Friedman; Fuller and Jenkins; Miklaucic; Williams), the components of narrative, character, authorship, and institution in the Jetman digital game (Brooker), women characters in digital games (Mikula), or cultural implications of multiplayer games (McBirney).

Another dominant humanistic approach in studying digital games focuses on the analysis of digital games as a text in terms of their fictive qualities and narratives (McBirney). Scholars have, however, questioned if narrative analysis of written texts is sufficient to generate insights to studying digital games (McBirney). Their arguments center on whether the narrative analysis is capable of capturing other in-game elements and the richness of gamer interactions and collaboration online. Furthermore, they contend if the emphasis on textual aspect of digital games is sufficient to investigate the richness of gamer experience. Because *WoW* is multimodal and interactive, digital game rhetoric needs to involve many non-textual design elements such as visual, aural, and kinetic messages. Therefore, it is not feasible to emphasize only the textual components of digital game rhetoric. Wolf concurs games should be studied as a medium of visual imagery, and he proposes to examine visual images in digital games. Wolf's multi-modal approach to study game rhetoric helps me to conceptualize this dissertation project.

Regardless of the approaches taken by game scholars, problems associated with game research are related to what constitutes its main focus. As observed by many scholars, one attribute that distinguishes MMORPGs, such as *WoW*, from traditional digital games, is enriched, real-time, character-playing, immersive (McMahan 67) and engaging experience that many *WoW* gamers encounter. In Gaming Clip 3.1, all gamers went into a state of highly engaging experience after they successfully killed Dragon Boss, *Onyxia* as the goal to accomplish this dungeon raid. Once the gamers

succeed in accomplishing this common objective, their excitement can be clearly observed when all gamers voiced their excitement and relief after this gaming session.

To better capture the essence of gamer experience during *WoW* gameplay, it is important to examine

H.I.R.E. as part of the gameplay experiences in the discourse

environment of MMORPGs. Although the topics and related research methods reviewed above provide scholars with insights into digital games, they do not examine the digital games and the gameplay experiences as a rhetorical phenomenon.

The emphasis on H.I.R.E. as the ultimate rhetorical expressions and practices of the gamers addresses the constraints of the narratologist's text-centric approach by expanding the domain of study to cover "interactive texts" that encompass not only the text, but the role of audiences/gamers, and medium itself (Kerr). The focus on the interactive text and other in-game design elements is also in line with Kerr's proposition for examining more than static textual messages; instead, "interactive texts" and other in-game design elements can be included. The digression from merely studying one aspect of *WoW* discourses, regardless of their modalities, offers game research a new perspective in studying digital game.

To further describe what should be examined in digital game research, Aarseth argues gamer experience should be studied, but he does not elaborate how to study it. Kerr expands Aarseth's stance and states that gamer experience in a digital game are "influenced as much by the randomness built into



Gaming Clip 3.1: A Demonstration of H.I.R.E. after Dragon Boss, *Onyxia*, is killed.

the medium, as the choices made by the user and the organisation of the surface elements by the designer” (Kerr 21). Aaseth’s proposition clearly indicates gamer actions play a vital role in constituting gamer experience during gameplay. The creation of their gameplay experiences often goes beyond what game designers have determined when a game is first conceptualized and designed. To follow the perspectives of Aaseth and many others, I examine H.I.R.E. as an important part of gamer experience. H.I.R.E. is derived from multi-modal rhetorical expressions and practices that gamers produce during their gameplay. For example, online chats and collaborations among MMORPG players have constituted an important part of their gameplay experiences.

On the basis of the arguments presented earlier, it is apparent a text-centric approach to study digital games is restrictive and myopic in producing fruitful results. Therefore, instead of adopting approaches used by narrative theorists to examine the structure of narratives in digital games as “narrative art” (Murray 28) or “cybertext” (Aarseth), this study will examine more than game narratives in digital games. Rather, I want to explore gamer experience (as conceptualized in the term, H.I.R.E.) during gameplay. As such, game narratives are viewed as a subordinate area that leads to H.I.R.E. experienced by gamers. The experience is partially a result of their constant and engaging interactions with other gamers online. The examination of H.I.R.E. adds a new research avenue in comparison with present game scholars in several ways.

First of all, I argue the study of H.I.R.E. has important theoretical implications to game research. Previous game researchers often focus on digital games as narratives by examining the structure and interpretation of game narratives. For example, Kerr summarizes contemporary game scholars often adopt one of the three approaches to study game narratives: 1) a classical, formalist, and narrow approach; 2) a historically-located and cultural post-structuralist approach; 3) rejection of the narrative theories. The limitations of these approaches are clear because gamer experience goes far beyond texts and narratives. I therefore argue if game scholars study H.I.R.E., in which texts and narratives make up

an important part of gameplay experiences, the debates on how game narratives should be studied and if traditional narrative theories can be applied to dynamic interactive narratives will carry less theoretical significance. Furthermore, the long-lasting debates between narratologist (a text-centric approach to studying games) and ludologist (a gameplay-centric approach to studying games) can be resolved by studying H.I.R.E. when game scholars begin to examine narratives and the process of using narratives leading to the creation of H.I.R.E. This perspective is echoed by many game scholars who examine other non-textual components of gameplay experiences (such as visual, aural, kinetic, or procedural dimensions that make up of their experience) (Bogost; Bolter and Grusin; Darley; Poole; King and Krzywinska, also see Kerr 35 for details).

Secondly, I argue the complex process of playing *WoW* cannot be fully understood by examining merely structural in-game design components (no matter whether they are audio, visual, kinetic, or textual) (Humphreys). What gamers experience from playing *WoW* is influenced not only by these rhetor-centric in-game design components, but also by social, economic, cultural, and psychological aspects of gamers that become parts of gamer experience during gameplay (Humphreys; Yee). In “Online Multiuser Games: Playing for Real,” Humphreys claims gamer experience is derived from “a complex interplay between the rules and affordances of a game, the user’s offline context, and the online social world created with other players” (79). In this dissertation, I reason gamers create their own rhetorical experience once they are given the rhetorical tools embedded in any digital game to respond to numerous rhetorical manipulations during gameplay. To further extend this line of thinking, the generation and maintenance of H.I.R.E. are not completely controlled by game designers; instead, interactions with existing game designers’ rhetorical devices, and mostly importantly with other gamers during gameplay lead to these processes to create H.I.R.E. felt by gamers during a gaming session.

Third, my proposition that H.I.R.E. should be studied twofold enables game rhetoricians to better understand the two-dimensional characteristics of H.I.R.E. as both the persuasive expressions and

practices created, maintained, and enjoyed by gamers during gameplay. On the one hand, H.I.R.E. is experienced by many *WoW* players every time they play the game. In order to achieve a high level of H.I.R.E., gamers have to adapt to the gaming environment created by game designers and employ many in-game design elements that come with the digital game. For example, *WoW* gamers are expected to choose from a list of avatars and follow rules of interactions that are part of the gameplay. On the other hand, *WoW* gamers themselves regularly engage in creating their unique rhetorical expressions and practices to persuade other gamers to collaborate with each other to succeed in a raid. For example, in the raid to kill *Festergut*, a *hunter* player (*Pathos*) uses *Elune Stone* to cast moonlight to persuade other *hunter* players to understand where the collapsing spot is located. Once *Pathos* informs the other player, *Wordzofpray*, by utilizing the in-game element, *moonlight*, *Wordzofpray* see its position on the screen and immediately understand its function.

Fourth, the experiential characteristics of H.I.R.E. as a rhetorical phenomenon will certainly pose challenges to rhetorical scholars in terms of what to study and how things work to create gameplay experiences. For example, van den Hoogen, IJsselsteijn, and de Kort observes game researchers are faced with developing “a coherent and fine-grained set of methods and tools that enable the measurement of entertainment experience in a sensitive, reliable and valid manner” (11). These problems are likely to attribute to the difficulty in defining what gamer experience is and what theoretical approaches are to be taken to study them. Psychologists like Csikszentmihalyi propose the concept of flow to capture how gamers feel when engaging in pleasurable activities. Nevertheless, because of its emphasis on intrinsic motivation of the gamers to seek entertainment as a psychological phenomenon, Csikszentmihalyi’s flow model does not take into consideration contextual (such as socio-cultural factors) influencing gamer experience.

Fifth, recent advances in game experience research have shifted the focus to examine these contextual factors in affecting gameplay experiences. Most importantly, game researchers have begun to

investigate the interplay between game design structures/components and characteristics of gamers (Ermi and Mäyrä). Research often explores how these factors would influence gamer experience. Ermi and Mäyrä's digital gameplay model (Figure 3.1) succinctly captures these interactions. Their later model (Figure 3.2) places greater emphasis on the contextual factors at both societal and personal levels and examines their influence on the gameplay experience. Therefore, I contend that gamer experience in gaming sessions justify the proposition of

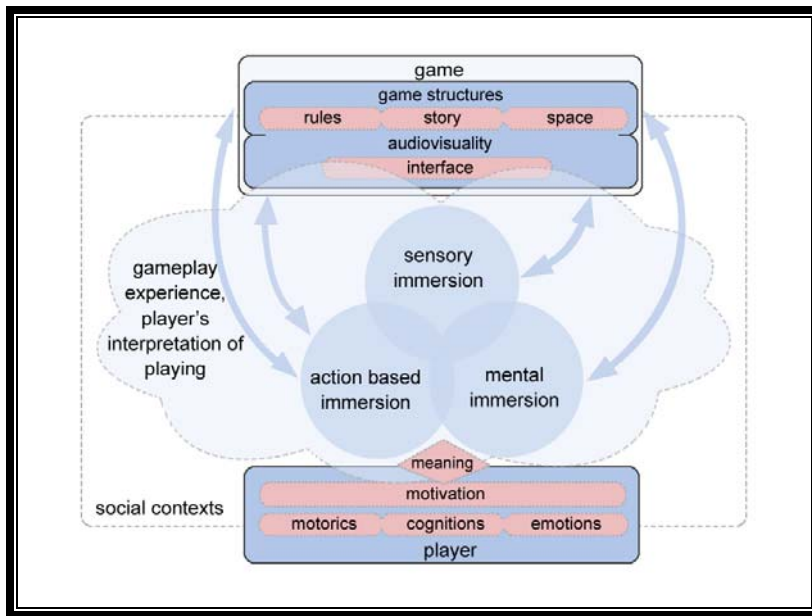


Figure 3.1: Ermi and Mäyrä's SCI Model.

(Source: Mäyrä 810)

“rhetoric of experience” (or “experiential rhetoric”), which requires the need to conceptualize gameplay experiences by game rhetorical scholars. Extending from Ermi and Mäyrä's model, H.I.R.E. can be viewed as the equivalent of intensive and immersive experience that gamers enjoy when playing *WoW*. The unique game design features (such as narratives, role-playing capabilities, and global interconnectivity with other players) contribute to gamer experience with *WoW*. The design of *WoW* (including the writing of the game narratives, interface design, audio-visual discourses in cyberspace) is rhetorical because game designers aim to create the best possible games through their manipulations of these devices, so gamers will purchase or subscribe to these digital games. The practices of persuading gamers to purchase the game or to take part in the gameplay are rhetorical in nature. Like rhetors in classical Greece, these game designers want to persuade gamers to take some actions that can lead to playful and pleasurable

experience with the game (Korhonen, Montola, and Arrasvuori). However, what gamers really experience depends on their interpretation of the ample rhetorical expressions and practices manifested in the forms of online chats, discourses, collaboration, interaction made possible by the fictitious in-game design elements in *WoW*. The process of experiencing *WoW* gaming sessions is affected by other players' actions, their involvement with the gameplay, and exposure to audio-visual game design elements. All of these in the end contribute to the H.I.R.E. many *WoW* players are likely to feel. In any rhetorical situation, how gamers are persuaded is surely dependent on individual characteristics (such as cognition, emotion, and motorics).

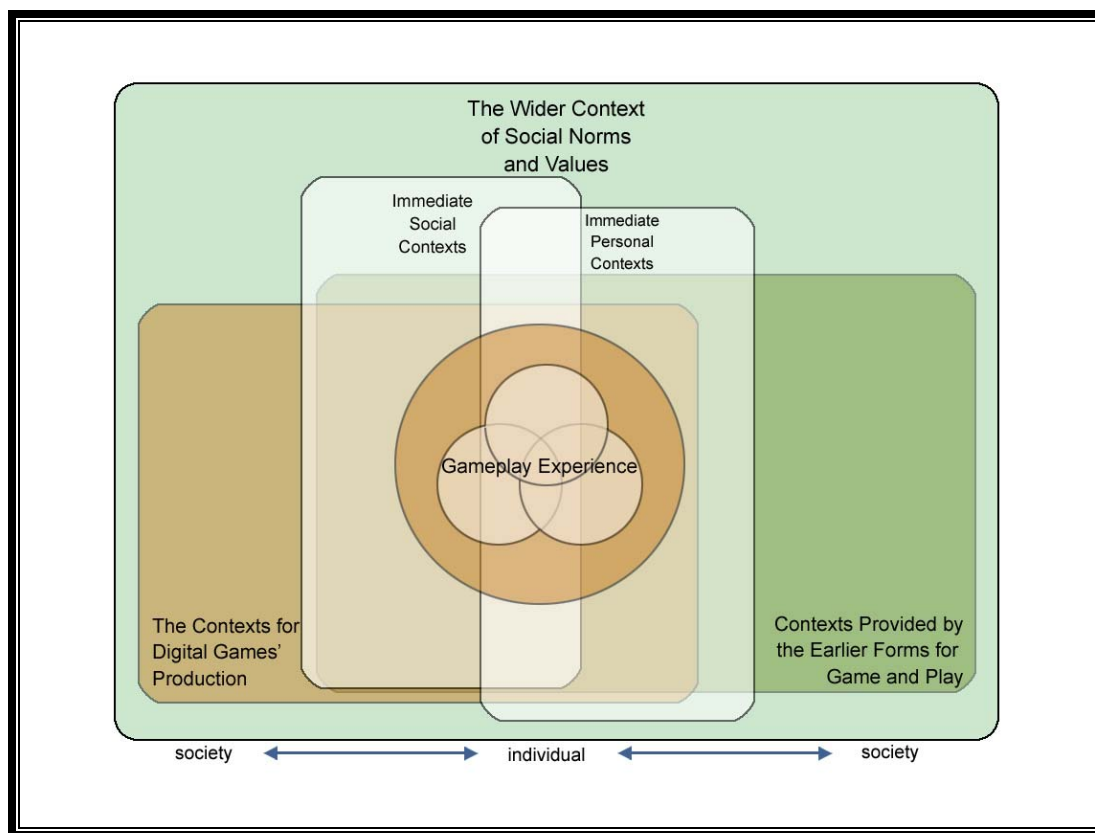


Figure 3.2: Ermi and Mäyrä's Contextual Game Experience Model. (Source: Mäyrä 813)

Drawing from Ermi and Mäyrä's SCI model (Figure 3.1) and Contextual Game Experience Model (Figure 3.2), I propose an integrated model of H.I.R.E. (Figure 3.3), on which this study will be based. The proposed model is different from other game experience models, in that I will not merely

examine the in-game design components as the rhetorical expressions and practices of game designers (i.e., rhetors), socio-cultural elements in which rhetorical discourses are to be interpreted, and characteristics of the audience; all of which work together to affect gamer experience during *WoW* gameplay. Rather, the focus of the model will emphasize the understanding of H.I.R.E. as rhetorical expressions and practices that gamers use to persuade other gamers to maximize their gameplay experiences. By shifting my focus from examining normative and structural features of what makes a digital game persuasive and engaging, I aim to studying gamer experience during gameplay. In particular, the focus of this dissertation is to approach H.I.R.E. as the causes and outcomes of a series of rhetorical manipulations to persuade other gamers. In order to successfully accomplish the persuasive objectives, gamers become rhetors, when other gamers become the audience in a gaming session.

At the top of the model is *WoW*. This component includes not only the game per se, but the “agent” associated with the development, distribution, playing, and representation of the game (McAllister 45-46). McAllister explains there are four primary agent categories involved in the computer gameplay industry; that is, game developers, distributors, players, and virtual agents (such as avatars) (45-46). Game developers and distributors help create *WoW* players can “act” (play) through the embedded “agency” (avatars) in a virtual gaming environment (“scene”). On the other hand, *WoW* gamers constantly interact with each other, which results in more intensive, immersive, engaging gameplay experience than playing a stand-alone offline digital game. Furthermore, an “interactive fantasy” is created when digital gamers “march up onto the stage and become various characters, altering the action by what they say and do in their roles” (Laurel 16). Once gamers enter (log in) the game, they will perform their roles defined by their avatars similar to when actors and actresses are on stage. Gamers will produce a large amount of rhetorical expressions and practices that persuade other gamers.

The second component of the model demonstrates the “act” (gameplay behaviors and interactions among *WoW* players) and the “agency” (employing avatars, forming guilds, and collaborated task completion, etc.). *WoW* enables gamers to role-play to create their preferred avatars. The process of creating online characters/representation involves “making decisions about the appearance, progression, and personality of the character” (Bessière, Seay, and Kiesler 531). Through these virtual characters and online guilds, various types of gameplay acts are executed to accomplish common guild objectives. The virtual world created inside *WoW* is “populated by agents, both human and computer-generated, and other elements of the representational context” (Laurel 17). Decisions to choose a virtual representation constitute important rhetorical expressions and practices that gamers use to persuade other gamers to change their attitudes and behaviors.

The third component in the model illustrates why gamers take part in *WoW*, what experience they seek to gain, and what leads to an interactive, immersive, and engaging gameplay experiences. Playing *WoW* is viewed as “experiential activities” that accompany the generation, maintenance, and enjoyment of H.I.R.E. among gamers (Laurel 22). Gameplay is experiential in nature, in that gamers want to obtain the experience killing a medieval dragon, fighting as a medieval knight, or collaborating with some other gamers who live in another continent. As such, Douglas and Hargadon persuasively argue affective pleasure of playing games should be emphasized in examining how readers interact with game narratives. One distinction between *WoW* and less technologically advanced games is *WoW* is highly interactive at textual, aural, visual and kinetic dimensions. The enhanced technical capacity to immerse gamers is equivalent to the flow experience (proposed by Csikszentmihalyi).

The concept of immersion is defined as “identification with characters and narrative elements” of *WoW* and many other MMORPGs (Douglas and Hargadon 163). It also refers to “[p]sychological state characterized by perceiving oneself to be enveloped by, included in, and interacting with an environment

that provides a continuous stream of stimuli and experience (Witmer and Stinger 227). In the design of digital games, immersion is believed to be an important feature an engaging game is expected to have. To associate immersion with H.I.R.E., Ermi and Mäyrä's typology provides a good foundation to begin the study.

Ermi and Mäyrä's SCI model further divides immersion with games into three categories: sensory immersion, action-based immersion (or challenge-based immersion), and mental immersion (or imaginative immersion). Sensory immersion refers to the multi-sensory features of a digital game that causes a perceptual impact on the gamers (IJsselsteijn, de Kort, Poels, Jurgelionis, and Bellotti). It is an outcome similar to the concept of *ilinx* which describes the alteration of perceptions through gameplay (Caillois).

Action-based immersion, or challenge-based immersion, refers to the motor skills required by gamers to complete the tasks and deal with challenges present in the game (IJsselsteijn, de Kort, Poels, Jurgelionis, and Bellotti). This type of immersion is generated through competition (*Agon*), chance (*Alea*) and role-playing (*Mimesis*) embedded in the play forms of many MMORPGs (Caillois).

Mental immersion, or imaginative immersion, on the other hand, refers to gamer experience within an imaginative virtual world enriched by multimodal interactivities (IJsselsteijn, de Kort, Poels, Jurgelionis, and Bellotti). These discussions describe that immersion with *WoW* happens when gamers interact with other players in a virtual gaming environment without paying attention to what happens in the real world. Some scholars have used "immersion" and "engagement" interchangeably (IJsselsteijn, de Kort, Poels, Jurgelionis, and Bellotti).

The concept of engagement is defined as "a desirable—even essential--- human response to computer-mediated activities" (Laurel 112). Specifically, engagement is conceptualized as "a category of user experience characterized by attributes of challenge, positive affect, endurability, aesthetic and sensory appeal, attention, feedback, variety/novelty, interactivity, and perceived user control" (O'Brien

and Toms 941). Past research has conceptualized engagement as attitudes, attention, interest, curiosity, motivation, mental models, motor skills, and activities of the players (Chapman and NetLibrary, Inc.). When *WoW* players are highly engaged with the game, they will feel “affectively involved, motivated, and ... in control over the interaction” (O’Brien and Toms 940). Their empirical interview study concludes engagement experienced by the players is made up four distinct phases: point of engagement, period of sustained engagement, disengagement, and reengagement (O’Brien and Toms). Engagement is not just a design issue that game developers (agents) want gamers to enjoy, these “engaging interactions” are also sought after by users of computer applications (such as *WoW*) (O’Brien and Toms 939). Engagement is likely to be embedded in a larger gameplay experience or event (O’Brien and Toms 946).

Normative categorization of gameplay experiences has evolved from the earlier flow concept (Csikszentmihalyi) to more elaborate descriptors (such as Costello and Edmonds’ model or Korhonen, Montola, and Arrasvuori’s Playful Experience (or PLEX) framework) (See Korhonen, Montola, and Arrasvuori 279 for the comparative analysis of playful user experience). For example, Costello and Edmonds’ framework identifies 13 words (such as creation, exploration, discovery, competition, danger, captivation, sensation, sympathy, simulation, fantasy, camaraderie, and subversion) to describe gamer experience. Korhonen, Montola, and Arrasvuori’s PLEX framework is mostly derived from Costello and Edmonds’ model, but some interactivity-related or negative experience are included (such as control, nurture, competition, sadism, submission, and suffering).

The last component in the model represents the roles of gamers in the process of making sense of their gameplay experiences. As shown in the proposed model, gameplay experiences are not solely attributed to “interactive texts” (to use Aarseth’s words), but rather are influenced by the game itself, other players, users’ own gameplay experiences, etc. Gamers themselves play a very important role in making sense out of their gameplay H.I.R.E. co-created by many agents, using various agencies, to seek

after common purposes, in the *WoW* virtual landscape (scene). As such, it will not be sufficient to merely focus on digital game narratives by examining plots, actions, and characters. By analyzing the meaning making process of *WoW* players, this dissertation enables game rhetoric researchers to examine the persuasive process during gameplay. Meanwhile individual's motivation, motorics, cognitions, and emotions are important to the process, I argue the emphasis on the persuasive process through meaning-making as a rhetorical process will allow game researchers to bridge the gap between rhetorical theory and game research theory into one well-integrated area of research, in that game researchers can go beyond the structural elements of digital games, and focus on gamer experience as a rhetorical phenomenon.

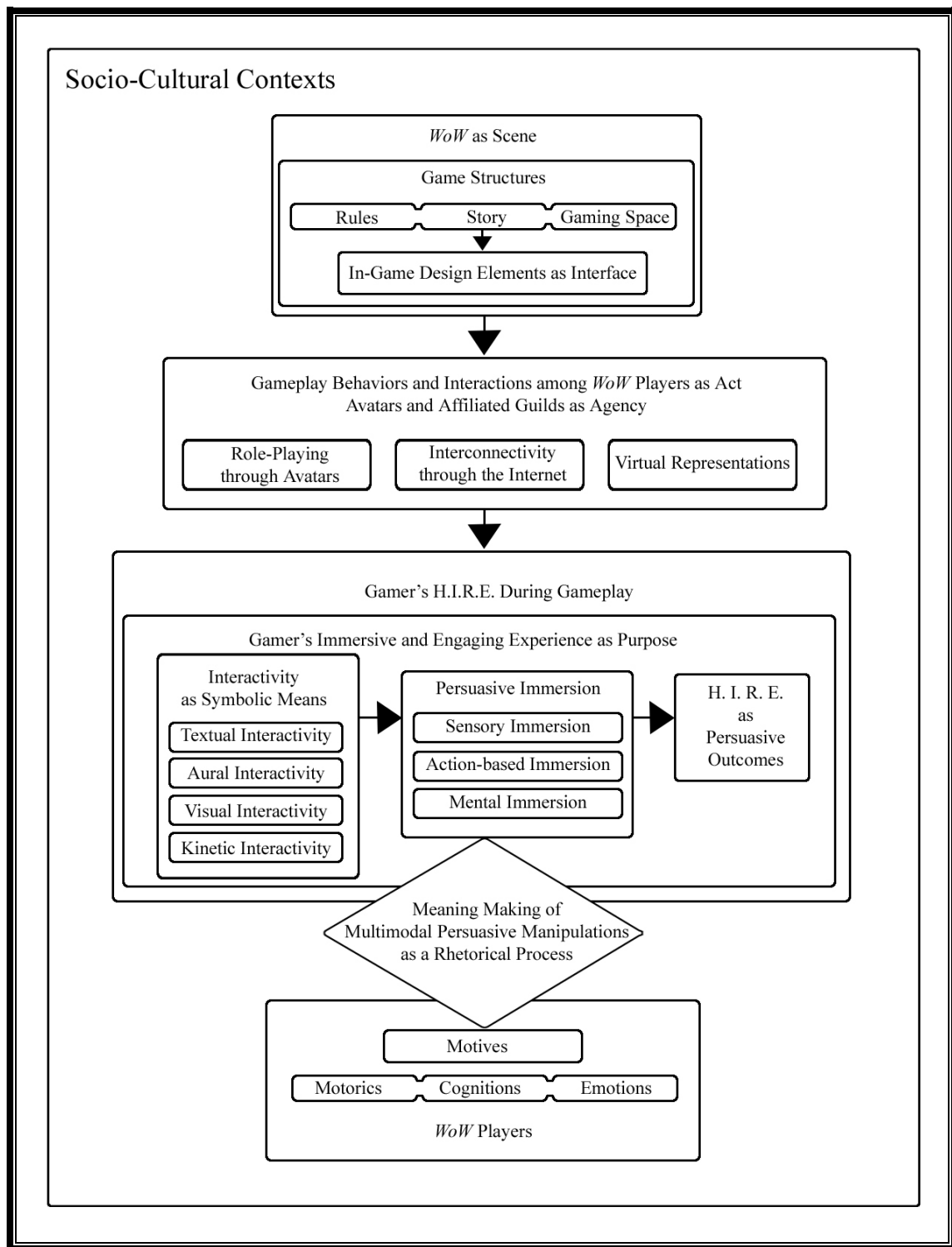


Figure 3.3: An Integrated Model to Analyze H.I.R.E. Digital Game Rhetoric.

3.3 SELECTING REPRESENTATIVE GAMING SESSIONS

A total of seven gaming sessions are chosen when I participated in three guilds as a player (total characters=274) in *WoW* over the past three years. These guilds included *Adult Swim*, *Legends of Velen*, and *Big Dogs*. *Adult Swim* is located in the realm of *Velen*. There are a total of 83 guild members (as of September 17, 2010). The character gender ratio is 63% male and 37% female, distributed among the following roles (with total number of guild members in the parentheses): *Death Knights* (11), *Druids* (10), *Hunters* (11), *Mages* (5), *Paladins* (9), *Priests* (7), *Rogues* (9), *Shamans* (5), *Warlocks* (7), and *Warriors* (9).

Legends of Velen guild has a total of 184 guild members (as of September 17, 2010) and is also located in the realm of *Velen*. Its character gender ratio is 71% male and 29% female. The guild members have played the following roles (with total number of guild members in the parentheses): *Death Knights* (25), *Druids* (19), *Hunters* (30), *Mages* (11), *Paladins* (28), *Priests* (16), *Rogues* (13), *Shamans* (15), *Warlocks* (8), and *Warriors* (19).

Big Dogs guild is also located at the realm of *Velen*. The guild has a total of 7 members (as of September 17, 2010) with character gender ratio of 43% Male and 57% Female. Their roles include the followings (with total number of guild members in the parentheses): *Death Knight* (1), *Hunters* (3), *Mages* (2), and *Warrior* (1). The researcher belongs to all three guilds and has established a good rapport with the guild members to facilitate the process of choosing representative gaming sessions useful to analyze H.I.R.E. in *WoW*.

The data collection period leads to a large amount of MMORPGs gameplay data recorded by Fraps captured videos. Fraps, abbreviated from frame per second, is “a universal Windows application that can be used with games using DirectX or OpenGL graphic technology” (Fraps). As of June 14, 2010, Fraps releases its 3.2.3 version. Among many tasks and functions Fraps performs, I employ Fraps’ screen capture and real-time video capture functions to capture high quality graphics, audio, and video

clips (Fraps). To capture real-time gaming session clips, Fraps can “capture audio and video up to 2560x1600 with custom frame rates from 10 to 120 frames per second” (Fraps).

A total of 120 *WoW* gaming session clips are collected for this study and briefly discussed below. Each gaming session ranges from three GB to four GB in terms of file size, and ranges from 8 minutes to 14 minutes. Seven gaming sessions are selected to capture the essence of the focus of this dissertation and to demonstrate H.I.R.E. encountered by the gamers through the negotiation of spaces and interactions with other players. The collected data are analyzed by the proposed *Integrated Model to Analyze H.I.R.E. Digital Game Rhetoric* (Figure 3.3). Specifically, I examine the multimodality of game structures in *WoW* to provide a typology of H.I.R.E. when playing *WoW*. The captured gaming sessions help account for the process by which players rely on multimodal interactivities to immerse themselves in the game, so optimal engagements can be achieved. Finally, I use the data to show the nuances of how the process of playing *WoW* to obtain H.I.R.E. is not possible if other gamers in the same or competing guilds do not cooperate closely with each other to accomplish common objectives in a raid. The collaboration process in itself involves persuasive expressions and practices that prompt other players to adapt their motoric, cognitive, and emotional states to different gaming sessions. Furthermore, the gameplay acts also involve laborious meaning making process in which gamers interpret the persuasive intent of multimodal rhetorical devices used in each gaming session. Although rational persuasive expressions and practices (i.e., ethos) prevail during *WoW* gameplay, the nature of *WoW* as a strategy game does not preclude that gamers will be persuaded by the emotional component (i.e., pathos) in the persuasion process. However, because the focus of this dissertation is on the persuasive process during gameplay to accomplish a raid through concerted strategy formulation and collaboration among raid members, I argue that the persuasive process depends on mainly rational component, which will be the topic of this project.

Chapter 4: Interactivity: The Meeting of Minds in the Digicontinent

One of the often cited characteristics of digital games is their capability to provide “players with a variety of opportunities for interactive engagement” (Tavinor 25). The technical possibility of digital games to generate intense multimodal engagements for gamers is even greater among contemporary online multiplayer role-playing digital games, like *World of Warcraft* (henceforth, *WoW*). Multimodal interactivities with role-playing avatars through an interconnected global gaming platform enable gamers to interact with other gamers and the gaming environment in a drastically different manner from what conventional digital games can provide. Mortensen vividly describes the technical advantages of *WoW* below:

a graphically sophisticated game simulating a three dimensional world. The way to traverse it is a simulation of physical movement, and the avatar you control is the likeness of a humanoid body. The interface is a combination of graphic, accessed through the mouse, and typed, accessed through typing long strings of commands or by using shortcuts readymade by the game developers or written specially for and by” gamers.
(398)

From the perspective of game rhetoricians, I reason these in-game design elements (such as computer interfaces, avatars, graphic/visual, aural, textual, and kinetic in-game designs, etc.) are employed to create a sense of “worldness,” where gamers can make sense of the fictional world they have invested with their time and money during gaming sessions. In other words, these in-game design elements are used to create a scene in which a series of rhetorical expressions and practices will be situated. The process of creating a fictitious gaming environment by game-designers is very similar to what rhetoricians do by using verbal, textual, and aural devices to persuade the audience.

Drew Davidson, in *The Rhetoric of GamePlay*, equates these in-game design elements to “rhetorical elements that serve the purpose of conveying the game’s techniques and rules enabling play” (11). In-game design elements of digital games have lent their technical characteristics to “the rhetoric of game” and the subsequent “rhetoric of gameplay” (to use Davidson’s terms). Like any other rhetorical interaction among rhetors and audiences to accomplish persuasive goals, MMORPG gameplays follow the same process so online interactivities can be completed through a set of agreed rules that contribute to the common objectives of the raid team (Lindley). This process is similar to the stasis theory in rhetoric that Aristotle states the invention process in rhetoric involves the identification, comprehension, and assessment of facts, which leads to the proposal of plan of actions.

These structural features of digital games demonstrate game designers’ rhetorical expressions and practices to persuade gamers. Despite being fully aware of the make-believe world experienced in *WoW*, gamers are persuaded to take part in these gameplay sessions with other players to seek entertainment and gratifications. Scholars like Ian Bogost and Janet Murray refer to these types of embedded rhetorical expressions, executions, and practices as “procedural rhetoric” (see Bogost Chapter 1 for detailed discussion) in which rules of gameplay constitute an important part of gamer experience. For example, when gamers adopt the avatar of a healer (class), they are given the capabilities to cast spells, heal other wounded gamers, and bolster the spirits of other gamers, according to the embedded gameplay rules for this avatar class.

The stance taken in this dissertation goes beyond examining the structural characteristics of digital games as a normative and descriptive rhetorical expressions and practices of *WoW* game designers. Although digital games allow gamers to use these in-game design elements, it does not mean any gameplay will behave solely within the predetermined rules of game designers. One distinctive feature that makes *WoW* engaging and addictive is its ability to allow online interactions with the in-

game design elements and among other gamers, which, I claim, will lead to a more interactive multi-modal rhetorical engagement, i.e., H.I.R.E.

Gamer interactions during gameplay are unique, depending on the composition of a raid group which is often composed of a maximum of eight parties and five players to accomplish tasks or missions in various adventurous dungeons (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Raid_group). Because of the variations in the characteristics of the gamers and their goals in a raid, it does not mean that any gameplay session will generate or maintain H.I.R.E. As observed in my data collection, many gameplay sessions end up with disappointing outcomes with limited rhetorical engagements among participants. Therefore, I reason H.I.R.E. is the outcome of many rhetorical expressions and practices made possible by game-designers, but, at the same time, co-generated by gamers, in-game design elements, and digital games to produce a highly engaging rhetorical experience for participants. H.I.R.E. is also the cause that allures many games to invest time and money in gameplay, so they experience H.I.R.E. as the ultimate rewards of their successful engagement with the rhetorical manipulations in *WoW*.

As such, the examination of H.I.R.E. in digital games in general, and in *WoW* in particular, helps game rhetoricians to understand the process to produce H.I.R.E. and the persuasive outcome during gameplay. In this chapter, I provide a description of seven gaming sessions selected from my data of over 120 sessions to exemplify some aspects of H.I.R.E. Through a detailed analysis of these seven gaming sessions and selected gaming clips, I aim to answer the following questions proposed in the first chapter of this dissertation: What characteristics do Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) have that contributes to H.I.R.E. experienced by the gamers? Do these characteristics account for the popularity and, sometimes, addictiveness, of MMORPGs? What are the relationship between these game characteristics and H.I.R.E.?

4.1. AN OVERVIEW OF SEVEN SELECTED GAMING SESSIONS

I provide an overview of seven gaming sessions to answer the questions above. A detailed description of these gaming sessions also provides background information about *WoW* and gamer experience to lay the foundation for future chapters. In the discussion of these seven gaming sessions, I will mainly focus on providing the background of these sessions without elaborating on various modes of interactivities demonstrated in these sessions. As such, full gaming sessions are discussed and presented in Section 4.1. A more thorough discussion of multimodal interactivities and their relationships with H.I.R.E. is presented in Section 4.2., where segments of the gaming sessions are edited and presented to support the analyses of different types of interactivities as demonstrated in these gaming sessions.

GAMING SESSION 1: The first gaming session records a raid in which gamers employ different types of interactivities to play their respective roles in achieving a common objective. The raid group led by *Prophecy* guild is organized to attack the boss *Festergut* in the *Plagueworks* wing of the *Icecrown Citadel*. The first gaming session involves a task of killing the boss, *Festergut*, through the collaboration of 25

raid members mainly from the *Prophecy* guild and a few members recruited randomly online. This gaming session is captured in a file with 7 minutes, 37 seconds. Participants of this task in this session include 2 *Warriors*, 2 *Death Knights*, 7 *Paladins*, 2 *Shamans*, 2 *Druids*, 2 *Rogues*, 2 *Mages*, 1 *Warlocks*, and 5 *Hunters*. They are *Tenaz*, *Xanderm*, *Razze*, *Rhhockeyboy*, *Jadalin*, *Asyrin*, *Jescyle*, *Xoa*, *Nervana*, *Wordzofpray*, *Rombeus*, *Squirrelnut*, *Rosemariee*, *Pathos*, *Nugesmage*, *Feenix*, *Gianthead*, *Zaor*,



Gaming Session 1: A Raid of Five *Hunter* Class Gamers to Kill *Festergut*.

Bodijuana, Yourpanda, Evilleian, Duhgoeszap, Uleile, and Strabo. Most of them are from the *Prophecy* guild with others from other allied guilds (Refer to Gaming Session 1).

At the beginning of this gaming session, the raid leader, *Tenaz*, first organizes the raid group by providing voice commands to inform every raid members of what they need to do. In addition to these aural interactions, I want to highlight the textual prompts used to organize other guild members who have not vocally taken part in these activities. At the lower left-hand side of the captured image, intense textual interactions are facilitated by the technical capabilities of *WoW* to allow gamers to “talk” to each other about what strategies and actions should be taken to succeed in this raid (Refer to Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1: Textual Interactivity at the Left-Bottom of the Captured Image.

This gaming session involves mainly positioning and movement strategies besides doing any damage to the boss. The raid group is divided into 2 groups. A ranged group is organized to stand around the boss with a 10 yard range from each other. A melee group is assigned to stand slightly behind the boss when the main tank and off-tank have to keep the boss away from this group. In this fight, *Festergut* casts three sets of *Spores* and *Pungent Blight*. *Pungent Blights* deal damage of around 50,000 to every single player in a group. In order to take less damage, players need to gain *Inoculation* by standing within 5 yard of a *Spore* when *Festergut* casts it. Generally there are two collapsed points: one for the melee group and the other for the ranged group outside. Whenever the *Spores* appear, other gamers will have to stack on those specific players who have the *Spores* above their avatars.

During this gaming session, raid members have coordinated with the raid leader through a variety of in-game tools made available to all raid members. These tools include online chat area for textual interactions (Box 1), visual representations of party members and their health and mana bars (Box 2), textual alerts from *DBM* to inform gamers of the gameplay (Box 3), and textual updates of party members' *DPS* status (Box 4) (Refer to Figure 4.2). For example, in addition to constant textual interactions among gamers (as seen in Box 1), variations of their strength levels are shown at Box 2 and Box 4. The first attempt of killing the *Festergut* boss failed and then the raid leader decided to go for the next boss instead.



Figure 4.2: Various In-Game Tools in this Raid.

GAMING SESSION 2: The raid group led by *Prophecy* guild is attacking a group of mobs before the first boss, *Lord Marrowgar*, in the *Icecrown Citadel*. Before the raid begins, the raid leader first tells the group members what to do and what to expect during the entire boss fight. During this offensive encounter with *Lord Marrowgar*, raid members are ordered by the leader to stand inside of the hit box area (except for the hunter class players) right under the position of the boss to attack him effectively.



Gaming Session 2: Fighting with *Lord Marrowgar*.

The raid leader mainly uses aural interactivity to facilitate his interactions with other raid members. Rationale for such a strategy is communicated to all other raid members, so the advantages (i.e., of not allowing the boss to easily damage them) are communicated to all other raid members. This gaming session also involves fast-paced and intense visual and kinetic interactivities (Refer to Gaming Session 2). For example, *Lord Marrowgar* uses *Bone Spike Graveyard* to attack many players. When this boss begins his attack, ranged *DPS* and nearby melee *DPS* members begin to free members impaled with *Bone Spikes* right away. *Lord Marrowgar* also does *Bone Storm* attacks every 30 seconds. These attacks demonstrate very intense kinetic interactivity among these gamers in this raid. The gamers as well as their avatars have to move quickly to coordinate with other gamers, so the raid will be successful.

To minimize the damage possibly done to the gamers, these raid members will have to run away from the boss to dodge its whirlwind attack and the *Coldflames* cast on the ground. The situation demands that all gamers cooperate closely with other team members to accomplish the task. Because this gaming session requires fast-moving actions, kinetic interactions are very intense and highly interactive. Actions taken by any gamer will influence how the raid will proceed, which demands close coordination among all participating gamers. As observed in Gaming Session 2, during this raid, the guild leader has instructed his members through aural commands to “disarm the trap,” “move the right,” “get the spot and to pop it,” etc. Aural interactivities as demonstrated in these timely commands are in response to new rhetorical situations the gamers have to respond to in order to succeed. The raid leader keeps checking with the members in the raid to ensure if they have disarmed some opposition avatars. Knowing which opposition avatars have been disarmed or terminated will help formulate new strategies that are to generate more commands. These voice commands then prompt various textual, visual, and kinetic interactivities among the gamers when their avatars interact with the in-game design elements and other gamers. As seen in Gaming Session 2, these voice commands often lead to other types of interactivities. The heavy use of aural interactivity is particularly noteworthy because, unlike textual

commands, aural commands enable gamers to listen to what to be done and react promptly as the gaming situation requires. This type of interactivity is appropriate for this situation because intensive and prompt interactions are to be anticipated among the gamers.

This gaming session involves 25 raid members who collaborate with each other to complete the task. During the attack, the raid leader, *Tenaz*, uses voice commands to arrange the rest of raid members to proceed to different strategic positions to facilitate the attacks. For the raid members who have not responded immediately to his request, the raid leader uses other types of voice commands to ensure his decision is heard and followed promptly. When not interacting verbally, other guild members use the textual input function by typing their thoughts and comments, so other gamers are informed and persuaded. Also, the raid leader initiated in-game ready check function to make sure everyone understands the strategy and is ready to fight.

During this highly intensive attack session, a large amount of multimodal interactions exist among raid members, between raid members and their characters.

In Figure 4.3, the captured image from Gaming Session 2 demonstrates that a combination of mainly visual and kinetic interactions is employed by gamers in order to succeed in this raid. Visual interactivities as part of the in-game design elements provide the health and mana status of the players (Box 1 and Box 5), as well as that of the in-game character (such as *Lord Marrowgar*) (Box 2). Continual updates of the gameplay and party

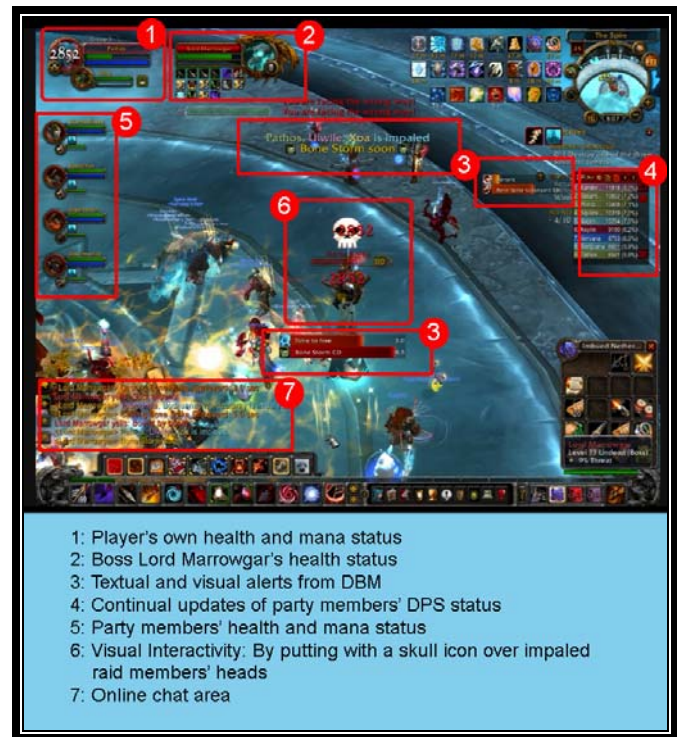
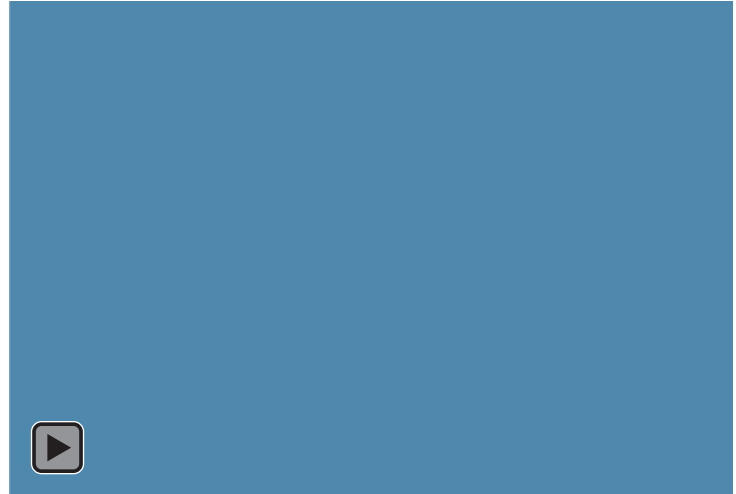


Figure 4.3: Intensive Visual and Kinetic Interactivities.

members' *DPS* status are provided through either visual, textual, or a combination of both interactivities (Box 3 and Box 4). A skull icon like the one in Box 6 is an in-game design element that displays over an impaled raid member.

In Gaming Clip 4.1, it shows that a gameplay session involves multiple interactivities by *Tenaz* to provide detailed voice commands to the team to strategize the attack of *Lord Marrowgar*. His commands lead to very intensive and prompt responses from the team members when gamer avatars show kinetic interactivities by moving around *Lord*



Gaming Clip 4.1: Attacking *Lord Marrowgar* in this Raid.

Marrowgar. Visual interactivities as a result of the attack are clearly observed with flashes of lights, engaging background voices from *Lord Marrogar*, and textual interactions (such as “Casting Bone Spike Graveyard: 3.0 sec.” or “Yourpanda, Bodijuana, Wordzofpray is impaled”) that inform the gamers about the situation and their progress in this raid.

GAMING SESSION 3: The raid group decides as a team whether to use cannons or simply jump back and forth to attack the third boss fight in the *Icecrown Citadel*. The main task of this gaming session is to attack the *Gunship* by using cannons equipped on the gunship and attack allies that appear both on the enemy's gunship and the raid group's ship. The recorded gaming session lasts about 13 minutes and is composed of two recorded gaming sessions, due to the limitations of FRAPS software in recording a long gaming session. I merged these files into one single gaming session file with Microsoft Movie Maker software.

The gaming session begins when the raid leader organizes participants to form a raid team to attack the *Gunship* (Refer to Gaming Session 3). The effort to take over the *Gunship* includes intensive jumping back and forth between the enemy and alliance gunships to kill *Battle Mage* and *Axe*



Gaming Session 3: Attacking the *Gunship*.

Throwers, killing mobs/allies coming out of the portals, and using the cannons on the alliance gunship to demand all raid members to fully coordinate with each other, demonstrating many kinetic interactivities during gameplay. For example, the raid leader asks every guild member to be on the right position before the raid begins. As such, these gamer avatars move around in response to raid leader's aural interactivity. Similarly, using aural interactivities, the raid leader guides other team members to follow his rhetorical expressions by moving their avatars accordingly. The raid leader's aural command/interactivity demands immediate kinetic responses and actions as shown in Gaming Clip 4.2 when the raid leaders instructs one of the gamers, *Shyron*, to act quickly to avoid being killed. Because deceased gamers will end their participation in the gaming session, it is a good strategy to express the negative consequence of violating the raid leader's aural commands in order to persuade these gamers to comply with the raid leader's rhetorical expressions.



Gaming Clip 4.2: The Raid Leader Uses Aural Interactivity to Guide and Persuade Another Gamer.

As shown in Gaming Session 3, the raid leader is able to manipulate the team

gamers to take actions because of their status and experience that are accumulated through their past experience playing *WoW*. Such familiarities with the rules of the game (or “procedural rhetoric” to use Bogost’s term) enable the raid leader to become a persuasive rhetor with well-respected expertise among less experienced gamers. These gamers are willing to be persuaded and guided by the raid leader because their compliance often leads to a successful raid and positive H.I.R.E. The success will promote them to a higher hierarchy in the game. On the other hand, a failed raid leader will lose not only their status, but suffer from not having a successful and highly engaging and satisfying gameplay experience.

The raid leader also determines the strategies and tactics that the raid plans to use in this attack. The communication of these strategies to all participating gamers is persuasive in nature because the intention is to ensure strict compliance among the gamers. Due to the status a raid leader enjoys, strategies are not challenged by other gamers. Full compliance is



Gaming Clip 4.3: Intensive Multimodal Interactivities.

always expected. As shown in Gaming Clip 4.3, the raid leader communicates his strategies to the raid members by voicing what to do in every important step in the attack. When the attack begins, intensive interactivity is found when the players use the cannon to attack the opponents. The gamer avatars also interact fiercely with other players. For example, the raid leader asks one of the gamers, *DPS*, to jump back and forth to his assigned position. The aural interactivity of the raid leader thus generates kinetic interactions on the part of *DPS*, and many other gamers (such as *RhhockeyBoy*) in this attack sequence. Interactivities initiated by the gamers have led to textual responses as part of the in-game design elements (such as “Spell is not ready yet”, “Your target is dead”, “New Adds Soon”, etc). Other in-game

design elements also provide visual interactivities in response to the attacks from the gamers with the cannons.

GAMING SESSION 4: The raid leader prepares the raid members for a battle with *Lady Deathwhisper*, who is the second in command in the *Icecrown Citadel*. In this gaming session, the raid leader begins by arranging each raid member in different strategic positions, so the raid can be ready for the upcoming battle with the arch enemy, *Lady*



Gaming Session 4: Placing Raid Members to their Strategic Positions before Fighting with *Lady Deathwhisper*.

Deathwhisper. The raid leader uses aural commands to assign each guild member to either the right, left, or back positions. For example, aural interactivity is done by saying “Bodi going on the left,” “Xander going on the back with RhhockeyBoy,” “Character A is assigned to the right flank..... are assigned to the left flank. are assigned to the back of the room.” Other gamers have immediately provided aural feedback to clarify what to do after hearing the commands. These exchanges of aural interactivities demonstrate a sequence of persuasive expressions initiated by the raid leader. Even though the voice commands tend to be brief and succinct, they are persuasive because all identified raid members (such as *Bodi*, *Xander*, or *RhhockeyBoy*) have all acted accordingly. These gamers demonstrate their kinetic responses after being persuaded by the raid leader. In other words, the aural interactivity initiated by the raid leader has led to the persuasion of the raid members to respond by using kinetic interactivities (as demonstrated by the movement of avatars). The strategic positioning of each raid member is an important step because the leader needs to prepare every player by counting down before the raid begins.

The multimodal interactivities are not merely employed by interactions between the raid leader and gamers. In Gaming Session 4, other raid members are found to employ textual and aural interactivities to communicate with each other, so their gaming experience can be greatly enhanced. These multimodal interactivities are noteworthy rhetorical expressions and practices as seen in any MMORPG gaming sessions. For the fight with *Lady Deathwhisper*, the raid members will have to kill the allies showing up on the left flank, right flank, and in the back close to the gate quickly and efficiently during the phase one. After the allies are terminated successfully, all *DPS* raid members need to switch back to *Lady Deathwhisper* as soon as possible, so her mana shield will disappear and then go into the next phase of the fight. Also, *Damage per Second (DPS)* of the raid members plays an important role during the complete period of the fight. The game is designed to contain the gameplay rule that, the higher amount of *DPS* a raid group has, the sooner a task can be done. The raid leader arranges the positions according to their classes and *DPS* attributes (melee and ranged) evenly to the left and right to make sure the time limitation will be met.

Lady Deathwhisper is a Non-Player Character (NPC) and a virtual representation of various in-game design elements created by the designers of *WoW* to make the *Icecrown Citadel* raid dungeon persuasive. *Lady Deathwhisper* is an in-game character equipped with multimodal interactive capabilities to make the raid in *WoW* convincing and entertaining. For example, *Lady Deathwhisper* often threatens the gamers with

her aural and textual interactivities during the raid. She voices her anger by saying “What is this disturbance? You dare trespass on this hallowed ground. This shall be your final resting place....” In



Gaming Clip 4.4: Multimodal Interactive Capabilities of *Lady Deathwhisper*.

addition, her threats are presented in the textual area in red fonts at the left bottom of the screen. The use of the term, “hallowed ground”, intends to present a sense of medieval atmosphere and carries the same meaning as a sacred ground blessed by priests, druids, and shamans. *Lady Deathwhisper* is programmed to cast *Death and Decay* spell, which is a green puddle on the ground and deals damage to players who stand in it (Refer to Gaming Clip 4.4). When *Lady Deathwhisper* continues to present her rhetorical expressions either through aural, visual, or kinetic interactivities by voicing her threats, waving her magic power, and casting her green puddle spell visually, all gamers have to respond by either moving their avatars (i.e., kinetic interactivity), and discussing their strategies that will lead to more kinetic interactivities among these gamers, so they can avoid being terminated. In Gaming Clip 4.5, it is evident that the interactivities initiated by in-game characters like *Lady Deathwhisper* are capable of generating more multimodal interactivities among these participating gamers. These gamers respond promptly to make the gameplay enjoyable and engaging. At the beginning of this gaming clip, the raid leader has rearranged the gamers to a new strategic position. The raid leader has used aural commands to persuade selected gamers to respond by moving their avatars. Once this is done, *Lady Deathwhisper* voices another rounds of embedded aural interactivity. In response, the raid leader has solicited the help of a caster, so the raid can be successful. During this raid, numerous interactivities can be observed on the screen near the end of Gaming Clip 4.5. Visually engaging images are shown when the gamers attack *Lady Deathwhisper*. Textual interactivities (such as “Out of Range” and



Gaming Clip 4.5: Gamers’ Multimodal Interactive Responses to *Lady Deathwhisper*’s Aural, Visual, Textual, and Kinetic Interactivities.

“Dominate the Mind of Nugemage”) that record spontaneous gamer actions are also presented to let the gamers know their status in the game.

These embedded in-game design elements are rhetorical expressions and practices produced by *WoW* game designers (as rhetors) to make *Lady Deathwhisper* a persuasive character with her magical power. Her rhetorical expressions and practices are rhetorical in nature because they intend to persuade and invite multimodal interactivities from these gamers. Adding these visual effects (or visual interactivities) is game designers’ persuasive tool to make *WoW* more engaging and entertaining. As demonstrated in Gaming Session 4, Gaming Clips 4.4 and 4.5, the battle with *Lady Deathwhisper* involves textual, aural, visual, and kinetic interactivities used by the gamers to interact with each other, game characters, and in-game interface. All these rhetorical expressions and practices enable the gamers to fully immerse with the game environment and the characters in their pursuit of highly engaging intensive rhetorical experience. The experience is rhetorical in nature, in that all gamers constantly employ multimodal interactive expressions and practices to persuade other gamers and the in-game design elements. For example, *Lady Deathwhisper’s* voice is heard by all raid members along with the textual representations of what she says. The raid leader coordinates through aural and textual commands to persuade all members and ensure all raid members work synergistically to defeat *Lady Deathwhisper*. His persuasion is effective because he clearly recommends what should be done to make a successful raid.

As shown in Figure 4.4, textual interactivity among these gamers is shown at the bottom left corner (Box 7). On the other hand, aural and visual interactivities are abundant in this raid to defeat *Lady Deathwhisper*. For example, Box 1 presents information about players' health and mana, and Box 3 provides other raid members' health and mana status. Box 2, on the other hand, informs the gamers about *Lady Deathwhisper's* health and mana status.

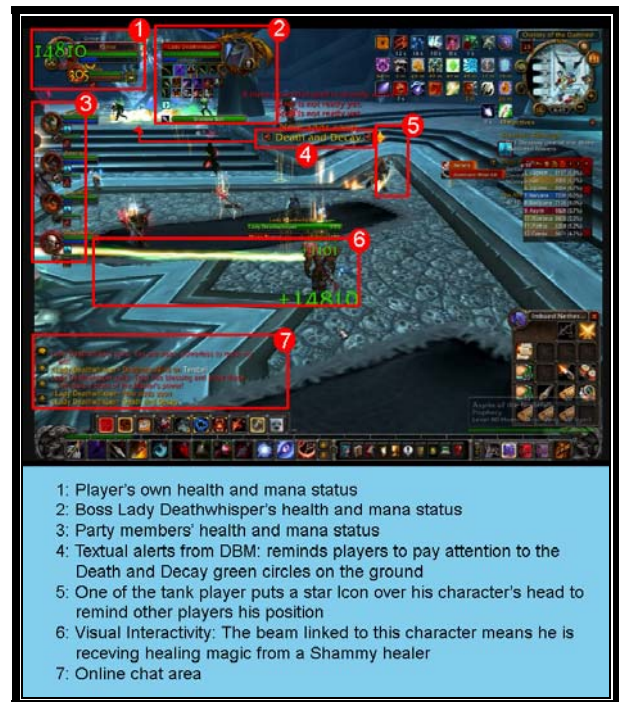


Figure 4.4: Synergetic Uses of Multi-Modal Interactivities to Defeat *Lady Deathwhisper*.

Participating gamers use these multimodal interactivities to collaborate with each other in this raid by sharing their assessment of the raid situation from reading textual alerts in Box 4 and textual chats in Box 7. Kinetic interactions produced by the gamers are often manifested by in-game design elements such as a visual icon over the character to remind other players of his position during gameplay (Box 5). The raid leader proposes a series of strategies to the gamers who decide if these decisions are persuasive and need to be followed. Once agreed upon, the raid team works closely with each other by moving their avatars, firing weapons (kinetic interactivity) to defeat the enemy (Refer to Figure 4.4).

GAMING SESSION 5: This gaming session is an excellent example of how aural interactions alone can help the strategic planning process among gamers before a raid begins. Through the discussion, the raid leader prepares the raid members for a series of pending battles with *Beasts of Northrend* and *Lord Jaraxxus*, in a 10-man raid dungeon-*Trial of the Crusader*. *Trial of the Crusader* is an epic 10- and 25-man raid dungeon in the crusader's Coliseum. There are five encounters in total in this recorded gaming session (Refer to Gaming Session 5).

In Gaming Session 5, it demonstrates the use of multimodal interactivities is essential to the success of a raid when seamless interactivities among gamers are made possible.

Any difficulties will lead to a disappointing outcome. As shown in this session, one of the raid players finds out that another gamer, *Slimwit* (a *Hunter* class), is not in vent and cannot hear people discussing the strategy for the next boss. The problem with aural

interactivity leads to more discussions by means of aural interactions among these gamers to find out what is going on. *Slimwit's* situation creates the exigence prompting for discussion because other gamers want to discover the difficulty encountered by this gamer before a pending battle will be launched shortly. When the gamers begin to talk about *Slimwit's* poor performance in the raid, they examine various in-game design elements that indicate *Hunter-Slimwit's* status and end up noticing his gearing issue (Refer to Gaming Clip 4.6).

Visual interactive in-game elements are also useful rhetorical expressions that can help these gamers to persuade each other to justify *Slimwit's* poor performance. In addition to the dominant use of aural interactivity in this session, embedded visual and textual in-game elements such as *Slimwit's DPS*



Gaming Session 5: Aural Interactivity in Planning raid Strategies before the Battles with *Beasts of Northrend* and *Lord Jaraxxus*.



Gaming Clip 4.6: Intensive Aural Interactions in Response to an Exigence Created by *Slimwit's* Situation.

number is used by gamers to comprehend the situation. This visual element functions as a rhetorical expression created by the game designers to inform the gamers of *Slimwit's* status. As shown in Gaming Clip 4.7., one of the *healer* players, *Chewchew*, opens the *Recount* window to see *Slimwit's DPS* number and finds out that he is the bottom *DPS* in group and then clicks on *Slimwit's* portrait icon on the screen and checks *Slimwit's* gears (Refer to Gaming Clip 4.7).

As shown in the gaming session and clips, participating raid members have coordinated with the raid leader through a variety of embedded in-game rhetorical tools made available to all raid members, through which they can persuade each other about the



Gaming Clip 4.7: A Combination of Visual and Textual In-game Design Elements to Persuade Gamers.

situation created by *Slimwit*. For example, what makes *Slimwit* a bad performer? Is this related to the wrong gear that *Slimwit* is wearing? What happens to *Slimwit* and his decisions to act during gameplay? In the process of making sense of *Slimwit's* situation, in-game design elements such as *DPS* data and *Slimwit's* visual representation (i.e., portrait icons) function as useful rhetorical tools that help the gamers to make sense of the situation. Other useful in-game tools include engaging graphics/visual elements, background sounds of attack, online chat areas, icons of guild members, and continual updates of guild members' health, mana, or *DPS*, etc. As demonstrated in the short Gaming Clip 4.7, these gamers can use *DPS* data to better understand what makes *Slimwit* a bad performer during the raid.

GAMING SESSION 6: In this gaming session, five gamers try to accomplish an in-game achievement task, *Split Personality*, inside the heroic mode Nexus 5-man dungeon. To achieve the goal, all five gamers from the same *WoW* server will use their crowd control spells to defeat *Grand Magus*

Telestra after killing her three split personalities within 5 seconds between splits. This is considered an achievement record for gamers because of the complexity and difficulty involved in completing this task. The embedded rhetorical practices of killing the splits within 5 second are to create a sense of urgency to demand prompt gamer reactions. Five gamers in this session are *Mysticfever* (dungeon leader), *Kashagan*, *Malkie*,

Likimeya, and *Ethos*. At the beginning of this session, *Mysticfever* tries to know what and how many crowd controls in the group and seeks out the best way to accomplish the task. In the middle of gameplay, *Ethos* and *Likimeya* request clarifications after the first attempt to kill the boss fails. After the second attempt also fails, the group discusses if this is due to *Malkie*'s multi-shot problem that ruins the task and ponders over when to use *AoE* during the fight to succeed in the future. The entire gaming session lasts about 50 minutes and an abbreviated 2 minutes session presenting the first attempt is included in Gaming Session 6.

Like many gaming sessions recorded for this dissertation, aural interactivities among gamers continue to the principal interactive mode during gameplay. These five players also use the in-game text chat function (i.e., textual interactivity) and speak through the microphone (i.e., aural interactivity) to communicate with



Gaming Session 6: Interactivities during a *Split Personality* Achievement Task.



Gaming Clip 4.8: Employing Textual Interactivity to Prompt other Gamers' Responses.

each other during the entire gaming session. As shown in Gaming Clip 4.8, *Ethos* uses two online textual chats to request clarifications about the strategy. *Ethos* types “sorry, I am not sure if I understand this,” followed by another textual interaction, “do we kill the splits all at the same time.” Both textual interactions prompt the leader, *Mysticfever*, to explain the strategy further, so *Ethos* can be persuaded by her knowledge of the game. Through aural interactions, *Mysticfever* says. Basically we have to get uhh...all of them down within 5 seconds as the first one goes down. And we have to do this both time of the splits...” *Mysticfever* intends to clarify the “procedural rhetoric” embedded in the game by the designer, as to how to successfully complete the *Split Personality* task. The task requires that the gamers kill the split personalities (i.e., visual rhetorical representations) of *Grand Magus Telestra* within a short 5 second to succeed in the task (Refer to Gaming Clip 4.8).

Because the *Split Personality* task involves various strategic decisions before the task begins, intensive aural interactivity can be observed in Gaming Clip 4.9. During the aural interactions, *Mysticfever* lays out her attack strategy, and also points out any contingency plan in case the original idea falls apart. *Mysticfever* says, “Okay, the plan is if we don’t get it...basically run out to here. Wait over here and she (the boss) will reset.” This strategy is to ensure all gamers will move their avatars accordingly and not be stuck inside the dungeon if the attempt fails. To ensure that her strategy is understood by the rest of the raid, *Mysticfever* uses her character to indicate where she wants the other four players to go by running to the opposite direction. Kinetic interaction of *Mysticfever*’s avatar functions as a persuasive tool to make her strategy easy-to-



Gaming Clip 4.9: Determining an Effective Strategy before Attacking *Grand Magus Telestra*.

understand. Furthermore, by demonstrating how each gamer will be positioned in the raid, *Mysticfever* makes her argument more persuasive among these raid participants.

According to the rhetorical practices written by *WoW* designers about *Grand Magus Telestra*, this boss has three split personalities represented in blue, purple and red. These three visual representations embedded in *WoW* are rhetorical expressions and practices by game designers as part of the Achievement task (to kill three personalities within the allowable seconds). In response to the task, *Mysticfever* develops her strategy accordingly by assigning each gamer to the target. *Mysticfever's* strategy can be argued as a rhetorical practice in response to a rhetorical situation presented to the raid team. *Mysticfever* says, "For now, I want to have...umm...I guess Malkie on Blue (the blue split image) or what you want, Likimeya (the Shaman Player)?" *Malkie* responds by typing "On it," when *Likimeya* voices his agreement, "Sorry, whatever works. I don't care." *Likimeya* is assigned to deal with the purple image. *Mysticfever* shares her observation about how to deal with the red split personality of *Grand Magus Telestra*. She proposes to leave its red image alone until all gamers have reached certain *DPS* points of 20,000 (as proposed by *Likimeya*), which is accepted before all gamers enter the dungeon. The intensive exchanges of thoughts demonstrate a process in which all participants want to make sense of the situation by exchanging their knowledge about these embedded rhetorical expressions of practices. In the end, the process of persuasion concludes with all gamers agree with the proposed attack strategy and become more familiar with the several in-game design elements to succeed in *Split Personality* task.

GAMING SESSION 7: In this fifty-minute session, the raid leader, *Anister*, tries to persuade other gamers to follow his strategy in order to succeed in this raid. After the first attempt, his strategy turns out to be ineffective and the whole raid fails. *Anister* tells other players to come back for another try. Near the end of this session, the dragon boss, *Onyxia*, is almost dead, but there are only two tank players alive to terminate her. Other players start to encourage these two players to continue with their

attack. In the end, players are very excited when the dragon boss, *Onyxia*, is killed. The raid leader and the raid use *Ventrilo* software, which allows the gamers to talk with each other, in addition to in-game text chat throughout the gaming session (Refer to Gaming Session 7).

Because there are thirteen gamers participating in this gaming session, it is important to make sure all gamers agree with the strategies in the raid. The goal of this raid is to kill the red dragon boss, *Onyxia*, inside a raid dungeon manned by ten people and located in the *Wyrmbog, Dustwallow Marsh*. At the beginning, the raid leader, *Brugarude*, tries to persuade other gamers to follow his strategies on how to defeat this dragon. To do this, aural interactivity is used by *Brugarude* when he says “make sure you all ranged (*DPS* players) are sticking around on one side, kind like stay here...if you can or stay close to the middle...” The aural interactions imply that other raid members will follow the leader’s command to move their avatars to the assigned positions. The raid leader also tries to remind the rest of the raid team to stand within the range those healers can reach, and he also tries to make everything organized before the ultimate encounter with the boss.



Gaming Session 7: The Use of In-game Design Interactivities to Plan the Attack Strategy to Kill dragon boss, *Onyxia*.



Gaming Clip 4.10: Using the In-Game Map to Explain an Attack Strategy.

In Gaming Clip 4.10, *Attreyu* says, “So...umm...Brugarude, can you pin it again in the map where you want...the ranged (*DPS*) and the healers?” *Attreyu* uses this aural interaction to request kinetic responses from *Brugarude* to clarify the strategy and request more details about what to do. *WoW* comes with an in-game map on the upper right-hand side of the screen. As a visual interactive element embedded by *WoW* game designers, the in-game map is used by the gamers to locate their positions in the virtual environment. The in-game map is a rhetorical expression used by the game designers to create a sense of geographical reality even in a virtual gaming environment. Moreover, information obtained by reading the map helps gamers to interact with other gamers and many in-game design elements (Figure 4.5). As such, the in-game map also functions as a rhetorical tool to help persuade these gamers to



Figure 4.5: An Example of the In-game Location Mini-Map.

In Gaming Clip 4.11, I observe that gamers can challenge the raid leader’s strategy by offering an alternative solution. This suggests the strategic decision is a process of negotiation that involves the gamers, the in-game design elements, and the game designers. One distinctive feature of *WoW* is the ability of gamers to negotiate a strategy before their interactions with the rhetorical expressions and practices of game designers. The raid leader is expected to be familiar with the rules, so the proposed strategy will be highly respected. When the raid leader lacks in experience to persuade other gamers, the formulation of the strategy will rely on more on other more skillful player.

In Gaming Clip 4.11, the raid leader, *Brugarude*, acknowledges his lack of experience with an in-game design element, *healers*, programmed as “gifted and powerful spellcasters who draw power from nature, faith and the spirits” (WoWwiki

<http://www.wowwiki.com/Healer>). As a result,

one of the gamers, *Chromestone*, jumps in to offer his own strategy by saying, “just stick

with the long ranged (*DPS*), if it’s not too far, they will just all group together and everyone is in one place. And if there is a whelp (little adds), somebody just go aheadso.” These aural interactions in negotiating an acceptable strategy lead to *Brugarude* to develop a strategy acceptable to all gamers. He

confirms his final strategy by voicing his request to “make sure all ranged and healers all over on this side.... Deepbreath coming just get out ...and get back there,” so the raid will be successful. This

gaming session is a good example of H.I.R.E., experienced by these gamers when they collaborate

closely to complete a successful raid. At the beginning of the raid, aural and textual interactivities are

used to strategize and organize the raid. Gamers exchange their thoughts through aural interactions

(Refer to Gaming Clip 4.10 and 4.11), so persuasion to accept the strategy can be successful. Intensive

kinetic interactions follow when all gamers gang up together to kill the boss dragon, *Onyxia*. In Gaming

Clip 4.12, all gamers need to move their avatars promptly to respond to ever-changing counter-attacks of

the dragon boss. Engaging visuals with quick actions and flashes are captured in the gaming clip to show

the demanding nature of gameplay experiences in *WoW*. When *Onyxia* is finally killed, all gamers voice

their happiness to see the dragon fallen to the ground. Their excitements are demonstrated when



Gaming Clip 4.11: Strategy Formulation as a Negotiation Process.

Brugarude voices “Woo!!” when *Chewchew* types: “woot” along with similar textual interactions by *Cyble* (“Woo Gratz”), *Ashen* (“woooooooooo!” and “u guys rocked”), and *Bluenorth* (“Ha ha”).

The descriptions of these gaming sessions and clips in this section help contextualize the following discussions on the characteristics of *WoW* and how these characteristics contribute to the generation, maintenance, and enjoyment of H.I.R.E. As demonstrated in Gaming Clip 4.12, accomplishing a difficult raid can be a highly engaging and immersive experience for these gamers. Emotional reactions of the gamers are clearly observed by their intensive multimodal rhetorical expressions and practices. In the section below, I will discuss textual, visual, aural, and kinetic interactivities as demonstrated in these seven gaming sessions. Using the clips from these gaming sessions, I discuss in greater detail the manifestation of these interactivities as rhetorical expressions and practices by the gamers and the game designers. Interactions among and between these participants and design elements manifest the rhetorical engagements that gamers have experienced.

I will mainly focus on identifying, reviewing, and explaining the typology of H.I.R.E. such as the multimodal interactivities, immersions, and ultimate engagement that *WoW* gamers experience during gameplay. A more extensive discussion on the specific rhetorical strategies by *WoW* game designers and gamers will be dealt with in Chapter 5, where how the rhetorical expressions and practices of both gamers and designers to accomplish their persuasive objectives will be explained in details.



Gaming Clip 4.12: Gamers’ Intensive Rhetorical Engagement after Killing boss dragon, *Onyxia*.

4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF *WoW* AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH H.I.R.E.

A descriptive approach to the characteristics of MMORPGs is commonly found in the game literature. For example, Tychsen, Hitchens, Brolund, and Kavakli summarize MMORPGs have the following characteristics: 1) intensive physical actions (in particular, among avatar-based MMORPGs); 2) the capacity to have as large as possible number of players taking part in the game; 3) complete freedom for gamers to create their own narratives without game designers' pre-determined control; 4) strong emphasis on gamer interactions and collaboration; 5) attempt to offer a game environment to facilitate storytelling among gamers (253). The seven gaming sessions exemplify many characteristics that scholars have found about MMORPGs in their research (Mortensen; Tychsen, Hitchens, Brolund, and Kavakli).

The first feature of *WoW* addresses the kinetic interactivity where MMORPGs demand their players to respond to the challenges of many in-game design elements. I claim these in-game design elements are *WoW* game designers' rhetorical expressions and practices to persuade and engage the gamers, when the gamers are required to create their own rhetorical expressions to the rhetorical situation in a raid. In Gaming Clip 4.13, the raid leader, *Tenaz*, voices his commands (i.e., aural interactivity) to which other gamers respond by moving their avatars (i.e., kinetic interactivity). Multimodal responses of the gamers are rhetorical because regardless of gamer modality of interactivities, other gamers and the in-game design elements are likely to be persuaded to act accordingly. Textual chats of the gamers will cause other gamers to respond by typing, by moving their avatars to each assigned position, or by verbally asking for more clarifications. Aural interactions lead to other kinetic responses of the gamers and are shown visually in Gaming Clip 4.13.

The second feature of *WoW* creates a platform where many gamers can interact and share their multimodal interactions. These interactions include using the pre-determined in-game elements (like avatars, in-game map, gameplay rules, etc) to interact and persuade other gamers. As shown in



Gaming Clip 4.13: *Tenaz*, the Raid Leader, Uses Aural Interactivity to Assign Gamers to their Positions.

Gaming Clip 4.13, the raid leader, *Tenaz*,

is given the authority to assign each gamer by saying, “Bodi go on the left. Nuges go...umm...go on the right...Xander go on the back with Rhhockeyboy.” This power is granted to the raid leader because of “the procedural rhetoric” (i.e., gameplay rules in *WoW*) that a raid leader can persuade other less experienced gamers in the raid team to act accordingly. *Tenaz* is a respected raid leader because his past achievements in the game. Respect toward a virtual fictitious character manifests that they are persuaded by the rules of gameplay (i.e., Ian Bogost’s rhetoric of procedure) in *WoW* and their compliance will generate a satisfactory gameplay experience. These embedded rules of gameplay dictate how each role should play and act through the use of in-game multimodal interactivities.

The third, fourth, and fifth features of MMORPGs refer to how these gamers can adopt their visual representations (i.e., avatars) programmed as game designers’ rhetorical tools to persuade other gamers to play the game through the alteration of the *WoW* environment. At the same time, *WoW* allows all gamers to create their own experience by freely interacting with other gamers after integrating the in-game design elements into their avatars. For example, the gamers can choose their own avatars, the gears related to the avatars, and freely roam around the virtual gaming landscape. As demonstrated in Gaming Clip 4.14, the players with magic buff abilities try to buff everybody up by adding more

strengths and skills to other players. For example, a *priest* class can give the whole group *Fortitude* and *Spirit* buff to increase their health and the speed of mana and health regeneration. With the ability to alter skills and abilities of other gamers, a gamer is capable of creating something very similar to game designers' control over these visual



Gaming Clip 4.14: Adding Strengths and Skills to other Gamers through *Magic Buff* Ability.

representations and gameplay rules. By means of offering the magic buff to other players, a new gameplay story can be told when more gamers participate in the gaming session. When people are casting the buffs, visual effects are observed over their heads, which shows an enticing gaming environment for all players.

As demonstrated above, hybrid and multimodal interactivities are abundant during *WoW* gameplay. The gaming sessions and clips show that the gamers often use a single interactivity or a combination of multimodal interactivities during their interactions in *WoW*. In the following discussion, I will focus on the multimodal interactivities as one of the most distinctive features of *WoW* and discuss how the different types of interactivities or their combination explain H.I.R.E. experienced during gameplay. My discussions, however, will not merely examine how *WoW* game designers employ the attractive in-game design elements (e.g., avatars, landscapes, or rules) to engage these gamers. Rather, the position of this dissertation intends to argue all gamers are required to constantly interact with the rhetorical expressions and practices presented by the *WoW* game designers. Furthermore, these gamers also interact with other gamers through these pre-determined rhetorical expressions and practices embedded in *WoW* to form the gaming environment. Their interactions are always negotiated and

contested during gameplay in order to accomplish some tasks and ultimately lead to the advancement of the status of the gamers in *WoW*.

As discussed above, gameplay is rhetorical because participating gamers constantly interpret, respond to, and reflect upon the rhetorical expressions and practices of textual, aural, visual, and kinetic representations programmed by the game designers and generated by other gamers. This concurs with Aphra Kerr in his description of gameplay as equivalent to “stepping into a ‘magic circle’ where one agree to play according to the rules and becomes a willing participant” (125). To take Gaming Session 6 as an example, when the gamers enter into the task of *Split Personality*, they are required to understand the rules associated with this task; that is, to kill the “splits” within a 5-second interval. They are also required to respond to the visual and kinetic interactions of the in-game “splits” as well as of those of other gamers, so the achievement task can

be successfully completed. The interpretation of what has been presented, said, and acted upon is rhetorical because it shows these gamers interact with these symbolic representations written as rules/rhetorical practices during gameplay.

Furthermore, the gamers are required to reflect upon their actions during gameplay, so they can be a skilled and responsive

player (Refer to Gaming Clip 4.15). The rhetoric of procedures as shown in Gaming Clip 4.15 is programmed so that the gamers must respond using the embedded multimodal interactivities to succeed in the raid. The rhetorical practices of killing the “splits” are also programmed so that all gamers in the raid need to follow the rules to succeed in this task.



Gaming Clip 4.15: Intensive Multi-modal Interactivities during a *Split Personality* Achievement Task.

Furthermore, when *WoW* designers determine to create a medieval scene in which rules of interactions, stories about medieval characters, creatures, and landscape elements are embedded in this popular MMOPRG, the designers intend to make a digital game product that persuades gamers to buy, to subscribe, and to remain a player with the game after the initial free trial. These gamers need to be persuaded and convinced after reviewing the product package and website that *WoW* is a worthy digital game to play among many other competitive offerings in the marketplace. However, the rhetorics of invitation manifested in the product package design and advertising campaigns do not stop after the gamers create their own account with *WoW*. These gamers need to be “invited” back to future gameplay through the sophisticated creation of many persuasive rhetorical expressions and practices produced by the game designers as well as other gamers.

Rhetorical engagements with *WoW* are contingent with the skill levels of the gamers, the locations and the levels of the raids/dungeons, and embedded objectives of each raid/dungeon as written by game designers. It is not feasible to discuss these at great length since there will be hundreds of combinations of different dungeons, raids, goals, and gamers because *WoW* is constantly being upgraded. In the Table 4.1, I present the names of the dungeons/raids, their locations, levels, and goals of seven gaming sessions in this dissertation. For example, Gaming Session 1 occurs in the *Icecrown Citadel* geographically located in the *Plagueworks* wing of the *Icecrown Citadel*, in the *Icecrown Glacier*. The raid is set to allow 25 players to participate and only accessible to those with the skill levels of 80.

As shown in Table 4.1, *WoW* game designers act together as rhetors to develop the stories as their rhetorical expressions and practices. The “procedural rhetoric” is arbitrarily, yet creatively, written for each dungeon and raid to make the game engaging and enjoyable to potential gamers. Derived from the Western medieval cultural and historical themes, the visual representations of each *WoW* raid and dungeon have also been created to be persuasive to participating gamers mainly from the West.

However, these cultural representations are attractive to any gamers from different cultural backgrounds. The expressions and practices of the defeating-the-monster scenes once programmed into *WoW* become rhetorical. When gamers enter into the raid to begin their multimodal interactions with these in-game design elements, they are, at the same time, manipulated to produce their own multimodal rhetorical expressions and practices during gameplay to respond to the rhetorical situation unique to each raid and dungeon in *WoW*.

Table 4.1. Table Summarizing the Names, Locations, Skills, and Goals of the Seven Gaming Sessions.

Gaming Session	Dungeon/Raid Name	Dungeon/Raid Location	Dungeon /Raid Level	Goal and/or Achievement for this Gaming Session
1	<i>Icecrown Citadel</i> (25-player version)	Plagueworks wing of the <i>Icecrown Citadel</i> , <i>Icecrown Glacier</i>	Level 80 raid	To defeat the boss <i>Festergut</i>
2	<i>Icecrown Citadel</i> (25-player version)	The <i>Spire</i> inside of <i>Icecrown Citadel</i> , <i>Icecrown Glacier</i>	Level 80 raid	To clean a group of mobs before the boss <i>Lord Marrowgar</i> and try to kill <i>Lord Marrowgar</i> the first time
3	<i>Icecrown Citadel</i> (25-player version)	Between the <i>Rampart of Skulls</i> and <i>Deathbringer's Rise</i> , <i>Icecrown Citadel</i>	Level 80 raid	To finish <i>Gunship Battle</i>
4	<i>Icecrown Citadel</i> (25-player version)	<i>Oratory of the Damned</i> inside of <i>Icecrown Citadel</i> , <i>Icecrown Glacier</i>	Level 80 raid	To defeat <i>Lady Deathwhisper</i>
5	<i>Trial of the Crusader</i> (10-player version)	<i>Crusaders' Coliseum</i> , <i>Icecrown</i>	Level 80 raid	To kill <i>Beasts of Northrend</i> and <i>Lord Jaraxxus</i>
6	<i>Nexus</i> (5-player heroic mode)	<i>Coldarra</i> , <i>Borean Tundra</i>	Level 80 dungeon	To succeed in the <i>Split Personality</i> achievement
7	<i>Onyxia's Lair</i> (10-player version)	<i>Wyrmbog</i> , <i>Dustwallow Marsh</i>	Level 80 raid	To kill <i>Onyxia</i> , the brood mother of the black dragonflight

The main *WoW* game component has over 30 dungeons that are generally classified as three skill levels: regular, heroic, and raid dungeons. With its new games and expansion patches, such as *The Burning Crusade* and *The Wrath of Lich King*, the number of dungeons can exceed over one hundred. Each type of dungeon represents various difficulty levels related to number of players to enter, and the level range of the mobs, the minimum level to enter the game. For example, Gaming Session 7 records a high level raid in the *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon where a total of maximum 40 gamers can enter and

participate in the dungeon/raid. The nature of this raid requires that all participants are highly skillful (i.e., Level 80 raid) in order to collaborate well in the raid.

The pre-screening mechanism embedded in *WoW* is a rhetorical practice by which game designers can ensure all participants of Gaming Session 7 are familiar with the “procedural rhetoric” of the *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon. With the advanced level these gamers have achieved as a result of past successes, it also means that they are extremely familiar with *WoW* in-game interface designs, storylines, and gameplay skills to interact with these in-game elements. These characteristics are beneficial to the persuasive process game designers intend to achieve because more difficult tasks can be incorporated into the game to make it more challenging, intriguing, and immersive as gameplay experiences.

On the other hand, those gamers who do not possess the adequate skills are unlikely to enjoy recurrent challenges an advanced level 80 raid demands. They are likely to find these challenges both perplexing and frustrating, even if they enter the raid accidentally. I argue the design decision is rhetorical because rhetorical engagement depends on the ability of game designers to see what will be persuasive and through their manipulation of procedural rhetoric to make the *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon only accessible to the gamers with certain levels of skills. In other words, when game designers conceptualize this raid/dungeon, they make purposeful choices of the gameplay rules including the visual representations of the characters, mobs, monsters, and landscapes. Their intention to make the raid/dungeon engaging and immersive prompts the designers to use a variety of rhetorical expressions and practices acceptable by the *WoW* game algorithm.

The interconnected MMORPGs like *WoW* intrigue gamers because of their capabilities to play with anyone around the world who are linked by the Internet to the game servers. This type of global connectedness creates a fictitious sense of community online that makes interactions meaningful for gamers. A sense of being part of a virtual gaming community is important to the decisions to choose an

avatar of their own, so they can be attractively represented as a real person during gameplay. A gamer willing to help others in a game is more likely to choose a *healer's* role, while a gamer who wants to initiate a fight is more likely to choose a tanking class. A *Mage* avatar is said to have the attributes of intellect and spirit (*World of Warcraft Game Manual*).

Once the gamers choose their visual representations predetermined by game designers, they begin the role-playing process by taking up the representations, gears, and skills each avatar is equipped with. However, the final presentation of the avatar is a co-creation process with the creativity of the gamers, as well as the predetermined features of the designers. As

shown in Gaming Clip 4.16, an avatar, or virtual representation, of a gamer is co-created by the embedded avatar feature that comes with *WoW*, and also by a gamer's own decision to clothe and name the avatar. A *Mage* avatar can be named as

Ethos and dressed in clothes provided as an in-game design element. The *Mage* avatar is permitted to use a dagger or a staff as part of his/her advanced weapon skills (*World of Warcraft Game Manual*).

As such, a *Mage* avatar can be considered as a distinctive rhetorical expression unique to a particular gamer taste and



Gaming Clip 4.16: The Co-Creation Process of an Avatar.



Figure 4.6: A Gnome *Mage* Avatar Standing on the Roof Top of a Building in the Stormwind City.

decision to create a virtual representation (Figure 4.6).

In Gaming Session 7, eleven gamers chose *Paladin*, *Priest*, *Hunter*, *Warlock*, *Mage*, or *Druid* classes to represent their virtual presence in this raid. Although there still lacks empirical psychological research about why gamers choose one avatar over the other, selecting a virtual representation during gameplay is rhetorical because the decision is similar to what Scott Consigny describes in his article, “Rhetoric and Its Situations.”

The art of rhetoric must not predetermine what the rhetor finds in the novel situation. But the rhetor must have some means by which he can discover and manage the particularities of each situation. [...] I propose that rhetoric be construed as an art of topics or commonplaces (181).

When entering the *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon that has been designed by the *WoW* game designers (as rhetors)-- the gamers are transformed into different roles capable of producing new rhetorical expressions and practices for the situation; that is, to kill *Onyxia*, the brood mother of the black dragonflight. In order to succeed in the raid, these gamers adopt the avatars that enable them to reflect their own intention and skill levels. These gamers now act like rhetors to choose rhetorical devices to deal with the new situation. Their decisions of these rhetorical expressions are well-planned responses to the situation presented in the *Onyxia's Lair* raid. When given the option to choose the avatars and react, the gamers are bound, to some extent, by the predetermined in-game design rules. This rhetorical situation concurs with Consigny's position that a situation will lead to rhetorical responses; however, how rhetors will respond is contingent on their own decisions to produce rhetorical expressions and practices appropriate to that situation.

The gamers employ multimodal interactivities (such as textual, aural, visual, and kinetic) embedded in *WoW*, to respond to the unique rhetorical situation in the *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon. In

this raid, gamers need to employ these interactivities and collaborate with each other to kill *Onyxia*, the brood mother of the black dragonflight. Textual interactivity is used extensively in most gameplay sessions because of its persuasive effectiveness in both game-to-gamers and gamer-to-gamer interactions.

4.2.1 Textual Interactivity

In this gaming session, textual interactions can be found between gamers and the embedded design elements, as well as among the gamers themselves. Gaming Clip 4.17 is a good example to show how an in-game monster, *Onyxia*, uses textual interactions to threaten gamers during the raid. These threatening words are rhetorical expressions used by *Onyxia* to show her character as an influential black dragon that is manipulative of other mortals and dragons (WoWwiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Onyxia>). *Onyxia* yells, “How fortuitous. Usually, I have to leave my lair in order to feed” and “Learn your place, mortals!” *Onyxia*’s words are written in red fonts, so they can be distinguished from other textual interactions among gamers. These intimidating words are the rhetorical expressions



Gaming Clip 4.17: *Onyxia*’s Threats as an Example of Game-to-Gamer Textual Interactivity.



Figure 4.7: An Image of *Onyxia* from *WoW*.
(Source:
<http://us.battle.net/wow/en/zone/onyxias-lair/onyxia>)

of *WoW* game designers to make the game interesting and inviting to gamers. Intended as rhetorical manipulation to solicit rhetorical responses, these expressions are also consistent with *Onyxia's Non-Player Character (NPC)* to make it a believable and persuasive monster in *WoW* (Figure 4.7).

Although textual interactivity is not the dominant mode of interactions during gameplay for current multimedia MMORPGs, most gamers have to read extensively about *WoW* before they take part in the raids. Before gamers virtually interact with *Onyxia* in this raid, they are often aware of the character of this monster dragon from reading the *WoW* manuals or websites. Their in-game knowledge about this monster and her story actually will make the interactions more entertaining and engaging for these gamers. It makes the gamers feel that they are interacting with a real character. For example, the following description of *Onyxia* from WoWwiki site will enrich their gameplay experiences once participants are fully immersed with *Onyxia's* background (<http://www.wowwiki.com/Onyxia>):

Onyxia is the current broodmother of the black dragonflight on Azeroth. After carefully calculating her plans for many years, she entered into a pact with her elder brother, Nefarian, to take over for their missing father and gain control of the entire flight. To this end, she has begun manipulating many mortals and dragons alike to her own ends and wields considerable political power over many groups.Though Onyxia is relatively small for a black dragon of her age, she shares the same powers and abilities as the rest of her terrible flight. Her searing breath weapon can melt both stone and iron. Her physical attacks, whether bites, scrapes or tail lashes, are lightning quick and nearly unstoppable. When cornered, Onyxia is fond of taking flight and blasting her troublesome prey from above.Though Onyxia has been sighted traveling to and from Blackrock Mountain, her main lair is located in a fiery cave below the Dragonmurk, a dismal swamp located within Dustwallow Marsh. She is guarded there by her kin, the remaining members of the insidious black dragonflight. There also her brood of new eggs is hidden, awaiting

maturation. Should anyone ever threaten Onyxia within her lair — within distance of her precious eggs — her wrath would be terrible beyond comprehension.

These pre-game rhetorical expressions by *WoW* game designers provide gamers with abundant background knowledge of the magical world they will be playing in, the in-game interface elements they will use to interact, the raids they will join and complete, and the characters and avatars they will choose to adopt or terminate. The in-game knowledge is essential for game designers to persuade the gamers because they create a make-believe world that make the rules of gameplay realistic and engaging.

During each gameplay session, information about the raid, the characters involved, experience points of each gamer, etc. is constantly communicated to the gamers through the embedded textual interactivity. A gamer can check comprehensive statistics about the raid leader, *Brugarude*, about the equipment he is wearing, his attributes, and secondary characteristics (Gaming Clip 4.18). *Brugarude*, the raid leader, is an 80 level human warrior and his well-respected experience comes from numerous successful quests and monsters he killed in the past. The gamers in the *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon can use the information to interpret *Brugarude's* commands and judge his ability to lead the raid. In order for

Brugarude to be a persuasive raid leader, his past quest experience should attest to the

strategy he proposes to use in this raid. Apparently, all gamers in the *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon are persuaded by the textual information that supports *Brugarude's* ability to guide them through the raid. The outcomes of their compliance in a successful raid will enable them to obtain experience points.



Gaming Clip 4.18: Checking *Brugarude's* Profile as an Example of Game-to-Gamer Interactivity.

Textual interactivity is also used among many gamers during their gameplay sessions.

The gamers can chat with each other through the online chat area at the bottom left corner of the screen. The online chat program is designed to make conversation sequences distinctive from each other by using different font colors. For

example, in Gaming Clip 4.19, a *Priest* healer, *Chewchew*, types a short textual message to ask

the raid leader, *Bruguarde*, to clarify about the healing assignment. *Chewchew* types, “You want me to focus on Attreyu?” to make sure healing the main tank, *Attreyu*, is the task she is supposed to do in this raid. The above example demonstrates that the brief exchanges of textual messages are used by the gamers to understand the rules of gameplay. This type of textual interaction, though not persuasive in nature, is essential to the success of a raid. Familiarity with the rules in *WoW* will make these gamers better players and contribute to the successful of the team in *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon. In other words, it provides the foundation for future persuasion.



Gaming Clip 4.19: An Example of Gamer-to-Gamer Textual Interactivity.

To conclude, with the introduction of numerous multimedia game contents, it seems textual interactions among gamers have been on the wane in MMORPGs. The persuasive functions of textual interactivity mainly center on providing clarifications and explanations to other gamers to facilitate subsequent persuasive acts during gameplay. Intensive game-to-gamer textual interactions can be observed in Gaming Clip 4.17 when *Onyxia* threatens, yet entices, the gamers to interact with her. In other words, *Onyxia's* aural and textual threats are rhetorical because they solicit the multimodal responses of the gamers to these rhetorical expressions.

Gamer-to-gamer textual interactions, on the other hand, can be observed in Gaming Clip 4.19 when *Deathomega* asks another player about the rules of gameplay. Another good example of using the gamer-to-gamer interactivity for clarification can be found in Gaming Clip 4.20 (from Gaming Session 1) when two gamers (*Pathos* and *Wordzofpray*) discuss what *moonlight* means and what functions this in-game element provides. *Pathos* recommends the use of *moonlight* to attack the boss *Festergut* from the back. In response to *Pathos*' proposal, *Wordzofpray* requests clarifications about this strategy. *Wordzofpray*'s responses create a rhetorical situation that warrants *Pathos*' responses as shown in Gaming Clip 4.20. Although this particular in-game design element is part of the game contents, how and when this element will be used and discussed are purely dependent on the knowledge of different players. The confusion *Wordzofpray* expresses clearly indicates he is not familiar with this in-game practice; as such *Pathos*' explanation and demonstration (through the kinetic interaction with his avatar) help persuade *Wordzofpray* to become aware of this device in the raid to defeat the boss *Festergut*.



Gaming Clip 4.20: Gamer-to-Gamer Interactivity Helps Explain the Functions of *Moonlight*.

Furthermore, using texts to interact with other *WoW* gamers influences and persuades other gamers by fostering “their own senses of agency through active participation in and frequent contribution to gaming communities in the form of written texts” (Johnson 271). In other words, like other types of interactivities during a *WoW* gaming session, textual interactivity often functions as important rhetorical tool just as other interactivities to manipulate the gamers with an intention to generate H.I.R.E. during gameplay. The multi-tasking and –modality characteristics of gameplay

experiences demand full immersion into different forms of rhetorical discourses in a game environment. Multimedia digital games, like *WoW*, demonstrate how these various types of interactivities are capable of working synergistically to create a high level of engagement with the game, leading to the generation, maintenance, and enjoyment of H.I.R.E.

Textual interactivity is demonstrated as more than persuasion among participating gamers for the collaborative and cooperative gameplay, so they can succeed in obtaining their H.I.R.E. As argued by Brookey and Booth, producing textual interactivity is not “just a means of character control: It is a way for the gamer to construct his or her own environment and narrative spectacle” (217). As observed in the gaming sessions and clips, these gamers apparently demonstrate their active roles in creating, soliciting, and responding to different gaming episodes through textual interactivity. Each gaming episode is conceptually equivalent to an “exigence” in a “rhetorical situation” (Bitzer) that demands responses by participating gamers involved in the situation. Depending on the effectiveness of these textual interactions, an urgent task can be completed. In other words, a gameplay situation is similar to a rhetorical situation that demands rhetors’ responses because the gamers are required to produce their own rhetorical expressions and practices to persuade other gamers. The discussion above confirms what many game researchers have been saying that, compared with other viewing or reading experiences, gamers are found to be more actively engaged in gaming events, scenarios and narratives in the game environment (Brookey and Booth).

4.2.2 Aural Interactivity

A thorough analysis of these seven gaming sessions has shown that aural interactivity is the most often employed interactions among the gamers. During the pre-raid strategic discussions, gamers have used extensive aural interactions to discuss strategies to succeed in the raid. Aural

interactivity provides gamers with immediacy and responsiveness suitable for

a situation that demands spontaneity. These gamers also use aural commands to organize the team members before the *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon begins. In particular, aural interactions are most often used by the raid leader to provide commands to the team players about what to do.

In Gaming Clip 4.21, the raid leader, *Brugarude*, use aural interactions to announce his strategy to succeed in killing *Onyxia*. He initiates the first step in this raid by positioning the raid members in their strategic points of attack. For example, *Brugarude* says that all players have to “make sure you ranged are sticking around on one side... stay like here if you can or close to the middle when you are *DPSing* the boss that way the healers can, that way the healers know where you are; you are always in range. Just be a little organized that way we'll get her down.” *Brugarude* shares his strategy by ensuring all gamers will stick together within the healer's range, so in case some gamers are wounded by the monster's fire breath, they can be healed and survive the attack.

WoW is well-known as a strategy-based digital game; therefore, participating gamers need to agree with and act upon the strategy once the raid begins. To make sure that all gamers are persuaded by his plan, *Brugarude* continues with reconfirmation by saying, “Any questions before we go?” One of the



Gaming Clip 4.21: *Brugarude*, the Raid Leader, Uses Aural Interactions to Persuade Players before the Raid.

players, *Chromestone*, agrees with *Brugarude*'s strategy by saying, "stay close together." *Brugarude* concludes this persuasion process by repeating his overall strategy to keep all gamers in healer's range, confirming "Exactly. That makes it a lot easier for the healers, too." In addition to the gamer-to-gamer interactivity, *WoW* is equipped with an in-game design feature (or game-to-gamer interactivity), *Ready Check*, that allows an automatic survey of all raid members to ensure they are ready for the raid (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Ready_check). This textual feature enables the raid leader to know if every player is persuaded and ready to following the strategy to commence the raid. As an in-game design element, *Ready Check* informs the raid leader if the raid is ready to proceed or a short break is needed. When gamers receive *Ready Check* textual prompt, they are required to respond by clicking "Yes" or "No."

Aural interactivity encompasses two main design features in *WoW*. The interactivity between gamers and gamers is configured as a broadcast mode and allows gamers to listen to voice communications among players (Wadley, Gibbs, and Brenda). On the other hand, game-to-gamer interactivity enables gamers to listen to the embedded voices and special effects of the monsters to make the fictional world more vivid and believable. During the raid to kill *Grand Magus Telestra*, many in-game design elements are employed to persuade gamers to continue with their participation in the game. Gaming Clip 4.22 shows the uses of aural interactivity by *Grand Magus Telestra* to entice gamers during the *Coldarra, Borean Tundra* raid/dungeon. As soon as the raid begins, *Grand Magus Telestra* yells, "You know what they say about curiosity....", then



Gaming Clip 4.22: Using Game-to-Gamer Aural Interactivities to Create a Perception of Reality.

continues with “I’ll give you more than you can handle!” All gamers can hear these threats, in addition to many sound effects that imitate the firing of weapons, the moaning of the mobs, the crashing of cannons, and the discussions among gamers. The in-game embedded aural interactions aim to create a sense of reality among gamers during this raid.

The aural interactions near the end of the successful *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon demonstrate how gamers respond to the successful killing of *Onyxia* dragon. These gamers have exclaimed their gameplay experiences as “That was intense.” Some express their excitement by saying, “woot” or “u guys rocked.” It is apparent that the gamers are manipulated by the fictitious battle with The *Onyxia* dragon that is a rhetorical manifestation of

the monster in the *Onyxia's Lair* raid/dungeon. Through the creation of a mythical medieval monster and battlefield, all gamers become intensively engaged with this raid when their emotions are elicited in response to these rhetorical expressions and practices programmed in *WoW* game. The penetrating and realistic multimodal interactivities in the *Onyxia's*



Gaming Clip 4.23: Intensive Aural Interactions among Gamers after the Successful Raid.

Lair raid/dungeon, regardless of whether they are game-to-gamer, or gamer-to-gamer, persuade these gamers to perform their fights with a real monster as a real fighter in a medieval setting. The sense of reality during gameplay is made possible through rules, storylines, landscapes, role-playing, multimodal interactivities, and a sense of community in *WoW*. All of these rhetorical expressions and practices contribute to a sense of immersion among the raid members particularly when the raid succeeds.

Allowing *WoW* gamers to use real-time voice communications during gameplay is viewed as one of the recent innovations in MMORPGs (Wadley, Gibbs, and Brenda). Compared with previous stand-alone games, MMORPGs are also unique in enabling gamers around the world to interact with each other synchronously. In-game interactions among the gamers through voice communications (or aural interactivity) are believed to be more natural and intuitive than typing texts (Wadley, Gibbs, and Brenda). The convenience and para-social virtual interaction of voice communications have been observed in the gaming sessions that this research collects. Most of the gamers in these gaming sessions have used voice communications; however, textual interactions are often reserved for more private communications among players. Textual interactivity can be done in different manners to allow various levels of privacy when interacting with other raid members; for example, commands like `"/w -target"` (whisper) `"/raid"` (talk in raid) `"/p"` (talk in the party) can be used to textually “talk” (interact) with other members. It seems that aural interactivity is the most popular tool to organize and persuade other raid participants as shown in these gaming sessions.

4.2.3 Visual Interactivity

Interactions with many in-game design elements and other gamers often involve multiple types of interactivities during *WoW* gameplay. Methodologically, it is difficult to isolate one type of interactivity from the others to accurately describe the persuasive manipulation as the result of these multimodal rhetorical expressions and practices. In many cases, a



Gaming Clip 4.24: The *Scourage Transporter* Device and Its Effects on Visual Representation of the Avatar.

combination of interactivities is used by gamers during gameplay. In Gaming Clip 4.24, one of the gamers uses the in-game design device, the *Scourage Transporter*, to create a crystalline light over an avatar. Once the gamer chooses this device, a pop-up window emerges with textual information about where the avatar will be transported. The transporter is a fixed device in the *Icecrown Citadel* dungeon to allow the *Lich King* and his followers to physically move around the frozen throne (WoWwiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Scourge_Transporter). The device is made available to all gamers who succeed in defeating certain bosses (WoWwiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Scourge_Transporter). In order to use this device, the gamers need to be persuaded by the textual information about what this made-up device can do for their avatars. To persuade gamers about the procedural rhetoric about this device, the textual description of the *Scourage Transporter* is written by the designers to create a sense of authority about its utility and function. Clicking on the device leads to the visual transformation of the avatar and the geographical transportation to a new location in the raid (Refer to Gaming Clip 4.24).

In-game visual elements (or graphics) refer to “some kind of changing and changeable visual display on a screen, involving some kind of pixel-based imaging” (Wolf and Perron 15). *WoW* contains plentiful enticing and vivid graphics and images that help create a fantastic and fictional game environment. Visual interactivity is abundantly programmed into *WoW* to make the game visually persuasive and to create a fictitious sense of reality that gamers are situated in a medieval setting. All gamers are required to become knowledgeable about these visual elements in order to succeed in different raids/dungeons in *WoW*. Various types of static visual tools are programmed to help the gamers during gameplay. These visual elements are also referred to as *WoW* interface (Game Manual, Blizzard Entertainment). The embedded game-to-gamer visual interactivity constitutes a vital part of their play experience because the graphic representations of the gameplay rules allow gamers to respond to each new rhetorical challenge in a more spontaneous and immersive manner. Instead of typing commands to interact with the game, players can kinetically interact with these design elements by clicking on these

icons. On the other hand, *WoW* can also communicate visually to players such as showing their positions in the virtual landscape in the Mini-Map (Box 3).

To use Figure 4.8 as an example to explain how this type of visual interactivity is designed and used, there is a layer of small icons at the bottom of the screen from the left to the right that range from Action Bar (Box 6), Interface Panel (Box 7), Latency Bar (Box 8), Bag Slots (Box 8), and Backpack (Box 8). Other visual



Figure 4.8: Visual Representations of *WoW* Gameplay Rules.

interactive elements also include Character Portrait (Box 1), Buff (Box 2), Day/Night Clock and MiniMap (Box 3). The green line in Box 6 show Experience Bar, or Reputation Bar, that records participants' total experience points to reach another level or how far away they are a specific area. These are the visual interactive in-game elements that enable these gamers to interact with the game environment.

I contend these in-game visual elements are rhetorical because of the following reasons. First, the embedded game-to-gamer visual interactivity demonstrates the designers' expressions and practices of "procedural rhetoric" during gameplay. In order for gamers to fully enjoy and immerse in the game, they need to become familiar with numerous rules of play. They need to be convinced that learning in-game knowledge is essential for their enjoyment with *WoW*. As part of in-game enforcement of the rules to persuade gamers, inability to understand these visual design elements will frustrate these gamers because they will "die" quickly and easily. For example, before they commence a raid, the gamers need

to learn that the Character's Action Bar (Box 6) is programmed to hold any abilities and spells gamers place on their own character (*World of Warcraft Game Manual*). If gamers are not familiar with these rules of play as manifested in these visual elements, they will learn how to use these icons through their subsequent experience with the game. Nevertheless, their interactions with the game will not be as smooth and engaging as those who are well-accustomed to these interface elements. In order for gamers to obtain their experience points, they are motivated to learn about how to use these visual design elements. Gamers need to be persuaded about the utility as to how these visual elements will help them during gameplay.

The process described here clearly shows that gamers need to learn and be persuaded by many rhetorical practices and expressions before they become a skillful and successful gamer. Rhetorical practices embedded in *WoW* are vital for gamers to have an immersive and engaging gameplay experience. Gamers need to learn the rhetorical practices of using "buffs," so they are knowledgeable about the influence of bugs on individual players. Often, gamers will learn the in-game knowledge (i.e., the rhetorical practices or procedural rhetoric of the game) by reading the game manual or visiting game community sites. As such, they are being persuaded by rhetors to create these rhetorical expressions. During gameplay, gamers will be persuaded by other gamers and the in-game design elements through their interactions. The table below provides detailed explanation and description on what the in-game visual element in Figure 4.8 are available for the gamers, so that they can interact with the game environment or other gamers (Refer to Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: In-Game Visual Interactive Elements at *WoW*.

Box Number	Name	Description of Its Usage
1	Character's Portrait	It shows how much health and mana/focus/rage point the character has. If it is a character with a pet, the pet's own portrait will show up right under this character's portrait.
2	Bufs	It tells what magic buffs are now currently affecting this character.
3	Mini Map	It shows players about their locations in this area. Working like a GPS system, this visual element also comes with a clock and calendar function. Players can check their in-game raiding schedule with the guilds through this visual element.
4	Chat Area	Players read and send messages from other players or from the game through this textual interactive design element.
5	Pet's Action Bar	Classes like <i>Hunter</i> , <i>Warlock</i> , and <i>Death Knight</i> with pets will have this action bar on the screen. The setting can be adjusted by clicking on the icon to command their pets do attack or stay at a spot through changing their pet's status from Aggressive to Defensive or to Passive.
6	Character's Action Bar	Players design their own action bar by creating own preference setting.
7	Interface Panel	A list of visual elements is included in this part: (from left to right) Character Info, Spellbook & Abilities, Talents, Achievements, Quest Log, Guild, Player vs. Player, Dungeon Finder, Game Menu, and Help Request.
8	Bags	Players' mobile storage spaces to place foods, gears, scrolls, potions, flasks...and so on. The larger capacity the bags have the more items players can carry with them.

WoW game designers have employed ample visual interactive expressions and practices to persuade gamers to act according to the rules of playing *WoW*. Gaming Clip 4.25 demonstrates the use of buffs to place a temporary beneficial spells on a gamer to provide a protective shield or to increase his/her strength (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Buf>). *WoW* game designers program the buffs as combat-based and non-combat based visual tools. Combat-based buffs include strength, agility, stamina, haste, and attack power, and non-combat based buffs include falling speed, water breathing, and water walking (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Buf>).

The visual effects of buffs on other visual elements are shown in this gaming clip where the priest class avatar can give the whole group both *Fortitude* and *Spirit* buff to increase other players' health and the speed of mana/health regeneration for the upcoming raid in the *Icebrown Citadel* to defeat the boss *Festergut*. When gamers



Gaming Clip 4.25: Visual Effects of Buffs.

are under certain helpful buffs they will be able to see those they are under the effects (Box 2). When gamers are casting the buffs, there will be some visual effects over their heads. The visual and aural interactions display what buffs can do for these avatars. These interactivities are employed by game designers to persuade these gamers the usefulness of this visual design element, so they will learn how to use the tool in the future.

Secondly, during the pre-raid strategy formulation phase, these embedded visual elements provide pivotal information for these gamers, so they can persuade each other to come up with the most effective strategy. In the *Icebrown Citadel* raid to finish the *Gunship Battle*, *Tanez*, the raid leader, uses a star mark over his own cannon to let other gamers know the tanks are located. The yellow star sign above his avatar clearly shows his position to let other gamers better understand his overall strategic planning in this raid (specifically



Gaming Clip 4.26: Using a Star Mark to Persuade other Gamer.

during 0:13-0:16 in Gaming Clip 4.26). *Tanez's* strategy is to assign the most capable person to the four *Alliance Gunship* cannons available to them in this raid. These cannons are capable of producing both cannon blasts and incinerating blasts to inflict heat and damage (WoWwiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Alliance_Gunship_Cannon). Therefore, it is vital for the success of this raid to assign the best gamers to each cannon. In order to persuade other gamers about his strategy, *Tanez* has used aural interactions first to communicate his idea. He also needs to make sure all gamers will follow his instructions according to his strategy in his cannon assignments. To ensure his persuasion will be more effective, he also relies on the embedded in-game visual elements such as the star mark over his avatar to jump up and down in front of the unassigned cannon to persuade one of the gamers, *Xoa*, about the location of this cannon and the importance of having *Xoa* assigned to this strategic position. As demonstrated in Gaming Clip 4.26, visual interactivity is an essential in-game design element that enables raid leaders to coordinate with other team members. This type of game-to-gamer visual interactivity is programmed by the designers to be immersed in the rhetorical expressions and practices of *WoW*. These enticing graphics enable gamers to see how their actions can lead to changes in the gaming environment.

Visual interactivity creates the most engaging part of gamer experience in *WoW*. Highly intensive visual representations and expressions are one of the most persuasive, even addictive, manipulations felt by all *WoW* gamers during gameplay. Many gamers are enthralled with the 3-D computer graphics during gameplay. In the



Gaming Clip 4.27: Intensive Gameplay Experiences as a Result of Visual Interactions during the *Gunship Battle*.

Icecrown Citadel raid played by 25 persons, intensive visual manipulations can be found once gamers fire their cannons at the targets. Embedded aural interactions make gamer experience more immersive as felt in a real gun battle environment. When the avatars jump back and forth, perspectives are changed to react to their actions, so other gamers can better see the battle situations to strategize their attack. During this gameplay, gamers are found to be fully engaged with game-designers' visual elements as result of their actions (Refer to Gaming Clip 4.27).

WoW, like other MMORPGs, is rich with visual interactive elements, or “interactive imagery,” to use the term coined by Wolf (117), which merges static images (like photos or primitive computer graphics) with interactive capability embedded in any digital games. In the *WoW* game environment, interactive imagery plays an important role in creating visual interactivity especially among participating gamers. Game landscape created by the interactive imagery is not “a window but a tool” (Wolf 117) for gamers to interact with others. In other words, interactive imagery can be argued as the rhetorical expressions of *WoW* game designers to persuade potential gamers to play with the game. However, in order for the interactive imagery to be really immersive and addictive, gamers have to take part in the rhetorical manipulation process by interact with these in-game visual elements. Without such game-to-gamer and gamer-to-gamer interactions, the static medieval landscape and avatars are neither interactive, nor engaging.

From a rhetorical perspective, a game environment creates an “exigence” that requires all participants to produce visual interactivity to collaborate closely to complete a common goal. Each action taken by any gamers will lead to the change of the situation. As Wolf observes, gamers are continuously invited to become involved with the game and explore its potential use. In addition to the physical actions (which will be discussed next in the kinetic interactivity section), visual interactivity in *WoW* can be done by typing commands to “emote” the game characters visually. For example, a gamer can *emote* an avatar to wave, salute, hug, and kneel, etc. (Griffiths, Davies, and Chappell). Depending on

whether animated or non-animated emotes are typed or selected (from a list of more popular emotes), gamers are able to direct their avatars to perform a variety of actions. The interwoven and boundary-crossing modality of emotes that are capable of transforming from textual commands to visual, aural, and kinetic interactivities demonstrates the complexities in studying digital game rhetoric.

From the perspective of *WoW* game designers, visual interactivity in MMORPGs is often presented with cultural symbols or images that gamers are familiar with. In particular, *WoW* is a strategy-based MMORPG with different historical visual elements for gamers to respond with their well-planned strategies. For many *WoW* gamers, these medieval elements are attractive and can be addictive due to a sense of recreated history and fantasy during gameplay. The intensive engagement many gamers experience cannot be attributed merely to viewing these medieval elements in still photos. As imagery generated by game designers, these medieval visual elements are no more attractive than a pictorial book and a movie clip on the medieval history. Rather, the possibility to gameplay through these fictional elements creates what many *WoW* gamers experience in a gaming session. The capabilities of gamers to interact with these in-game elements and to interact with gamers through these visual elements are the key to the popularity of *WoW*. For these game designers to persuade the gamers to continue with the game, the ability to kinetically interact with these embedded interactive elements is indispensable for many gamers. In the following section, I examine the kinetic interactivity employed during *WoW* gaming sessions.

4.2.4 Kinetic Interactivity

Kinetic interactivity refers to the abundant physical actions and interactions undertaken by gamers when they collaborate with other players to complete a raid. This type of interactivity involves not only the movements of avatars to constantly interact with many in-game design elements during *WoW* gameplay. I argue the kinetic interactions of gamers are their rhetorical expressions and practices produced to address the rhetorical situation in a raid. Take Gaming Clip 4.28 for example, several

gamers fire their weapons at *Lady Deathwhisper* in the *Icecrown Citadel* raid. Their actions are in response to the textual, visual, and kinetic representations of *Lady Deathwhisper* present to the gamers to engage their participation and generate more multimodal interactions. *Lady Deathwhisper* waves her body around and demonstrates a bright aura around her avatar. She also casts on these gamers her



Gaming Clip 4.28: An Example of Avatar-Generated Kinetic Interactivity in the Raid to Defeat *Lady Deathwhisper*.

famous *Death and Decay* spell that is capable of causing 4500 shadow damages to targets for one second and to an 8 yard area for 10 seconds (WoWwiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Lady_Deathwhisper). At the same time, she voices her threats, “Arise and exult in your pure form!” and “You are weak, powerless to resist my will!” These in-game interactivities employed by *Lady Deathwhisper* are equivalent to a series of rhetorical expressions that intend to persuade gamers about the reality of the game, and invite their reactions by producing a series of rhetorical expressions (such as evading her attacks through spontaneous kinetic interactions).

In the study of game rhetoric, kinetic interactivity can be viewed as an important rhetorical element that is vital to H.I.R.E. Unlike other types of interactivities experienced by gamers as situational and contextual to create a sense of reality and urgency, kinetic interactivity is capable of fully engaging gamers during their gameplay. Any gamers who do not respond to the rhetorical invitation of the in-game design elements and other gamers are likely to fail the raid, cause other gamers to lose points, and to end up having a bad reputation (i.e., achievement points) among gamers. For example, gamers need to avoid *Lady Deathwhisper’s Death and Decay* spell by kinetically moving their avatars to a safe range.

Otherwise, they will be killed once hit. This is the reason why the raid leader constantly keeps in contact with the other players to ensure the strategy is followed.

Kinetic interactivity explains how multimodal rhetorical “narratives” are created by gamers and many in-game design elements, and through which gamers can experience H.I.R.E. During *WoW* gameplay, kinetic interactivity can be broadly categorized as either game-to-gamer or gamer-to-gamer kinetic interactivity. The game-to-gamer kinetic interactivity is the rhetorical expressions and practices programmed by *WoW* game designers to persuade gamers to play with the digital game and to explain how *WoW* should be played. Game designers often employ numerous in-game design elements seamlessly responding to the textual and visual interactions of the gamers to create a sense of reality and pleasure. In Gaming Clip 4.29, *Lady Deathwhisper* uses an in-game spell, *Dominate Mind*, on two of the players, *Squirrelnut and Tembel*, to subdue their will and cause them to be charmed for 20 seconds. Once cast, the affected players will alter their kinetic reactions; during this period, both players will attack their own raid members. The *WoW* designers give *Lady Deathwhisper* many spells that can be used in different phases of the game. For example, spells for Phase One include *Animate Dead*, *Dark Empowerment*, *Dark Transformation*, *Mana Barrier*, and *Shadow Bolt*, which can cause various types of damages on players. On the other hand, a list of spells is also offered for Phase Two, such as *Frostbolt*, *Frostbolt Volley*, *Summon Vengeful Shade*, and *Touch of Insignificance*, which also affect their mana and capabilities once hit. Among the many spells *Lady Deathwhisper* has, their effects on gamers really depend on the rhetoric of procedures game designers have



Gaming Clip 4.29: Casting *Dominate Mind* Spells on two Players by *Lady Deathwhisper*.

programmed into *WoW*. The processes of creating these different spells and related capabilities are examples of the rhetorical practices programmed to affect the interactions during gameplay. For example, *Frostbolt Volley* is programmed by the designers as a spell that will inflict 14400 to 17600 Frost damage to nearby players and reduce their movement speed for four seconds (WoWwiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Lady_Deathwhisper).

During gameplay, gamers not only are required to kinetically respond to multimodal challenges posed by numerous in-game design elements, but they also have to interact with other gamers to succeed in a raid. Similar to game-to-gamer interactivity, gamer-to-gamer kinetic interactivity often demonstrates how the gamers respond to the rhetorical expressions and practices of other gamers. These gamers have to be persuaded by other gamers before they kinetically respond to these requests. In Gaming Clip 4.30, these gamers are required to coordinate with each other, in order to defeat *Lady Deathwhisper* in the *Icecrown Citadel*. *Lady Deathwhisper* is the *Supreme Overseer of the Cult of the Damned*, and the second powerful boss in this dungeon (WoWwikihttp://www.wowwiki.com/Lady_Deathwhisper). The programming of this raid demands high level of awareness and prompt response from all gamers because it is a *DPS* race that requires the gamers to kill the boss as soon as possible (WoWwiki http://www.wowwiki.com/DPS_race).

The *Death and Decay* phase of the raid particularly demands quick response time on the part of the gamers because *Lady Deathwhisper* will inflict 500 shadow damage every one second to all targets



Gaming Clip 4.30: *Tanez*, the raid leader, Commands Other Participants to Kinetically Respond to Succeed in the Raid.

around the area (WoWwiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Lady_Deathwhisper). It is very important that all raid members react to *Lady Deathwhisper's* attacks immediately. Therefore, a high level of organization is needed to defeat her in this raid. The raid leader, *Tanez*, tries to coordinate the attack by requesting participating players to move their avatars and plan their actions accordingly. For example, *Tanez* commands, "All casters focus on Skeleton in the left. Strabo, please head down, too. I need casters on the left. All casters on the left. There is a skeleton that needs to be hit down. Our top priority now. All casters!" *Tanez* wants to persuade the gamers that a skeleton needs to be terminated first by asking them to prioritize their actions. The presence of a visual element, a Skeleton, leads to a rhetorical situation that demands kinetic reactions from all participating gamers. In order to succeed in the raid, the gamers with the capability of casters are asked to kinetically respond by moving their avatars.

Like other multimodal interactivities experienced by many *WoW* gamers with an intention to persuade, kinetic interactivity is also rhetorical and persuasive for several reasons. Kinetic interactions from in-game design elements (such as *Lady Deathwhisper* and her spell capabilities) are programmed by *WoW* game designers to manipulate many gamers to be immersed in the game. By casting the *Death and Decay* spell on the raid players, *Lady Deathwhisper* invites these gamers to respond by producing their own rhetorical expressions and practices as demonstrated in Gaming Clip 4.30. Kinetic reactions from *Lady Deathwhisper*, at the same time, create a new rhetorical situation that further requires the raid members to respond properly by producing aural, textual, visual, and kinetic interactivities to address the situation. As Grant Tavinor describes similar multimodal interactivities by phrasing these interactions as "kinetic narratives" conceptualized as "*problem spaces* in which are player must act so as to solve a particular puzzle, defeat a boss-monster, or perform a difficult fictional task" (36). The process not only involves how gamers are persuaded to believe in the need and urgency to respond to these challenges in the raid to kill *Lady Deathwhisper*, but also how gamers interact with each other to produce rhetorical expressions and practices for this situation.

Multimodal interactivities as discussed in this chapter include textual, aural, visual, and kinetic interactivities. These interactivities, from the perspective of designers, are the rhetorical tools to persuade many potential *WoW* gamers to play the game. On the other hand, these multimodal interactivities are also used by many *WoW* gamers to produce their own rhetorical expressions and practices, to persuade other gamers. Sal Humphreys describes the content creation by gamers “through the activity of playing, and through creating ‘mods’, new levels, new ‘skins’, new modes of play” (79). Multimodal rhetorical “narratives” constitute the important part of game rhetorical research. In-game interactions with the “highly symbolic environment” are considered to be a rhetorical process by either producing textual or visual representations to alter their gaming experiences (Moberly 291). However, a descriptive and typological research on these rhetorical “narratives” will only bring up limited insights into what gamers really experience during gameplay. The outcome of interacting with these enticing multimodal rhetorical tools often leads to immersions represented as what gamers see and hear (i.e., sensory immersion), what they think (i.e., mental immersion), and how they react (i.e., action-based immersion). The interactivity-produced immersion so many *WoW* gamers experience during gameplay will generate a sense of engagement with the game, the community, and cultural manifestations. I argue these elements also make up of gamer experience that warrants inclusion in the study of game rhetorics. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss how *WoW* gamers use interactivity, immersion, and engagement as an agency to obtain H.I.R.E.

4.2.5 Conclusion

WoW offers ample possibilities of textual, aural, visual, and kinetic interactivities to all willing and motivated gamers. These engaging in-game interactions among gamers, gaming environment, game design elements, and collaborative tasks are made possible by one most distinctive characteristics of MMORPGs; that is, interactivity. Jansz and Martens refer to this type of interactivity as “playful

interactivity” because gamers take part in creating actions that are reinforced by in-game design elements such as visual effects, sounds, bonus points, or advancement to a higher level (336). The lack of actions is equivalent to “virtual death” when a gaming session is terminated (Jansz and Martens 336). Along with other in-game design elements, these different types of interactivities help create a mythological and fantastic world to motivate gamers to invest their financial, temporal, and cognitive resources on each gaming session. A thorough examination of these interactive modalities merely provides fundamental understandings of what makes *WoW* different from other MMORPGs in specific and other digital games in general. However, a normative description of different interactivities in *WoW* and other MMORPGs fails to capture the complexity of interactions between gamers and game designers and among gamers themselves in any gaming session. The static descriptions of interactivities also fail to examine their roles as rhetorical expressions and practices by participants during gameplay. Sometimes, a clear-cut approach to study different types of interactivities is also problematic. For example, the aforementioned *emote* functions as textual, visual, aural, and kinetic interactivity at the same time.

Although these interactivities constitute an emerging area of rhetorical game study, a more important question to ask is how *WoW* gamers use interactivity, immersion, and engagement as an agency to generate and maintain H.I.R.E. This question thus treats the above multimodal interactivities as tools to facilitate the creation of gamer experience. Through these interactivities, *WoW* players try to understand the persuasive intents of these rhetorical expressions and practices created by other gamers during different gaming sessions. The strategies to persuade other gamers to act and to collaborate are believed to contribute to “the generation of emotional, physical, and cognitive engagement, shaping the player’s experience of game play and making it meaningful” (Krzywinska 121). However, in order for gamers to be persuaded during gameplay, the understanding of in-game design elements, rules of gameplay, and in-game knowledge is essential to the process and its success. Therefore, it is similar

to any persuasive act that will require both rhetors and audiences to share common understanding of the culture, language, and customs before any persuasive acts are possible and effective. By the same rationale, a successful and engaging game is not possible unless all participating gamers agree on the strategies, arrangements, and the level of dedication; all of these help facilitate if a guild can succeed in their pursuit of common goals.

Unlike early digital games that restrict what actions a player can take, *WoW* allows its gamers to fully control their characters, interactions with other gamers, and tools available for them to take part in the game (Tavinor 26). For many *WoW* gamers, interactivity is more than a game feature; it is what makes playing *WoW* an engaging and intensive experience. As Aarseth insightfully summarizes below:

Computer games bring players into a productive relationship with the text. This is more than the active interpretation we engage in with conventional media texts, more than identity construction through consumption; this is an engagement which serves to create the text each time it is engaged. (59)

His statement above can be further extended to other types of interactivities widely available in existing MMORPGs nowadays. Thus, similar productive relationships are likely to occur to generate and maintain H.I.R.E. The proposition that a variety of in-game multi-modal interactivities offered in *WoW* helps create and maintain H.I.R.E. among gamers should be explored from Burke's Pentad, where the concept of agency can be used to examine these types of interactivities.

Despite variations in its nomenclature, *WoW* has been said to allow gamers to take an active role in determining if the gameplay story will move in a certain direction, "allowing the player to actually change the game as it is played" (Sawyer, Berg, and Dunne 112). One of the most distinctive features of *WoW* and many other MMORPGs is that gamers are allowed to create their own virtual in-game representations (i.e., avatars). Through the use of avatars, the gamers can make full use of the interactivities by directing avatars to speak (aural interactivity), to act (kinetic interactivity), and to be

seen (visual interactivity). These rhetorical expressions and practices during gameplay are made possible by the technical capabilities of the particular MMORPG. However, to make these representations rhetorical expressions, the skills and creativity of the gamers play a far more significant role during their interactions with other players.

The creation of an avatar enables the gamers to be immersed, both metaphorically and physically, in the game environment. The avatar is the culmination of what interactivities can do to enhance gamer experience become an agency through which users seek from computers is continual response to their own actions—a *reflection* of personal agency made available onscreen as surplus pleasure” (Rehak 111). The “self-created digital characters” allow gamers to interact with *WoW* software, as well as other gamers (Steinkuehler and Williams 886). As a result, H.I.R.E. results from “the sense of acting to create or change” one’s avatar, which ultimately changes gamer experience and “the progression of the game” (Brookey and Booth 216). Brookey and Booth succinctly capture both the experiential and procedural characteristics of H.I.R.E.

In *WoW*, gamers need to create one primary character to physically represent their online identity during gameplay. Once created, these gamers can see each other’s avatar in the fictional world. The avatar will have different pre-determined limitations and benefits related to their race or class (such as *Night Elf Rogue*, *Human Paladin*, or *Tauren Hunter*) as determined by other fellow gamers during the selection process (Thomas and Brown). Once selected, avatars become an extension of the players during gameplay (Meadows). Sometimes, avatars even fuse with the players (Meadows). Afterwards, instead of interacting with a real person, the gamers can interact with each other’s avatars through textual, aural, visual, and kinetic interactivities (Williams, Caplan, and Xiong). Although the creation of avatar is functional to facilitate gameplay, scholars have extended to argue that the decision to choose what to represent self through the selection of avatar represent “virtual selves” (Bessière, Seay, and Kisler 531; Klang). In other words, the selection of an avatar in itself is a conscious act on the part of

gamers to project their own identity and visual representation online. Avatars, as a pre-determined in-game visual element by the game designers, do allow gamers to modify the appearance and equipment to a certain extent as long as the addition is in line with the nature of the guild. As such, it can be argued that visual interactivity with the game elements begins even before gamers start to play *WoW*.

Associating interactivity with the concept of agency further allows rhetorical scholars to examine the meaning making process that is involved in gaming sessions. The gamers are now perceived to be active participants in making sense of what has been communicated whether it is delivered through textual, aural, visual, or kinetic interactive rhetorical expressions and practices. As a social game, playing *WoW* requires scores of negotiation and collaboration among gamers (Colby and Colby). Because many gamer-to-gamer interactions in a gaming session involve persuading other players to cooperate and collaborate, a common task can be achieved. Different types of interactivities can be argued as an important agency by which gamers interact to succeed in *WoW*.

To conclude this chapter on various types of interactivities and their relationship to H.I.R.E., textual, aural, visual, and kinetic interactivities during gameplay are rhetorical in nature because, according to Lloyd Bitzer in his influential article, “The Rhetorical Situation,” “rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action” (3-4). Through the skillful employment of various interactivities embedded in *WoW*, gamers are able to use these “procedualities” (to use Ian Bogost’s term) (Bogost 3) to create their own rhetorical expressions and practices to persuade other gamers. At the same time, gamers are already persuaded by the rhetorical manipulation that they are medieval anthropomorphic fighters with distinctive magic capabilities. The virtual reality created in the *WoW* gaming environment can be altered by the deliberate collaboration of gamers who employ textual, aural, visual and kinetic persuasive activities and devices to change behaviors of other gamers. As a result of their gameplay experiences, many successful gamers will feel a sense of immersion and

engagement when playing *WoW*. Through these intensive interactive engagements with many game-to-gamer and gamer-to-gamer rhetorical manifestations, many *WoW* players ultimately feel a sense of pseudo-reality after their high level of immersion and engagement with the game contents.

An important question arises: What persuades these gamers to believe in the reality of the game and respond accordingly? In the following chapter, I use Burke's concepts of identification, symbolic actions, and dramatistic pentad to analyze the rhetorical roles of multimodal interactivities in accomplishing persuasive goals in *WoW* gaming sessions. Specifically, the following chapter addresses an important question in rhetorical theory; what are the roles of these multimodal interactivities in facilitating the generation, maintenance, and enjoyment of H.I.R.E. Furthermore, the next chapter also intends to answer the following two questions:

Question 1: How do rhetors (game designers) and audiences (gamers) interact with each other in the digicontinent? How do audiences (gamers) interact with each other in the digicontinent?

Question 2: How does interaction with rhetors (game designers), audiences (gamers), and among other audiences (gamers) lead to the co-creation and co-generation of hybrid interactive rhetorical engagements (or H.I.R.E.)?

Question 3: How do these interactions generate persuasive rhetorical discourses as demonstrated in H.I.R.E. during gameplay?

Chapter 5: Persuasion

How do multimodal interactivities used by gamers and game designers during gameplay contribute to the formation, maintenance, and enjoyment of the *Hybrid Interactive Rhetorical Engagement* (H.I.R.E.) experienced by gamers? How do interactive rhetorical expressions and practices in the preceding chapter resemble Kenneth Burke's concepts of "symbolic means" and "symbolic actions" employed by rhetors to persuade game participants? What do gamers and game designers go through to perform their persuasive acts by these "symbolic means" and "symbolic actions"? How will game rhetorical scholars apply Burke's strategies for persuasion (as in *A Rhetoric of Motives*) and Dramatism and Pentad (as in *A Grammar of Motives*) to analyze rhetorical manipulations during gameplay? How will *WoW* gameplay demonstrate the sophisticated applications of multimodal interactivities as rhetors' symbolic actions for persuasion?

Burke states the primary purpose of rhetoric is to persuade in his influential work, *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Persuasion involves the utilization of symbols to affect audience's attitudes and behaviors. The examination of game participants' rhetorical manipulations during gameplay presents an excellent domain of contemporary rhetorical research: to examine what these manipulations aim to achieve and to identify what rhetorical strategies and tactics are utilized to create persuasion through their eloquent use of rhetorical symbols or forms. The main objective of this chapter employs Burke's rhetorical theory to analyze the processes of persuasion as they occur in different rhetorical situations to which game participants respond through their symbol-using activities.

I will begin this chapter by briefly discussing Burke's definition of rhetoric, followed by reviewing his influential concept of "identification," a pivotal theme in his rhetorical theory. I will then apply Burke's Dramatism and Pentad to explain the process of persuasion and the rhetorical manipulation employed by rhetors during *WoW* gameplay. The dominant theme of this chapter will use the selected gaming clips and figures as examples to demonstrate how Burke's notions can be employed

to explain these rhetorical manipulations during *WoW* gameplay. These explications will demonstrate the applicability of Burke's rhetorical theory to an increasingly important rhetorical phenomenon; that is, how game participants manipulate multimodal interactivities to persuade gamers through *hybrid intensive rhetorical engagement* during *WoW* gameplay.

5.1. THE CONCEPT OF "SYMBOLIC ACTION" IN BURKE'S RHETORICAL THEORY

Rhetoric, according to Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, is to induce "human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (41). In the same book, Burke defines the basic function of rhetoric as "an *inducement* to action" (42-43) and he focuses on the use of language "as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation" among human agents who have the natural tendency to respond to symbols. Derived from Burke's definition of rhetoric as to persuade through the use of symbolic means, I claim playing *WoW* also

constitutes a series of interconnected actions and decisions induced by in-game design elements and gamer actions at different raid dungeons. For example, in the *Trial of the Crusader* raid dungeon, a number of boss encounters is embedded in the game as part of the raid to induce the multimodal responses of the gamers to that rhetorical situation. Each raid encounter is equivalent to a rhetorical situation demanding timely and appropriate actions from the gamers. *The Beasts of Northrend* encounter calls for collaborative efforts among the players to defeat three types of monsters, *Gormok*

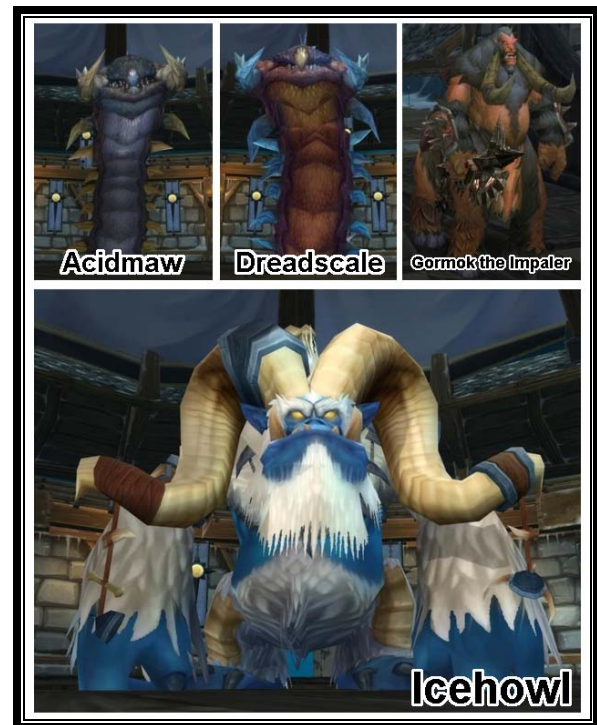


Figure 5.1: Images of *Gormok the Impaler*, *Acidmaw* and *Dreadscale*, and *Icehowl* in the *Beasts of Northrend* Encounter.

the Impaler, Acidmaw and Dreadscale, and Icehowl (WoWWiki

http://www.wowwiki.com/Trial_of_the_Crusader). These in-game elements created by the game

designers aim to create a challenging and engaging gaming situation, and to persuade gamers to take part in the raid through the generation of raid strategies, actions, and multimodal interactivities.

During *WoW* gameplay, the players are divided into different raid groups, but those in the same group are given incentives to “act in the suggested ways” to accomplish their common goals (Heath 133). These incentives include psychological, social, and monetary rewards given to participating gamers upon their successful completion of a raid (Taylor). For example, in the 25-player mode of *the Trial of the Crusader* raid dungeon, the reward for each successful achievement is ten points. A raid dungeon will comprise multiple achievement tasks that grant players certain points upon completion. In *the Trial of the Crusader* raid dungeon, the tasks include *Upper Back Pain*, *Three Sixty Pain Spikes*, *Resilience will Fix it*, *Salt and Pepper*, and *The Traitor King*. These achievement tasks are created by *WoW* game designers through their artistic combination of various in-game design elements and interactive symbolic actions. With their plots and narratives, these tasks can be considered as various rhetorical situations challenging game participants to produce their own rhetorical expressions and practices.

The above description clearly demonstrates the persuasive manifestation of *WoW* gameplay as observed in the persuasive use of in-game design elements to manipulate the multimodal responses of the gamers. This example helps support the function of rhetoric as persuasion that Burke clearly explains in *The Study of Symbolic Action*. Walz also maintains gameplay is “a rhetorical performance between player(s) and game design, a symbolic action that takes place amongst agents” (186). In Burke’s other well-known book, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, he claims rhetoric is the “use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents” (41). Because human beings are “the symbol using animal,” Burke claims the use or mis-use of symbols can be employed to understand human

behaviors and their consequences in his work, *Language as Symbolic Action* (1). Because human beings use symbols purposefully, what motivates their symbolic actions to persuade needs to be examined. Therefore, the utilization of symbols can be considered to be a subset of rhetoric as Burke claims. As discussed in Chapter 4, the game participants, no matter whether they are designers or players, produce a large amount of uninterrupted and sequential multimodal interactions during *WoW* gameplay. These interactivities, no matter whether they are textual, visual, aural, or kinetic, are equivalent to a rich combination of symbols utilized by the participants to alter the attitudes and behaviors of other gamers, soliciting their proper responses to the rhetorical situations during gameplay. These activities are equivalent to the symbol using intent of the participants. The following gaming clip further shows Burke's notion of rhetors as "the symbol using animal" in understanding what game designers create to generate enthusiastic participations among players.

In Gaming Clip 5.1, by means of their eloquent use of multimodal symbols, the designers of *WoW* successfully create a fictitious dragon character, *Onyxia*, in an invented location, *Onyxia Lair* in *Dustwallow Marsh*. The game designers persuasively transform these multimodal interactivities into a convincing and engaging dragon boss capable of breathing fire to melt iron and stone, biting her attackers, or killing with her powerful tail (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Onyxia>).

The sophisticated utilization and conversion of interactive symbols create a realistic dragon to persuade the gamers to fully engage with the gaming situation. Intensive multimodal interactions from the game participants can be observed in the clip when *Onyxia* is finally killed and all players cry out their joy after this



Gaming Clip 5.1: Persuasive Effects Demonstrated after the Killing of *Onyxia*.

fierce battle. As displayed in this clip, persuasive effects generated by the game designers are similar to what eloquent rhetors can do to persuade their audiences, using delivery media such as a novel, a public speech, a movie, a drama, etc.

As demonstrated in the preceding clip, *WoW* gameplay is rhetorical and persuasive by its very nature because it demands all game participants to fully understand a rhetorical situation before producing any appropriate symbolic action in a raid. This entails that all participants comprehend the rhetorical tools and manipulative intent utilized in a specific situation during *WoW* gameplay. Failure to do so will be disastrous for the rest of the raid team. For instance, in order to defeat the boss *Onyxia*, gamers need to understand what capabilities this dragon boss has been programmed with and what attack strategies she often employs in combat; therefore, effective strategies can be calculated by gamers. On the other hand, if gamers are not able to comprehend the gaming situation correctly, an ill-conceived strategy will lead to a failed attempt in a raid. In Gaming Clip 5.2, the players ponder over what cause their failure to kill *Festergut*, a boss in the *Plaqueworks* branch of the *Icecrown Citadel* raid dungeon (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Festergut>). As one of the players complains, what caused this raid to fail is the lack of more effective strategies by “stack[ing] on the same person” and by “stand[ing] on *Festergut*’s left leg.” As Burke once argues in *Counter-Statement*, when a rhetor succeeds in the “interpretation of a situation,” subsequent symbolic actions can be planned (154). Burke reasons a persuasive rhetor needs to accept, correct, and be emancipated from a situation, so the eloquent use of these symbols will influence the audience (154-156 for detailed discussion). Apparently, as shown in Gaming



Gaming Clip 5.2: The Importance of Assessing a Gaming Situation during Gameplay to Kill *Festergut*.

Clip 5.2, the boss *Festergut* can only be defeated if the interpretation of the situation is accurate among the participating gamers. When gamers are knowledgeable about the rules, capabilities, activities embedded by game designers as their symbol-using activities, they will be able to evade gas spores, gaseous blight, inhale blight, gastric bloats, and vile gas attacks from *Festergut*.

According to Burke in *Language as Symbolic Action*, any purposeful use of symbols can be considered as one type of symbolic action. The symbolic action is not limited to language and literature, but also includes magic, ritual, religion, and history as stated in Burke's books, *Permanence and Change* and *Attitudes toward History*. As such, Walz contends gameplay is also a symbolic action among participating agents because persuasive manipulations exist in that rhetorical situation. During *WoW* gameplay, the gamers are required to produce their own multimodal symbolic

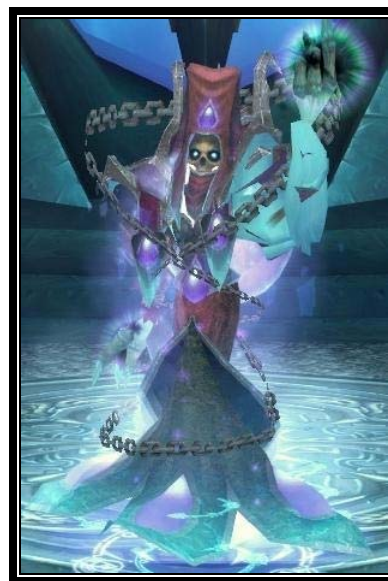


Figure 5.2: A Ghoulish Image of *Lady Deathwhisper*, Persuading Gamers to Produce Multimodal Interactions. (Source: <http://spicytunas.com/2010/01/frost-mage-pve-lady-deathwhisper/>)

activities pertinent to that situation. Textual, aural, visual, and kinetic interactivities are the commonly used symbols that game designers and gamers employ to respond to many persuasive acts during gameplay. The rhetorical manipulation during *WoW* gameplay is even more substantial and noticeable when compared with other conventional game platforms. For example, in the *Icecrown Citadel* raid dungeon to defeat *Lady Deathwhisper*, her ghoulish image is intentionally created by game designers to represent persuasively her role as *the Supreme Overseer of the Cult of the Damned* (Figure 5.2). This in-game design element is also equipped with many abilities to create different rhetorical situations for the gamers to respond. For example, *Lady Deathwhisper* is able to cast a *Death and Decay* spell on

attacking gamers by inflicting 4,500 Shadow damage per second on all targets (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Lady_Deathwhisper). She is also programmed to cast the *Dominare Mind* spell on one attacker within 50,000 yard range to charm them for 20 seconds (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Lady_Deathwhisper). *Lady Deathwhisper* is designed by a carefully planned combination of visual, kinetic, aural, and textual interactive symbols that make her a convincing manipulative tool to persuade the gamers to fully engage with the boss during this raid. Such a full engagement often leads to the production of multimodal interactions from the gamers. Furthermore, different rhetorical manipulations are presented during gameplay such as when the *Dominare Mind* spell is cast on two players, *Duhagoeszap* and *Squirrelnut*. Any gamer, affected or not, will need to respond to the new rhetorical situation with two of their members under the spell. As such, casting a spell can be argued as a symbolic action by *Lady Deathwhisper* to manipulate these gamers to respond through using similar interactive symbols embedded in *WoW* (Gaming Clip 5.3). When a gamer is charmed by the *Dominare Mind* spell, the charmed gamer will be mind controlled for 20 seconds and during the period their damage will be increased by 200% while healing increased by 500% (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Lady_Deathwhisper). The spell will alter kinetic interactivity of the gamers during subsequent gameplays.

The example above shows the manipulative effects of an in-game design element on gamers and their gameplay experiences. How will the gamers respond to this situation? What



Gaming Clip 5.3: Rhetorical Manipulation through Casting *Dominare Mind* Spells.

will happen to those who are hit by the *Dominate Mind* spell? The decisions to initiate multimodal symbol-using activities for the situation demonstrate gamer reactions to the designer-initiated rhetorical manipulations.

For the majority of stand-alone off-line games with a limited number of participants, persuasion only occurs between gamers and game designers when gamers are required to respond to designers' persuasion to interact with many enticing in-game design elements such as avatars, background music, and attractive graphics. Game designers rely on these multimodal interactivities to persuade gamers to continue with the game. Each combination of multimodal interactivities presents to gamers a rhetorical situation that invites them to respond promptly. To extend from Burke's argument in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, in order for game designers to solicit the multimodal interactive responses from gamers as their symbolic actions, *WoW* has to be designed "as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (43). As observed by Heath, persuasion during gameplay is a "symbolic action" that involves different entities at various playing phases through "the use of symbol system in general" (137).

What is distinctive about *WoW* is that multiple participants of this strategy game are obliged to collaborate closely to succeed in achieving their common objective in different raid dungeons. The exigency to cooperate demands persuasion and thus generates a large amount of persuasive acts among game participants. As such, *WoW* gameplay involves more than when gamers identify with game designers' manipulative intent to act. It often involves player-initiated persuasion to accept the agreed strategies before a raid is launched and during the progression of the raid. This part of the persuasive process involves the constant role-rotation of gamers as rhetors and as audiences. Thus, *WoW* gameplay can be said to comprise a sequence of persuasive acts among all game participants to generate identification with each other's persuasive intent. As Rueckert succinctly interprets Burke's definition of rhetoric that can be used to describe the *WoW* gameplay situation: "Rhetoric... is persuasion to

change by means of identification” (25). In the following section, I will discuss Burke’s concept of identification and its application to analyze rhetorical manipulations in the selected gaming clips.

5.2. THE CONCEPT OF “IDENTIFICATION” IN BURKE’S RHETORICAL THEORY

Burke’s concept of “identification” provides a fruitful beginning to extend this notion to study the underlying mechanism of persuasion during *WoW* gameplay. “Identification,” according to Burke, is an effective method of persuasion that a rhetor uses to appeal to the audience to accomplish the objectives of rhetoric. What makes a rhetor’s persuasive manipulation effective is through the process of making two fundamentally separate entities “consubstantial,” according to *A Rhetoric of Motives* (21). In other words, a rhetor needs to communicate clearly their rhetorical intent to the audience by an eloquent use of symbols to create identification with the gamers. Thus, the persuasive objectives of rhetors can be achieved through such a successful rhetorical manipulation, leading to “consustantiality” among all game participants by merging both entities into one. As Burke states in the same book, it is important to utilize every possible means to persuade the audience by creating a sense of identification with the rhetors and their persuasive intent:

You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his. (51)

Burke compares these persuasive tools to “identification symbols” that are capable of creating identification with the audience. These symbols enable game designers to develop a persuasive MMORPG that will cause identification among participating gamers, just like the ancient Greek rhetors ingeniously plans and execute their speeches to persuade their audiences. It is vital for game designers to do so because playing a high level raid at *WoW* is time-consuming and nerve-wracking, even for the most experienced players. To terminate numerous bosses and monsters during multiple encounters in an

advanced raid can take over three to four hours and it depends on the close collaboration of the raid team. Therefore, the gamers need to be persuaded by *WoW* game designers that their investment with considerable amount of resources and efforts to play this game is worthwhile before the raid is launched. They also need to be persuaded that their participation will lead to a high level of immersion, enjoyment, and pleasure. These game designers need to identify with the craving of gamers, and integrate these needs for gratifications into the development of *WoW*. In other words, they need to build identification with the gamers, thus consubstantiality can be accomplished.

The following clip is a good example to show how the notion of identification can be used to understand the persuasive process during gameplay. Gaming Clip 5.4 records the group in the *Nexus* dungeon to free the captured red dragon boss, *Keristrasza*, from her ice prison, after killing three previous bosses, *Grand Magnus Telestra*, *Ormorok the Tree-Shaper*, and *Anomalus* (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/The_Nexus). The clip describes the encounter with *Grand Magnus Telestra* to accomplish the *Split Personality* achievement. The objectives of designers in creating this task are to manipulate gamers to use their crowd control spells, so they will be able to defeat *Grand Magnus Telestra* after having killed her three images within 5 seconds of each other during both splits. As a challenging *Lich King* heroic achievement, this gaming situation demands highly coordinated and strategy-based kinetic interactivity to interact with intensive visual and kinetic symbolic actions from *Grand Magnus*



Gaming Clip 5.4: *Grand Magnus Telestra* as an Identification Symbol to Persuade Gamers to Produce Their Own Multimodal Symbol-Using Activities.

Telestra. Upon the successful completion of this achievement, the gamers will be rewarded with 10-

point achievement, and will be able to proceed to other raid dungeons for the *Reins of the Red Proto-Drake* to mount this creature in the future (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Reins_of_the_Red_Proto-Drake).

After the raid leader, *Mysticfever*, initiates a *Ready Check*, all players are prepared to attack *Grand Magnus Telestra* in a *Split Personality* task. During the attack, *Grand Magnus Telestra* voices her threatening words, “You know what they say about curiosity,” “There's plenty of me to go around,” “I'll give you more than you can handle,” and “Now to finish the job!” These prompts are provided at different phases of the gameplay to create a contingency for action. Furthermore, the boss also casts her spells on the gamers to manipulate their responses for that situation. These gamers need to believe they are interacting with a real character in the fictitious gaming world. They have to feel mentally immersed in the designers’ world for the persuasion to be effective. As Burke states in *The Rhetoric of Motives*, the reader should form unity (identification) with the author for persuasion to succeed.

On the other hand, in order to facilitate the formation of identification, game designers need to intentionally determine the creation, production, and characterization of a *Grand Magnus Telestra* boss image (Figure 5.3), assuming that *WoW* gamers will be attracted to the virtual representation through the creation of a sense of identification with the medieval landscape. Furthermore, *WoW* is also characterized with the dominant themes of raid dungeons, medieval characters, and mythical monsters. Thus, creating a difficult heroic achievement in the *Nexus* dungeon shows game designers are well aware of what gamers expect to encounter when they enter into a medieval genre of MMORPGs. In *Counter-Statement*, Burke

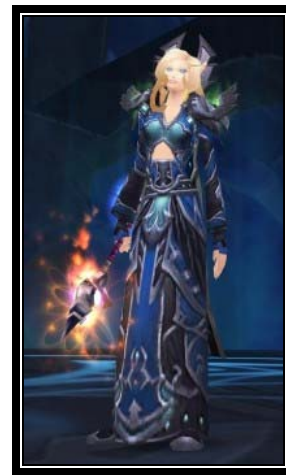


Figure 5.3: Image of *Grand Magnus Telestra*. (Source: http://www.wowwiki.com/Grand_Magnus_Telestra)

reasons “identification” is persuasive because it can be accomplished through “the arousing and fulfilling of an audience’s expectations” (217). Once gamers enter into the heroic mode dungeon they are prepared for this difficult task and anticipate great rewards afterwards. The symbolic action by game designers creates a rhetorical situation that arouses gamer expectations that will be fulfilled later during the attack. In other words, when rhetors (i.e., game designers) consider and speculate what symbols will be persuasive to the majority of gamers during gameplay, they design this gaming situation by identifying with the needs of the gamers, so as to accomplish their rhetorical goals.

In order to identify with the intention of gamers to be entertained during gameplay, *Grand Magnus Telestra* is designed as a female high elf race similar to those found in *The Lord of Rings*. She belongs to the *Mage* character class who is a *DPS* caster and specialized in area of effect (*AoE*) and burst damage spells. As a *Mage*, she is also equipped with the abilities to damage dealing and crowd control by using *Polymorph* capable of temporarily converting beasts and humanoids into inoffensive critters (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Mage>). According to Burke, identification is rooted in the similarities of substance of the symbols that the rhetors utilize to share with the audience. Most experienced *WoW* players are familiar with different races, character classes, talents, and skills in *WoW*. The design process of *Grand Magnus Telestra* character shows designers’ persuasive intent can lead to the creation of a credible character through the use of the pre-existing physical attributes, activities, beliefs, and skills, so it can be integrated into many similar in-game characters that the gamers are familiar with. As an *Elf* race, the image of *Grand Magnus Telestra* is similar to those other *Elf* race characters in terms of their physical representations (Figure 5.4). Their combat skills, beliefs



Figure 5.4: Images of Various *High Elf* Race Characters at *WoW*. (Source: http://www.wowwiki.com/High_elf)

in magic, and culture are also similar (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/High_elf). The creation of *Grand Magnus Telestra* can be considered as a designer-initiated symbolic action to manipulate the continual interactions of the gamers by identifying with their desire for various types of rewards. These identification symbols utilized by game designers will function effectively as an inducement for action among these participating gamers.

Burke's broad conceptualization of identification symbols seems to have foreseen the coming of the multimedia age. Burke's comprehensive categorization of these symbols can be well-extended to cover recent multimedia interactivities prevalent in MMORPGs. For Burke, all formal means considered to be persuasive should be examined when studying rhetoric. In the following section, I proceed to examine the notions of symbols and forms in Burke's rhetorical theory. I use selected gaming clips to discuss how these two notions are applicable to analyzing persuasion during gameplay.

5.3. THE CONCEPTS OF "SYMBOLS" AND "FORMS" IN BURKE'S RHETORICAL THEORY

Burke and many Burkean scholars tend to use the term, "symbol," to refer to both the material/physical and rhetorical characteristics of the manipulative devices in the persuasive process. The manipulative symbols in *WoW* include many multimodal interactive design elements, as well as embedded procedural rules governing how these design elements will operate. All of them intend to persuade the participating gamers during gameplay. For example, *Lady Deathwhisper* in the *Icecrown Citadel* raid dungeon should not be treated merely by her physical shape, voice pitch, activities, and capabilities, but as symbolic means used by rhetors (i.e., game designers) to manipulate the gamers to produce strategic multimodal responses appropriate for that situation. In the context of *WoW*, the symbol of *Lady Deathwhisper* can be argued as equivalent of the rhetorical manipulations by game designers to persuade the gamers during gameplay. Therefore, symbols can be reasoned as equivalent to the rhetorical expressions and practices—all of them are utilized to address a rhetorical situation. In

Burke's *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, all human produced symbols should be treated "as a *strategy for encompassing a situation*" (109). Therefore, in the following discussions, I will use these terms interchangeably in the discussions below to examine how these notions have been applied to analyze the selected gaming clips.

Symbols lay the foundation of developing a persuasive MMORPG platform. They are equivalent to many in-game design elements synergetically created to make *WoW* matchless and enticing. In the preceding sections, I discuss the utilization of symbols by game designers to persuade participating gamers during gameplay. This type of symbol-using activities is mainly for designers to manipulate gamers to produce their own responses for various rhetorical situations (such as activities for different raid dungeons). In this section, I will focus on the use of symbols by gamers to create their virtual self-representations to interact with other gamers.

As a popular MMORPG, *WoW* is distinctive because it allows participating gamers to choose and alter their virtual self during gameplay. On the other hand, many gamers of most stand-alone game platforms (except for recent Wii sports video game) cannot modify their avatars. The designer-programmed avatars remain to be a rhetor's agency used to persuade gamers to play a game. *WoW*, however, lets its gamers alter their own avatars through their symbol-using activities. Therefore, even though gamers of the traditional game platforms could identify with their avatars, the identification is restricted because of the lack of potential cohesion with the avatars through their own creation. A sense of agency can only be produced when gamers identify with the avatars as their very own symbolic actions.

For example, in Figure 5.5, the *Draenei* race avatar shows a change of visual representation as a result of the modifications by the gamers (before and after the alteration). At the beginning of this game, gamers are allowed to select a pre-designed and randomly-assigned *Draenei* race avatar. But they can adjust its skin color, face, hair style, hair color, and facial hair by transforming it to a partially

player-controlled symbol. Other race avatars will also allow various types of amendments; for example, the gamers are allowed to change ears for *Goblin*, tusks for *Troll*, horn and color/style for *Tauren*, and even piercings/earrings for most female avatars. During gameplay, players can also upgrade their own gears by receiving rewards from previous successful quests to change the appearance of their own avatars. With these detail modifications given by the gaming system, each player will have their very own avatars uniquely different from others. Through these symbol-using activities, *WoW* enables gamers to transform pre-determined avatars into their own agency during gameplay. Such symbolic action can be considered as a player-initiated manipulation to project an individual virtual representation.



	
The Avatar Originally Presented by the Game Designers (randomly selected by the game system)	The Avatar Modified by a Gamer
Original Visual Features	Modified Visual Features
Skin Color: Randomly chosen by the system. Face: Randomly chosen by the system. Hair Style: Randomly chosen by the system. Hair Color: Randomly chosen by the system. Facial Hair: Randomly chosen by the system.	Skin Color: Changed to a pinkish color. Face: Filled-up and round face. Hair Style: With a fancy hair style from its baldness. Hair Color: With black hair color. Facial Hair: With human-like goatee and less. <i>Draenei</i> 's tentacle-like facial feature.

Figure 5.5. A Comparison of Pre-determined and Modified *Draenei* Race Avatar.

According to Burke's rhetorical theory, the eloquent selection and utilization of symbols are crucial to producing an effective persuasion. In *Counter-Statement*, Burke argues "many purely formal patterns can readily awaken an attitude of collaborative expectancy in us" (58). Take the avatar modification as symbolic actions of the gamers for example, Talent builds is an important aspect of the process that involves adding more attributes to the avatars. To be more specific, a *Priest* could be *Holy*, *Shadow*, or *Discipline built*. Different Talent builds will subsequently give gamers different gaming experience and require them to seek for gears more suitable for their avatars. When new talent points are added to the avatars of players, their visual representations might also change slightly as a result.

Evidently, in Burke's rhetorical theory, symbols play an important role in producing intended rhetorical manipulations for effective persuasion. A clear distinction between designer- and gamer-initiated rhetorical manipulations will help understand the role of symbols in the persuasive process. The preceding discussions show both game designers and gamers utilize many in-game design elements as persuasive symbols, so that persuasive rhetorical responses can be generated among game participants. First, as to the use of symbols by gamers, the persuasive process is rhetorical because it involves the use of multimodal interactivities as persuasive symbolic actions to change their hybrid responses during a raid.

Secondly, as to the use of symbols by game designers, the multimodal interactivities constitute a vital part of the in-game design elements, enabling game designers to transform their own "experiential patterns into the symbols" (Rueckert 16). These multimodal symbols are considered to be an engaging and immersive gaming experience for many *WoW* players. In other words, avatars and many other symbols are rhetorical and are believed to communicate game designers' "patterns" to persuade gamers to experience the same (Rueckert 16). I will use the following gaming clip to explain the notion of symbols to explain the rhetorical manipulative process in typical *WoW* gameplay.

In Gaming Clip 5.5, when these gamers ponder over their strategies and prepare their pending attack on a group of mobs inside the *Icecrown Citadel* raid dungeon, they have applied the embedded buff tool, to provide short-term spells and effects on each gamer.



Gaming Clip 5.5: Rhetorical Manipulation through the Casting of Buffs on Other Gamers.

WoW designers program two types of buffs in the game: time-sensitive buffs with expiration

(such as *Arcane Intellect*) and environment-

dependent buffs (such as *AoE effects* by *Shammy's Totems*). Buffs, as an in-game design element, are programmed as a complex rhetorical manipulative device for gamers to alter their visual and kinetic capabilities for any subsequent gameplay. Buffs can be used for either combat or non-combat purposes by gamers from different classes (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Buff>). For example, a *Mage* class player will be able to cast both *Arcane Intellect* (to increase maximum spell power and mana) and *Focus Magic* (to increase the chance of hitting the target by 3%) buffs. Other classes of players will be able to cast buffs such as *Aspect of the Pack* (for a *Hunter* class character), *Thorn* (for a *Druid* class character), *Devotion Aura* (for a *Paladin* class character), *Fortitude and Shields* (for a *Priest* class character), etc. Written in such elaborate rules, procedures, and narratives, buffs, like many other in-game design elements in *WoW*, function as persuasive symbols to entice gamers to identify with the designer-initiated persuasive intent during *WoW* gameplay.

As recorded in Gaming Clip 5.5, these gamers are proficient with the rhetorical manipulations exerted by buffs on other gamers. As shown in this clip, some gamers with these abilities have cast buffs on other gamers to ensure that they will be powerful and prepared for the upcoming combat. When a gamer casts buffs on others, there are also visual and aural effects over the heads of the affected

gamers. The upper-right corner of the screen also shows the effects of buff casting on them. As such, it can be argued that the casting of buffs help manipulate other gamers to shape future gameplay experiences through the modification of avatars' strength, agility, stamina, intellect, magical resistance, water breathing, and speed. Such symbol-using activities are used by gamers to persuade other gamers to accept a more gratifying combat in the future.

In his book, *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke defines man as a “symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal, inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative), separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order), and rotten with perfection” (1). The utilization of interactive multimodal symbols can be clearly found in the game development process. As shown in these clips above, it is apparent that gamers also employ a large amount of symbols during gameplay. In Burke's discussions, the distinction between symbols and forms seems lacking and unclear. However, according to his discussions in *Counter-Statement*, form seems to be a higher-level of application of the symbols that function as another rhetorical manipulative tool rhetors can use for persuasion.

Form, according to *Counter-Statement*, is “as the psychology of the audience” and is capable of “the creation of an appetite in the mind of an auditor and the adequate satisfying of that appetite” (Burke 31). Form can be conceptualized as the outcome of an eloquent manipulation of symbols to create the appetite and expectations among the audience. As such, forms are likely to be what game designers will utilize. Although a persuasive utilization of symbols can generate such anticipation among gamers, forms provide the context in which a complete interpretation of the symbol-using activities can be thoroughly understood by the gamers. In other words, seeing an image of *Lady Deathwhisper* does not allow the gamers to fully comprehend the rhetorical intent of game designer unless they learn that she is a female boss in the *Icecrown Citadel* raid dungeon. She is also capable of casting *DPS* spells, causing high level damages on the targeted players. The *DPS* race with *Lady Deathwhisper* involves two phases

and she will have more abilities in Phase 2 to combat with the attacking gamers (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Lady_Deathwhisper).

In *Counter-Statement*, Burke identifies four major rhetorical forms that enable a rhetor to create persuasive effects: conventional, repetitive, progressive, and minor forms. Form (in particular, the syllogistic form) resembles “perfectly conducted argument, advancing step by step” in rhetoric (124). These forms are rhetorical devices that rhetors utilize to persuade the audience. Thus, rhetorical scholars can rely on the analysis of these rhetorical forms and their manipulative applications to understand the motives of game participants, either as the rhetor or the audience in the persuasive process. Forms are rhetorical by nature because the gamers will be always manipulated to expect their experience and the subsequent gratification during gameplay.

Therefore, in the process of developing *WoW*, its programmers have used these forms, or formal patterns, through their eloquent combinations of multimodal interactive symbols to persuade gamers to play by offering an opportunity of fulfilling the expectation, immersion, excitement, and gratification of the gamers. As Burke elaborates in *Counter-Statement*, “A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence” (124). Among many different types of MMORPGs (ranging from historical, superhero, fantasy, to sci-fi genres) in the digital game market, *WoW* is categorized as a fantasy game set in a fictitious *Warcraft* universe. When gamers subscribe to *WoW*, they anticipate an exclusive



Figure 5.6: *WoW: Wrath of Lich King*. (One of *WoW*'s 3 Expansion Sets)

gameplay experience, involving avatar creation, role-playing, and encounters with many mythical characters in an outlandish fictitious medieval landscape (Figure 5.6). Such expectations derive from the formal patterns of each MMORPG genre. Different game genres are also rhetorical, in that they manipulate gamers by promising to fulfill certain aspects of their appetite. Gamers are less likely to anticipate the same gameplay experience as found in other MMORPG, such as *Star Trek: Infinite Space*.

The rhetorical manipulation of their appetite and expectation is often through utilizing “conventional form” in the development of *WoW* for better market positioning. According to Burke, conventional form refers to “the appeal of form *as form*” that the audience is aware of its formality because different forms can produce “categorical expectation” as to what to expect in a specific genre (126). In *Counter-Statement*, Burke uses reading a novel as an example when a reader anticipates “an opening passage which will proclaim itself an opening” (127). In addition to its medieval fantasy theme, *WoW* is also considered to be a role-playing game (Wolf 202). As one of the most popular MMORPG genres, all players anticipate that they will “create or take on a character with a developed persona, that often has a description often including specifics as species, race, gender, and occupation, and may also include various abilities, such as strength and dexterity, to limited degrees usually represented numerically” (Wolf 202). Furthermore, all *WoW* gamers eagerly anticipate encountering an irreplaceable gameplay experience by interacting with these fictitious symbols and symbolic actions, no matter whether they are designer- and/or player-initiated.

Conventional form is a pre-game persuasive tool utilized by game designers to generate the expectations of gamer subsequent gameplay experience, repetitive and progressive forms, on the other hand, are used during gameplay by all game participants. In *Counter-Statement*, Burke reasons, “the anticipations and gratifications ... arise *during* the process of reading” when conventional forms generate similar expectations occur “*anterior to* the reading” (126-127). Once gamers enter into the *WoW* universe, forms are usually rhetorically manipulated by means of many game features, such as

customized characters (e.g., 12 races, 10 classes, 2 factions, 8 production professions, 3 gathering professions, 4 secondary professions, and talents) and its game systems (e.g., event, quest, honor, dungeon, and general systems) (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/World_of_Warcraft). With the manipulations of these rhetorical forms, rules, stories, myths and space are then created to persuade their continual engagement with the game (Quigley).

Repetitive form is one of the most popular rhetorical forms gamers often encounter during *WoW* gameplay. These forms are often used by game designers to create a perception of urgency among gamers in a rhetorical situation. These manipulations are used when the boss *Festergut* unleashes a gas spore with the text, “Festergut farts” displayed on the screen. Or, when *Festergut* kills a player, “Dead, dead, dead!” shows up in addition to the visual and kinetic interactivities. In *Counter-Statement*, Burke defines the repetitive form as “the consistent maintaining of a principle under new guises. It is restatement of the same thing in different ways” (125). Thus, the utilization of these repetitive forms helps create a feeling of anticipation among gamers. I will use the following gaming clip to discuss how repetitive forms create many in-game boss encounters to persuade gamers and to stimulate them to generate responses appropriate to that rhetorical situation.

In Gaming Clip 5.6, these gamers in this *Icecrown Citadel* raid dungeon discuss the appropriate strategies as to how to defeat the boss *Festergut*-- how to position their attack posts and how to take advantage of *Festergut's* enrage intervals to evade its attacks. In order to respond to the rhetorical manipulations, they are persuaded to produce their multimodal interactions. Through the



Gaming Clip 5.6: Repetitive Forms and Persuasive Process in the boss *Festergut* Fight.

use of repetitive forms, a distinctive rhetorical situation is presented by the boss character, which involves the needs to group the players into the ranged or melee groups, and stay out of *Festergut's* attack range to avoid *DPS* damage. As a strategy-based MMORPG, *WoW* players need to agree on the strategy before initiating their attack. During the intensive persuasion for effective strategies, the raid leader wants to ensure a consensus is reached within the raid team. The strategic planning process among gamers can be viewed as a result of designer-generated rhetorical manipulation of the repetitive form in the raid. The task to defeat the boss is also a *DPS* race that requires gamers have sufficient gear before they progress into another part of the raid to encounter other more difficult bosses. As a gear-check/gatekeeper raid, game designers have intentionally programmed the boss *Festergut* to be with a high damage output, and a short enrage timer (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Gear_check). The abilities the boss *Festergut* uses to unleash its *Gas Spore*, *Gaseous Blight*, *Inhale Blight*, *Pungent Blight*, *Vile Gas*, and *Gastric Bloat* during the raid become part of the repetitive form to characterize the raid (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Festergut>). The forms help create what to expect in this encounter, which ultimately leads to the generation of many player-initiated strategic discussions as recorded in this gaming clip.

When gamers take part in a raid, they are in a constant state of mind, anticipating what will happen next? What will be the forthcoming move of these raid members? How should a gamer respond if the boss suddenly attacks? What strategies should be used to respond to the rhetorical situation? For *WoW*, as a massively multiplayer strategic game, the answers to these questions are even more difficult to obtain without taking into the actions and thoughts of other gamers. In *Dramatic Form*, Burke describes the progressive forms are used by the rhetors to create a sense of expectation; that is, the development of a situation that makes “the audience to anticipate or desire certain developments” (54). In *Counter-Statement*, Burke further divides the progressive forms into syllogistic and qualitative forms (Refer to 124-125 for detailed discussion).

The syllogistic progressive form is most relevant to the persuasive manipulation for raid strategies during *WoW* gameplay. This type of rhetorical form is similar to a plot that provides the audience with what to expect next as in “a cause and effect reaction chain” (Rueckert 21). For example, if gamers decide to position themselves outside the *DPS* range of the boss *Festergut*, then they will not be killed, according to the abilities of the boss. This type of form is also called syllogistic in *Counter-Statement* because “the form of a perfectly conducted argument, advancing step by step” (Burke 124). *WoW* game designers program many raid instances in the game with a sequence of if-then (cause and effect) rhetorical manipulations through spells, abilities, gears, and game rules. Examples include the following if-then situations: if gamers buff the team members, then they will be able to sustain the attacks from the boss; if *Lady Deathwhisper’s Death and Decay spell* is cast, then 4,500 Shadow damage will be inflicted on the players in the affected area for 10 seconds (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Lady_Deathwhisper). With the knowledge of what to come next, the raid leader will be able to propose effective positioning strategies to complete this boss encounter successfully (Gaming Clip 5.7). In this clip, it records the process of cleaning the mobs before the boss *Lord Marrowgar*, who is the first boss encounter in the *Icecrown Citadel* raid dungeon. The raid leader, *Tenaz*, tries to persuade the whole raid team that the most effective strategy to clean up the mobs is through a series of positioning decisions once the gamers kinetically move their avatars.



Gaming Clip 5.7: Syllogistic Progressive Forms Affecting Strategy Formulation before the *Lord Marrowgar* Raid.

Tenaz uses the syllogistic progressive form to persuade the gamers to move to the right positions, so the task will be successful. For example, *Tenaz* orders every gamer to “get back to the right.... Off to the

right please” because if gamers move to the right, the mobs will predictably “come to the same spot” for an easy kill by tanking and *AoE*. *Tanez’s* rhetorical manipulation has led to numerous multimodal responses of these gamers once other gamers agree with and follow his strategy, “Cool, I am pulling,” “Stay around, keep here. Wait till the casters to get around,” and “All right, AOE in.”

The encounter with *Lord Marrowgar* is also considered as the easiest raid among many bosses in the *Icecrown Citadel* raid dungeon. If gamers cannot survive this raid, it is then unlikely they will succeed in future encounters with other more demanding boss raids (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Lord_Marrowgar). As such, this raid in itself can be considered as a syllogistic progressive form because it adopts the same if-then (cause and effect) logic to predict what will come in the future.

Designer-initiated syllogistic progressive forms are embedded as rules and procedures to create “an appetite in the mind of an auditor” (Burke 31). Often used as persuasive manipulations, the forms constitute the rhetorical practices used by *WoW* game designers (Bogost). These concealed rhetorical forms are used dexterously by designers to encourage playing *WoW*, so inducements can be obtained. However, because *WoW* is played as a team-based strategy game, experienced and skillful gamers will often become a raid leader who will share the in-game knowledge, obtained through extensive interactions with the in-game design elements and forms. As such, the in-game knowledge becomes an interpretive frame that helps the gamers to comprehend the meanings and persuasive intent of the symbols, forms, symbolic actions, and raid strategies during *WoW* gameplay. Broadly speaking, the corpus of *WoW* in-game knowledge comprise statements such as “What” (such as “What is the *WoW* game about?”), “How” (such as “How should I respond to the multimodal interactivities from the boss *Onyxia*?”), and “If-then” (such as “If the boss *Lady Deathwhisper* cast her *Dominate Mind* spell on me, then what will happen?, then what should I do?). These statements address whether gamers are familiar

with the meanings and manipulative intent of the game participants in terms of the use of “conventional forms” (What), “repetitive forms” (How), and “progressive forms” (If-then).

The in-game knowledge functions as an interpretive frame for the persuasion during gameplay to work effectively. It also helps game participants to comprehend the persuasive intent behind these rhetorical manipulations: another demonstration of the identification process that leads to “consubstantiality” of two separate entities during gameplay. With the in-game knowledge, designer-generated manipulations through various symbol-using activities then become meaningful and persuasive. Burke once claimed in *A Rhetoric of Motives*: “Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is ‘rhetoric,’ there is ‘meaning’” (172). Persuasion during gameplay is meaning-making and –sharing process. The sharing of knowledge and experience among the game participants is also vital for identification to occur. The gamers often acquire the knowledge from reading the game manuals, consulting information from community forums (such as *Elitist Jerks*, <http://elitistjerks.com/>), from conversing with other gamers, or simply from many trials and errors. On the basis of the knowledge, the gamers can then make sense of rhetor’s “symbolic means” and persuasive intent. While the discussions above emphasize the meaning making process of the gamers, it does not mean the affect (pathos) perspective does not play a role in the persuasive manipulation. When exposed to the rhetorical manipulations of participants, the gamers are also emotionally involved, which will affect their interpretation of these persuasive manipulations.

Understanding the persuasive manipulations of rhetors involves the accurate interpretation of the gameplay situation. The process of interpretation is thus another part of the persuasion. Burke’s Dramatism and Pentad discuss how human beings interpret a rhetorical situation. Burke uses the term, motive, to account for the interpretation process. In *Permanence and Change*, motive is a “term of interpretation” (25). In the section below, I derive from Burke’s Dramatism and Pentad, from *A Grammar of Motives*, to examine Burke’s notion of motive in explaining what game participants are

doing to rhetorically manipulate other gamers and what motivate their persuasive intent during gameplay (xv).

5.4. DRAMATISM AND PENTAD IN BURKE'S RHETORICAL THEORY

Gameplay involves a series of persuasive acts between gamers and game designers, as well as among gamers themselves. Game designers utilize existing or newly developed “symbolic means” to persuade many *WoW* gamers to generate rhetorical responses pertinent to different rhetorical situations (such as raids, tasks, and strategy formulation). These “symbolic means” include multimodal interactive symbols, forms, and many in-game design elements used by the game participants. This dissertation emphasizes the persuasive process manifested through these symbolic activities and will specifically examine the persuasive process and rhetorical manipulations in the selected gaming clips.

The study of human-computer interactions is plentiful in the literature because of an increasing dependence on this new technology to seek information, entertainment, enjoyment, and socialization. Brenda Laurel's book, *Computers as Theater*, pioneers the concept of “theater as an interface metaphor” to describe the reasons, dynamics, and mechanisms of human-computer activity (18). Game scholars like Walz follows a similar idea by describing human-computer interactions in the context of digital game as “a rhetorical performance between player(s) and game design, a symbolic action that takes place among agents involved in playful human-computer *eigenworld* cooperation on the basis of identification-making, and persuasive operations” (195). Thus, gameplay occurs when a series of participant-initiated symbolic actions take place at the *WoW* setting. Walz's definition of gameplay is derived from Burke's rhetorical theory that emphasizes human agents' abilities to influence others through the use of symbols and forms.

To extend Burke's Dramatism and Pentad to study game rhetorics may involve the same argumentation process that visual rhetoricians go through earlier to justify such an application (See Foss

for a complete discussion). This process helps make a case as to why rhetorical scholars could justify their inclusion of gamer-to-gamer and designer-to-gamer persuasion as a rhetorical artifact. Foss provides a list of normative criteria to support the treatment of visual rhetoric as a proper domain of rhetorical study: 1) symbolic action; 2) human intervention; 3) presence of the audience. To derive from her arguments to justify the application of Burke's rhetorical theory to study game rhetoric, I contend *WoW* gameplay is not a series of unintended meaningless interactions with the game or other gamers. It requires a high level of cognitive processing and kinetic interactions with both designer- and player-initiated symbolic actions to succeed in the gameplay. These interactions often involve a sequence of purposeful rhetorical manipulations of symbols and forms to address or create a rhetorical situation during gameplay. *WoW* game designers utilize these multimodal interactive symbols and forms to create many enticing rhetorical symbols and forms for gamers to create prompt and timely interactions for the raid to be successful. All gamers need to collaborate with each other to succeed in the game. The persuasive process includes involvement, engagement, and elaboration of many player- and designer-crafted rhetorical symbols and forms.

Burke's rhetorical theory of Dramatism conceptualizes all human interactions as a "symbolic drama" and links his rhetorical theory with many "identification symbols" that a rhetor uses to persuade the audience through their interpretation of a gaming situation. In the prior section, I establish identification is an effective method to induce persuasion through the sophisticated utilization of symbols and forms during *WoW* gameplay. Symbols and forms, thus, lay the foundation of persuasion and are often utilized as rhetorical devices to persuade game participants. In order to assess the appropriateness of rhetorical manipulations for different rhetorical situations, Burke proposes the concept of Pentad. Dramatistic pentad offers a self-explanatory analytical framework for rhetorical scholars to examine rhetor's motive (i.e., the interpretation of a situation) to produce symbolic actions through a detailed examination of their pentadic relationships in the process. Dramatism therefore

enables rhetorical scholars to “consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treat language and thought primarily as modes of action” as Burke argues in *A Grammar of Motives* (xxii). As such, Dramatism helps rhetorical scholars to understand rhetors’ motives and symbolic actions through the examination of the persuasive process pertaining to “what people are doing and why they are doing it,” as Burke reasons in the same book (xv).

Gaming Clip 5.8 records how these gamers respond after a failed attempt to kill *Festergut*, documenting what went wrong during the fight and what should be done to remedy the situation. In particular, what should be done, so the next attack will be successful?—these are only a few rhetorical responses appropriate for a raid attempt that fails, but will be repeated shortly. Though not desirable among many gamers, a failed raid can be argued as a designer-controlled symbolic action to persuade gamers to continue with the game after reformulating their strategy for a better result. It aims to create an appetite for future success, instead. Apparently, these game designers have successfully manipulated gamers to yearn for a future success through the development of new strategies, as shown in this clip. All gamers take part in the discussions to assess and interpret what causes their failure and they all ponder over any mishaps in the gameplay, so they will not be repeated. One player shares his interpretation of this failed raid, saying “I think the tank missed the first and the third...” Another player relates the failure to the miscalculated positioning of the *DPS* group as stationed “too far away” from the boss. To succeed in the raid, two tank players need to tank the boss right in the center of the circular room so that other ranged players can choose their position and stay away from each other to avoid boss *Festergut's* buff attacks (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Festergut>).

For these gamers, a failure in a boss encounter often means that their earlier rhetorical responses to that situation are not effective in addressing the designer-initiated rhetorical manipulations (challenges) in this raid. In a strategy game, like *WoW*, this often means that gamers have not interpreted the rhetorical situation correctly in terms of what the boss *Festergut* is capable of, what other

gamers are able to do, and what strategies will be most effective in interacting with symbolic actions from game designers. A new strategy thus needs to be developed for future attempts. Although the encounter with the boss *Festergut* is considered to be a gear check raid that only requires limited tactics to defeat him. The boss *Festergut* is equipped with many designer-initiated rhetorical forms such as unleashing gas spores and blights at its attackers (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Festergut>). To formulate a new scheme of defeating *Festergut*, these gamers need to rely on the in-game knowledge about *Festergut*, such as its 5-minute enrage intervals, damage capabilities of its different weapons (such as *Vile Gas* can cause the target to vomit and 4,875 to 5,125 damage every 2 seconds for 6 seconds) (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Festergut>). Only when they accurately interpret the gameplay situation as to how the boss *Festergut* will respond to create new rhetorical manipulations, can they then develop more effective strategies in setting the attack priority, grouping the raid members, and deciding the safe positioning of the raid (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Festergut>)-- all of these are essential for a ultimate successful raid to defeat *Festergut*.

In Gaming Clip 5.8, Burke's notion of "motive" as the interpretation of a gameplay situation is clearly shown when gamers try to make sense of what caused the failure. The process of interpretation leads to some heated discussions among gamers. For example, the raid leader, *Tanez*, has attributed the failed raid to the situation that "people obviously haven't...you know look up the strategies." If

effective strategies have been developed and followed straightly, then "stupidest mistakes" will not be made to cause the failure. The emphasis on strategic planning during *WoW* gameplay also reveals the



Gaming Clip 5.8: Gamers' Motive to Formulate a New Raid Strategy to kill *Festergut*.

application of conventional form in a strategy-based game. The endless concerns over what should be done in the future boss encounters help generate more discussions on the stacking and positioning strategies; those are two of the pivotal strategic decisions to defeat the boss in this raid. As voiced by one of the gamers, “you just stand on *Festergut’s* left leg it’s the one in front and you will never miss that...the spore you’ll never do. Just stand on his leg.” Apparently, they are manipulated to feel the exigency for an effective strategy, so they can successfully tackle designers’ rhetorical manipulation in the future.

The essence of Burke’s Dramatic theory as an analytical method of a rhetorical situation is best summarized in his graphical representation of the Pentad that constitutes human relations and motives (Figure 5.7). In his well-known book, *A Grammar of Motives*, five elements make up a pentad; that is, act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose, which are used to answer the following five questions: “what

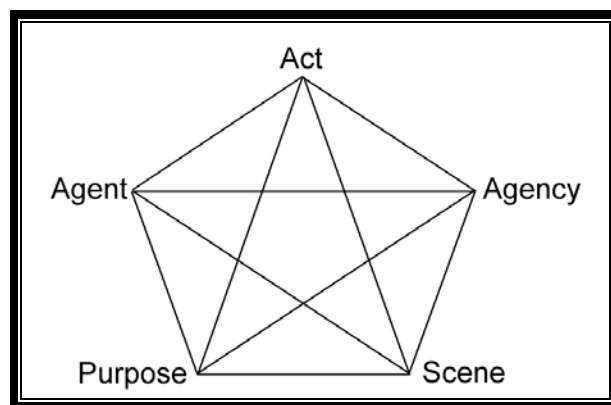


Figure 5.7: Burke’s Pentad and Ratios.

was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purposes)” (xv). Act refers to “names what took place, in thought or deed,” meanwhile scene refer to “the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred” (xv). Scene is defined as “the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred” (xv). Agent refers to “what person or kind of person” (xv), and agency refers to “what means or instruments he used” (xv). Burke further divides agent into *co-agents* who motivate the agents to modify their act and *counteragents* who are enemies of the agent (xiv).

I will first use the creation of gamer avatars to explain the notion of pentad before proceeding to analyze more dynamic and complex gaming clips. *WoW* is full of various types of participant-initiated

symbolic actions that are similar to what an actor or actress does in a theater; gamers act and interact with each other in a dramatic setting to entertain, persuade, and inform each other in a virtual space. In *WoW*, when gamers choose different races and classes in creating their avatars to complete some tasks (Act) in a mythical virtual world (Scene), they already choose what experience they want to explore during gameplay. Players (Agent) that belong to different factions, races, or classes work with or against each other, following the pre-determined scripts, assigned abilities, and user interface items (Agency) written by game designers. The objectives (Purpose) of their collaboration or fights are to complete a raid and a task, which allow their characters to advance into various levels of status within the game hierarchy by obtaining more Achievement Points, gears, and reputation (Taylor).

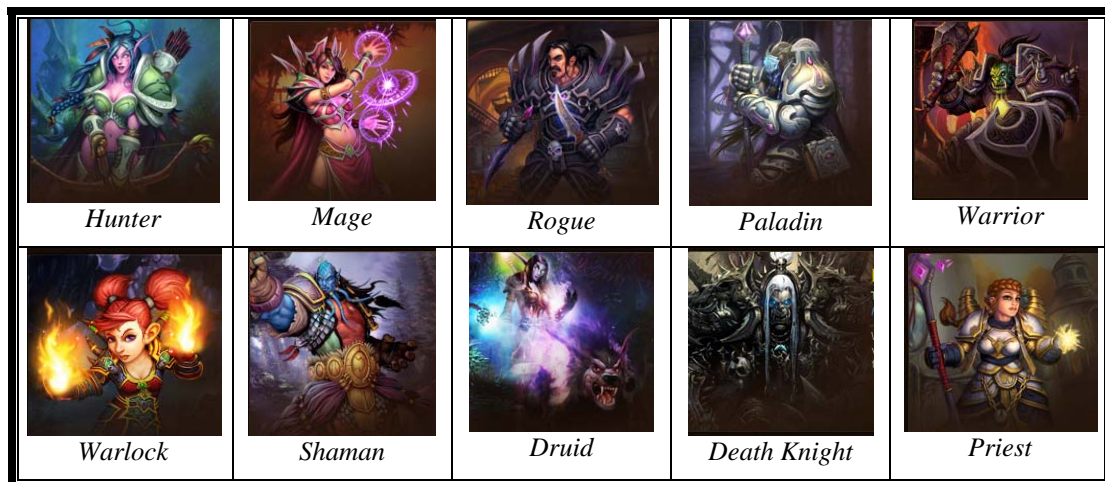


Figure 5.8: Images of Ten Classes at *WoW*.

(Source: <http://us.battle.net/wow/en/game/class/>)

To create their own avatars, the gamers have to determine their factions, races, and classes. *WoW* has two factions, the *Alliance* and the *Horde*, for the gamers to choose from. The *Horde* has the six races (i.e., *Orcs*, *Tauren*, *Trolls*, *Forsaken*, *Blood Elves*, and *Goblins*), meanwhile the *Alliance* has another six races (i.e., *Dwarves*, *Gnomes*, *Humans*, *Night Elves*, *Draenei*, and *Worgen*). There are also ten classes of characters with various strength, agility, stamina, spirit, and intelligence (Figure 5.8).

For example, a *Priest* character is only available for *Humans, Dwarves, Night Elves, Forsaken, Trolls, Blood Elves, Draenei, Worgen, Gnomes, Tauren, and Goblins*. The *Priest* has the primary attributes of intellect and spirit. Main weapon skills of the *Priest* include one-handed maces, unarmed, wands, daggers, and staves. *WoW Game Manual* describes the *Priest* class as:

[A] spellcaster with a diverse portfolio of spells. This class has the most potential healing spells, as well as excellent buffs. It also has good defensive spells that can ward allies from physical dangers and spells, as well as purely offensive shadow spells. However, as a primary spellcaster, the priest is extremely fragile, with poor health and weak melee power. (74)

A pentadic analysis of designer-initiated rhetorical manipulations in the game development has established Burke's notions of act, scene, agency, and purpose are useful to understand these persuasive devices. To take the *Priest* class for example, the pre-determined abilities of this character have foreseen that a *Priest* avatar will be suitable for a variety of raids and tasks (Scene) because of its healing, buffing, and shielding powers (Agency) at various *WoW* gameplay situations in different raid dungeons (Scene). Its agency for applying the embedded abilities in a raid is done through casting a wide variety of spells, such as *Holy Smite, Holy Word, Holy Word (Shield), Inner Fire, Lesser Heal, Mana Burn, and Resurrection* (Agency) (Blizzard Entertainment). In-game knowledge like the preceding discussion helps the gamers to learn the persuasive intent of the designers by interpreting what has been done to create these characters and for what persuasive purposes. The process of selecting characters and avatars to participate in the game is a process that Burke calls "consubstantiality," meaning both game designers and gamers share a common perspective as to what these characters can do for them during gameplay. As such, all participating gamers identify with the persuasive intent of the designers-- a process of

identification as Burke proposes. Once the “consubstantiality” is established, then persuasion is effective to create H.I.R.E. among gamers.

The process of selecting avatars, interacting with other gamer avatars, and collaborating as a guild, raid team, or group to complete the boss encounters by means of designed interface and scripts generates a high level of engagement and immersion experienced by many gamers during gameplay. As gamers advance in the *WoW* hierarchy after progressing from easier to more difficult quests, the experience of working with other skilled team in a raid create the most intense physical and emotional engagements in a short period of time. As Girod, Rau, and Schepige points out, gameplay is an intensely emotional and dramatic experience, which is similar to H.I.R.E. many gamers feel during gameplay.

According to Burke’s rhetorical theory, dramatistic pentads can be observed in any rhetorical situation, depending on the perspectives adopted for the analysis. In the following gaming clips, I will apply Burke’s pentad and its components to analyze what has been done to persuade gamers and why these rhetorical manipulations are effective. This dissertation will place emphasis on how gamers interpret the rhetorical manipulations in different rhetorical situations during gameplay. The designers’ motives to interpret the needs of the gamers are quite straightforward and predictable. In other words, in order to obtain maximum commercial success in the competitive game marketplace, designers need to develop an engaging game with exceptional raid dungeon landscapes that constantly demand appropriate responses (Scene), challenging raids waiting for completion by agent’s symbolic actions and for what reasons (Act and Purpose), easy to use interface tools and avatars (Agency). Therefore, the following explanations will center on gamer-to-gamer rhetorical manipulations observed in the selected gaming clips.

Gaming Clip 5.9 records the persuasive process that demands gamers to complete a *Split Personality* achievement in the *Nexus* dungeon. The task situation is created on the basis of what game designers interpret their “appetite for excitement.” The *Nexus* raid in heroic mode is composed of five

boss encounters in five scenes (i.e., *Axis of Alignment*, *Hall of Stasis*, *The Librarium*, *The Rift*, and *The Singing Grove*) (WoWWiki [http://www.wowwiki.com/The_Nexus_\(instance\)](http://www.wowwiki.com/The_Nexus_(instance))). On the basis of their understanding of the gamer intention to defeat all bosses in this dungeon, game designers (Agent) utilize every possible multimodal rhetorical device to create this dungeon to persuade the gamers to act. From the perspective of game designers, the task is created through the use of several pentadic elements. The task is situated in *The Nexus* dungeon featuring a *Coldarra, Borean Tundra* landscape (Scene); the objectives of producing this raid are to persuade the gamers to take part in the dungeon group for rewards (Purpose) through the use of *Grand Magus Telestra* (Agent) and her three components and harmful spells (Agency), by which a challenging raid can be created (Scene). If the symbolic actions in creating the boss and raid are used strategically, many gamers will enthusiastically take part in this raid, achieving game designers' objectives in making this patch a commercial success (Purpose).



Gaming Clip 5.9: Using the Pentadic Analysis for the *Split Personality* task.

Grand Magus Telestra can be

defeated if all gamers collaborate to kill the boss' three images within 5 seconds of each other during both splits through their sophisticated use of controlling damage dealt and damage received. If these gamers want to succeed in this task, they would need to understand the persuasive intent of game designers. As often happened during *WoW* gameplay, they sometimes lack the sufficient in-game knowledge to interpret these symbolic actions from game designers. Oftentimes, they may have abundant in-game knowledge, but the dungeon group fails to develop an effective strategy to complete the task. Because *WoW* is a multiplayer strategic game, the persuasive process among its gamers is

another important object of rhetorical analysis that scholars can apply Burke's pentad and its components to analyze these rhetorical manipulations.

In the same gaming clip, all participating gamers are aware of what is entailed when taking part in this *Split Personality* achievement. The task requires the gamers to control damage dealt and damage received within a short period of intervals of five seconds in the *Nexus* raid dungeon (Scene). *Grand Magus Telestra's* three split components must be controlled so that they are terminated one by one as quickly as possible (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Split_Personality) (Act). The pentadic interpretation of the rhetorical situation in this task should be known to all gamers to help with the strategic discussion and formulation. As noted in Gaming Clip 5.9, the persuasive process apparently centers on the strategic formulation process to better respond to the task. The group leader, *Mysticfever*, begins the development of the strategy by first assessing what has happened (Motive). She wants to ensure if one of the players in a *Mage* class is capable of delivering stuns and if a stun can be used at the beginning of the raid. Resorting to her own in-game knowledge, *Likimeya* points out *Mage* can only *Sheep(morph)*. Attempting to figure out who can deliver a stun vital to the success of this task, *Mysticfever* then asks *Malkie* to see if he can stun. Observing from their interactions, *Mysticfever* tries very hard to interpret what each player (Agent) is capable of doing (Act) through their Agency (avatar with their numerous embedded abilities), so the task of defeating *Grand Magus Telestra* can be completed (Purpose). To justify her later strategy, *Mysticfever* is building her persuasive arguments on the basis of what an agent can accomplish through what symbolic means in a unique rhetorical situation. By presenting this pentadic rhetorical manipulation, *Mysticfever* wishes to persuade the rest of the group members to agree with her proposed strategy, making the best use of agents' abilities to utilize their agency to complete the achievement.

After laboring on various possibilities (using trap, stun, crowd controls, and *DPS* points), *Mysticfever* then proposes a strategy for approval by the team; she says, "Okay, the plan is if we don't

get it...basically run out to here. Wait over here and she (the boss) will reset.” She also proposes to have *Malkie* on the blue split because it is the most powerful split; *Likimeya* will be placed on the purple split, leaving the red split alone. The strategy will rely on another pentadic relationship, in which all gamers (Agents) will use their agency to reach 20,000 *DPS*, stop there, until everyone is ready to proceed (Act). The purpose of *DPS* management is to prepare the raid team to be ready for the *Split Personality* achievement (Purpose). To obtain the agreement from other gamers on the strategy, *Mysticfever* (Agent) also relies on the in-game knowledge of other gamers, so the persuasion will be accomplished through a commonly agreed objective among the rest of the raid (persuasion as Purpose). To avoid any possible confusion, *Mysticfever* (Agent) has even used her avatar (Agency) to facilitate the persuasive process by moving her character to the position where these four players will visit by running to the opposite direction.

Analyses using Burke’s Dramatism theory and pentad often lead to the examination of relationships between and among his pentadic elements: Agent, Agency, Scene, Act, and Purpose. Burke’s pentad is a useful analytical tool to understand the fictitious reality and drama during *WoW* gameplay when an “agent” is placed in a “scene” to perform an “act” through an “agency” to accomplish a raid (“purpose”). The pentad is made up of the aforementioned five elements that are embedded or “implicit in any artifact or message” (Dickinson 126). Rhetorical scholars have applied the pentad to examine the relationships between these elements and the combination of the elements (i.e., ratios) in any rhetorical artifact to uncover a rhetor’s persuasive intent in producing these symbolic actions for that particular situation (Burke; Dickinson). In other words, what motivates the rhetor to use these pentadic elements and their combinations for persuasive purposes? Thus, the rhetor’s decisions to choose what pentadic elements to be utilities to persuade the gamers can uncover what the rhetors have interpreted the situation and why the persuasive manipulations in a rhetorical situation are crafted as such to accomplish persuasion. Therefore, Burke’s pentad allows game scholars to deconstruct a

gameplay rhetorical situation by identifying five “dramatistic keys;” at the same time, it allows them to understand holistically why one gameplay situation is more persuasive than the other. Ten ratios can be generated from any combinations of these five elements in the pentad: Scene-Purpose; Scene-Act; Scene-Agency; Scene-Agent; Act-Purpose; Act-Agency; Act-Agent; Agency-Purpose; Agent-Purpose; and Agent-Agency (Sadler and Bellew 2). Overington identifies two of the most commonly used Burkean ratios as Scene-Act and Scene-Agent, examining the complex situation affecting “an *agent acting in a situation*” (143). The following gaming clips will discuss the notions of Burke’s Scene-Act and Scene-Agent ratios in establishing the “substance” (essence) of a rhetorical action as interpreted by both game designers and gamers (Burke; Overington). As Burke reasons, the interpretation of a rhetorical situation will ultimately lead to the symbol-using activities for persuasion.

I will begin my discussion on Burke’s notion of ratio and its numerous combinations as interpretative frames to analyze complex rhetorical situations by focusing on the utilization of the boss *Onyxia* (Agent) in the *Onyxia Lair* raid dungeon located in *Wyrmborg*, *Dustwallow Marsh* (Scene). In Figure 5.9, it displays the Scene-Agent ratio that helps answer the question: “How does the scene affect the creation of the agent?” by game designers to manipulate gamers to take part in the raid.



Figure 5.9: *Onyxia* as an Agent in the Scene-Agent Ratio in Burke’s Pentad. (Source: <http://www.wowwiki.com/Onyxia>)

Wyrmborg is located in the south of *Dragonmurk*, a depressing swamp area within *Dustwallow Marsh* and where many dragons live (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Wyrmbog>) (Scene). Its inimitable geographical location justifies the creation of a dragon boss, *Onyxia*, in that rhetorical situation of a particular *WoW* raid. The raid is composed to

Black wyrm, Black dragonspawn, and Black dragon whelps, along with many mob groups to create a challenging raid (WoWWiki http://www.wowwiki.com/Onyxia%27s_Lair).

Onyxia (Agent) is created as a huge black dragon, and she has all the abilities and powers like other black dragons have. The creation of this dragon boss is grounded in the geographical landscape. *WoW* game designers purposefully manipulate the multimodal interactive symbols to present a convincing character in this landscape to entice gamer engagement with the gameplay situation. The swamp area where many dragons already exist justifies the introduction of another black dragon to make the scene appealing. Some remaining fierce dragonfights are also added to make the raid more persuasive as a gameplay situation. *Onyxia Lair* (Scene) is located in a blazing cavern below the *Dragonmurk* and is filled with *Onyxia's* precious eggs. To guard her eggs waiting for maturation within her lair, *Onyxia* is designed to initiate an unrelenting combat through her breath weapon by attacking soft targets such as spellcasters. *Onyxia* will use her defensive spells (Agency) to increase her flying abilities if she has time to prepare the combat (Act). *Onyxia* is also capable of flying and breathing fire as a dragon (Agency) (WoWWiki <http://www.wowwiki.com/Onyxia>). As observed in these examples, it is apparent for the *WoW* game designers, Scene-Act and Scene-Agent ratios seem to dominate the rhetoric of gameplay persuasion to justify the creation of certain bosses and monsters to warrant numerous acts. Although Agent-Agency ratio is also found in the designer-initiated symbolic actions in the development of *WoW*, the scene continues to provide the most persuasive manipulation as to what agent and act should be created. Even though other Burke's pentadic ratios can be observed in different gameplay situations, they fail to offer as many materials for analysis as the Scene ratio pairs are able to offer. *WoW* is basically a MMORPG full of eloquently crafted scenes that justify the creation of bosses, mobs, and abilities associated with these fictitious creatures (Agent, Act, and Agency). Without the contexts of the scenes, the existence of these designer-initiated symbolic actions fails to produce the needed meanings to share with gamers, so identification cannot be generated in the persuasive process.

The two examples above show the pentadic relationships of Scene and Agent, Scene and Act, and Agent-Agency in a typical *WoW* raid. By emphasizing the Scene-Agent and Scene-Act ratios, *WoW* game designers are thus able to create one of the most popular MMORPGs in history through their eloquent rhetorical symbols and forms to accomplish their persuasive intent.

Will the same pentadic ratios prevail in player-initiated rhetorical manipulations during any gameplay situation? What will be the dominant pentadic ratios when gamers want to persuade each other to formulate an effective strategy for a raid? Gaming Clip 5.10 records the killing of *Onyxia* dragon in the *Onyxia Lair* raid dungeon. In this clip, the designer-initiated pentad, the game designers (Agent) make the same interpretation about the needs of the gamers and created a rhetorical situation in which the gamers are required to respond. In the *Onyxia Lair* raid dungeon (Scene), game designers (Agent) program the raid that *Onyxia* (Agent) initiates a combat (Act) using her breath weapons (Agency), so the gamers will be persuaded to play with the game (Purpose).



Gaming Clip 5.10: Burke's Notion of Ratio in Analyzing Pre-Raid Strategy Formulation among Gamers.

From the perspective of these gamers, several different pentadic relationships can be observed to formulate a pre-raid strategy during gameplay. The formulation of a pre-raid strategy involves numerous persuasive acts among the gamers, so that they can identify with the manipulative intent of the designers as well as the raid leader, *Brugarude*. A sequence of rhetorical manipulations is important for the gamers to come to a consensus about their pre-raid strategy. The purposes of the raid leader's rhetorical manipulations aim to develop an effective strategy to defeat the *Onyxia* boss (Purpose) in *Wyrmbog*

(Scene) (Scene-Purpose). The dragon-infested *DPS* raid dungeon (Scene) demands the players and their avatars (Agent) to use their abilities as a tank or a healer (Agency) to evade any incoming attacks from *Onyxia* (Act) (Scene-Agency; Scene-Act). To maximize the abilities of each gamer during the attack (Scene), they need to be positioned strategically to obtain healer's protection (Act) (Scene-Act).

The analyses of pentadic ratios demonstrate that the raid leader's rhetorical manipulations are mainly done by requesting the gamers (Agent) to do the followings: 1) to interpret the rhetorical situation as he does through the in-game knowledge (Identification); 2) to reiterate whether the scene justifies the recruitment of player characters in a situation (Scene-Agent); 3) to respond to the scene by producing appropriate acts (Scene-Act); 4) to maximize the use of player abilities to respond to the situation (Scene-Agency); 5) to collaborate closely on an agreed strategy to facilitate rhetorical manipulation to succeed in the raid (Act-Purpose).

As observed in this clip, *Brugarude*'s strategy will coordinate the positioning and ability-using of the gamers in this raid; both of them are vital to succeed in this *DPS* raid. For example, *Brugarude* instructs the raid members to "make sure you ranged are sticking around" and to "close to the middle" (of the entrance into the lair) "...when you are in *DPS* range, that way, the healer knows where you are. You are always in range. Try to stick together a bit. Just organized, so we can get her done." Resorting to his own in-game knowledge about what entails in the *Onyxia Lair* raid (Scene), *Brugarude* also persuades other gamers (Agents) to *DPS* the boss with the support of the nearby healer if any damage occurs (Act). One of the players, *Chromestone*, is obviously persuaded and agrees with the strategy, concurring, "as long as we stay close together...so we won't split apart in case that you are wondering." Another player, *Attreyu*, requests *Brugarude* to clarify his strategy by manipulating his own avatar, saying, "Can you pin it again in the map where you want the ranged and the healer?" The request is not responded to because the raid leader is not clear about the healing before. Because the *Onyxia Lair* raid (Scene) is mainly designed as a *DPS* raid, the scene creates the rhetorical exigence that players (Agents)

with specific damage control abilities (Agency) will be recruited to take part in the raid. *Brugarude* (Agent) aims to ensure that the abilities of a healer (Agent) can be utilized to offer the protective and healing spells (Agency) for other gamers. *Brugarude* says, “yes, make sure all ranged and healers all over on this side, anyway...you know, unless there is *Deepbreath* coming, just get out ...and get back there.” Once the rest of the game participants agree with *Brugarude*’s strategy, the raid is launched by asking *Attreyu*, the main tank, to begin the attack on the boss.

Burke argues in *A Grammar of Motives*, “the explicit and systematic use of the dramatist pentad is best designed to bring out the strategic moment of motivational theory” (67). As demonstrated in the gaming clips and figures above, Burke’s dramatistic pentad is useful to identify a rhetor’s persuasive intent in creating the ever-evolving *WoW* gameplay situations to persuade and solicit the multimodal interactions from the gamers as their symbolic actions to that situation. The ability of the game designers and the gamers to utilize all available in-game elements and rhetorical devices is equivalent to what Burke calls “eloquence,” a notion that is defined as “the result of that desire in the artist to make a work perfect by adapting it in every minute detail to the racial appetites” in *Counter-Statement* (41). In order to use these rhetorical symbols and forms persuasively and “eloquently,” Burke argues, in the same book, that a rhetor needs to become the “manipulator of blood, brains, heart, and bowels which... dictate the mould of our desires” (36-37) When the game designer actively determines what forms, symbols, and symbolic actions to use to persuade the gamers in the game development, the role of game designers as a rhetor subsides and is represented through the game narratives, landscapes, and avatars’ visual, aural, and kinetic interactivities. This is particularly evident that in the designer-initiated persuasive pentad, the dominant ratios are Scene-Act and Scene-Agent. On the other hand, the player-initiated persuasive acts comprise a wide variety of pentadic ratios, indicating a more dynamic rhetorical manipulative process among the gamers in formulating the strategy. During *WoW* gameplay, the gamers

have apparently transformed themselves from passive audiences to actively produce their own multimodal rhetorical manipulations as rhetors.

According to Burke's perspectives, interactive multimodal interactivities in the preceding chapter can be argued as the building blocks to create rhetorical symbols and forms that game designers use to persuade the gamers. Myth and story can be created through the skillful combination of narratives, sounds, medieval monsters, brave knights, and powerful spells that further persuade the gamers to be immersed in the game. Burke conceptualizes these multimodal interactivities above as symbolic actions produced by rhetors. The employment of multimodal interactivities as rhetorical symbols by game designers only represents one crucial, but incomplete, part of the persuasive process that gamers go through during *WoW* gameplay. In her article, "Delightful Identification & Persuasion: Toward an Analytical and Applied Rhetoric of Digital Games," Walz observes the importance of game designers' persuasive intent in the development of *WoW*. She states "there would be no human-computer activity if there was no cooperation between these two agents" (197). Therefore, both designer- and player-initiated rhetorical manipulations should be examined carefully to uncover the persuasive process during *WoW* gameplay.

5.5. CONCLUSION

According to Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, rhetoric refers to "the *use* of persuasive resources ...and the study of them" (36). The study of the rhetorical manipulations employed by game designers and gamers during gameplay is similar to what rhetorical scholars have been doing: to understand how a rhetor eloquently "manipulates his material in order to produce the desired effects" (Rueckert 18). During gameplay, all participating rhetors need to manipulate rhetorical symbols and forms available to them to affect the "psychology of the audience" (*Counter-Statement* 31). Through these symbolic activities to persuade, gamers will be "aroused and then gratified by the progression of the work"

(Rueckert 18). As Burke points out, the outcome of a successful persuasion will be the experience of “exaltation at the correctness of the procedure” (*Counter-Statement* 37). Rueckert further argues “the quality and intensity of the exaltation ideally are in direct proportion to the degree of ‘eloquence’ inhering in the work itself” (24). As clearly demonstrated in Gaming Clip 5.1, an effective rhetorical manipulation can often lead to a highly engaging gaming experience and exalted state of mind.

WoW gameplay involves a sequence of rhetorical events that use persuasion as both the objective and the method to generate participants’ multimodal rhetorical expressions and practices. The gaming environment as a scene is “highly symbolic” and often demands the symbol-using responses from the gamers (Moberly 291). Through these intensive interactions and exchanges, *WoW* is no longer a static game product pre-determined by game designers. Rather, gamers “write” their own games through the symbols and forms available to them in the process. Ultimately, gamers achieve their psychological exaltation. In other words, as Burke precisely reasons even before the advent of MMORPGs, the gameplay is both “developmental” and “transformational” that “proceeds *from* something, *through* something, *to* something” (*The Philosophy of Literary Forms: Studies in Symbolic Action* 15). All *WoW* participants intend to obtain a high level of “exaltation” through their responses to a rhetorical situation (as seen in Gaming Clip 5.1).

Burke’s dramatistic pentad appropriately describes the persuasive process as a dynamic process, leading to the generation of H.I.R.E. among the gamers during gameplay. Multimodal rhetorical manipulations often experienced by many *WoW* gamers can be analyzed by Burke’s rhetorical theory, particularly, through his notions of identification, symbols, forms, symbolic actions, Dramatism, Pentad, and pentadic ratios. Examining the processes and the outcomes of these rhetorical manipulations during *WoW* gameplay helps rhetorical scholars to adopt a “reflexive and questioning stance” when studying the rhetoric of game (Warnick 6). In this dissertation, I have proposed a theoretical framework to study H.I.R.E. in Chapter 3, a typology of H.I.R.E. in Chapter 4, followed by a Burkean application of

rhetorical theory to examine the rhetorical manipulations in this chapter. In the conclusion chapter of this dissertation, I will summarize the key findings of this project and discuss a theoretical and methodological approach to study H.I.R.E. from the rhetoric of experience perspective.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation examines a new domain of game rhetoric by emphasizing the persuasive manipulations employed by game participants to induce multimodal interactive responses on the popular massively multiplayer online role-playing game platform, *World of Warcraft* (henceforth, *WoW*). Using the selected gaming clips during *WoW* gameplay as examples, I have presented a typology of interactivities (namely, textual, aural, visual, and kinetic) to describe the rhetorical engagements of the gamers during gameplay. I argue that these multimodal interactivities contribute to the formation of gamer experience in general and their *hybrid interactive rhetorical engagement* (henceforth, H.I.R.E.) in particular when they play this well-known digital game. In Chapter 4, I claim these patterns of interactivities should not be treated merely as structural features *WoW* game developers have embedded as part of the game. Rather, these multimodal interactivities should be examined as the rhetorical expressions and practices employed by all game participants to persuade others to respond properly to a rhetorical situation during gameplay (such as developing a good strategy to succeed in a pending raid). Therefore, these interactivities constitute the rhetorical engagements and gameplay experiences when playing *WoW*.

The discussions in Chapter 4 on the roles of multimodal interactivities in the persuasive process lay the foundation of examining what persuasive devices are made available to the game participants in *WoW*. In Chapter 5, I apply Burke's rhetorical concepts (such as identification, consubstantiality, forms, and symbolic actions) to study the intensive rhetorical manipulations during *WoW* gameplay. I also employ Burke's dramatistic pentad and pentadic ratios to analyze a plethora of persuasive manipulations that can be observed during *WoW* gameplay.

I begin the conclusion chapter by summarizing major findings that answer my research questions proposed in the first chapter. My responses to these research questions in the preceding chapters help

justify the importance of studying persuasive manipulations during *WoW* gameplay as a worthy area of rhetorical game research. I present my arguments through identifying the growing significance of *WoW* and other MMORPGs as an emerging rhetorical phenomenon, the unique characteristics of rhetor-audience interactions during *WoW* gameplay, and the applicability of existing rhetorical theories to study this emerging domain of rhetorical study. More specifically, this chapter will justify the study of rhetorical experience in general, and H.I.R.E. in particular during *WoW* gameplay. I want to argue H.I.R.E., as part of gameplay experiences, is as a pivotal theoretical concept in rhetorical game research to help game scholars explore the new rhetorical term of digital games. I contend H.I.R.E., as a rhetorical concept, is capable of explaining the dynamic and engaging rhetorical manipulations most gamers have experienced during *WoW* gameplay.

6.1 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The dissertation begins with my proposition that digital games should be treated as a rhetorical phenomenon to better understand the persuasive manipulations through the uses of rhetorical expressions and practices by game participants, regardless of their roles as game designers or players in the process. My stance is derived from Raessens' and Goldstein's original framework (See Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 for the revised model). I claim, without theorizing rhetoric as an essential part of contemporary game rhetorics, it is likely game scholars would not be able to uncover the abundance of rhetorical interactions of computer gaming as a field of rigorous academic study, so that a clear domain of this emerging field of study can be established. I argue in the first chapter, because rhetorical manipulations are used to motivate the game participants to invest time and money in gameplay, it is vital for game researchers to examine the rhetorical characteristics of digital games through the examination of the persuasion process in *WoW*.

WoW, one of the world's most popular MMORPGs, offers a fertile ground of research to begin this dissertation. Representing one of the great commercial successes in the digital game industry, *WoW* continues to evolve by adding more updated expansion patches to enrich its contents, thus accumulating the ever increasing player universe around the world since its first launch in November 2004 (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore). Like many other popular MMORPGs in the market, *WoW* shares many rhetorical characteristics commonly found in many contemporary digital games. These features include the use of multimodal interactivities to generate and maintain intensive persuasive manipulations, so rhetorical engagements can be produced as a result of gameplay. Game participants actively seek the most effective combination of multimodal interactivities to respond to a rhetorical situation by producing their own rhetorical manipulations to succeed in a raid. Other *WoW* features also comprise the capability for game participants to assume different avatar identities and to co-produce multimodal rhetorical manipulations during gameplay. In other words, *WoW* enables its players to select their own character avatars and interact with other gamers to complete their tasks through the utilization of multimodal interactivities in different dungeons (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, and Moore).

Existing literature has found *WoW* provides its players with the opportunity to become immersed in a fantasy virtual world and to generate a high-level of emotional involvement (Beavis; Krzywinska; Turkle; Yee). Game scholars borrow Jeremy Bentham's concept of "deep play" to refer to the situation when "a player reaches a level of near-obsessiveness" (McMahan 69). The collected gaming clips in the preceding two chapters have confirmed the elevated emotional engagement can be clearly observed when the gamers collaborate to complete a boss killing task. Multimodal and synchronous interactivities during *WoW* gameplay often demand players to produce their own rhetorical expressions and practices to instantaneously respond to numerous rhetorical situations that are created through the persuasive uses of symbols by both designers and other gamers.

The unique gameplay experiences many *WoW* gamers have gone through provide abundant topics for game researchers to explore. In Ian Bogost's book, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, he proposes gameplay is equivalent to responses to a series of "multiple successive decisions" (Bogost 2). He claims digital games have "unique persuasive powers" because of their abilities to meaning-creation and expressivity. Through such processes, Bogost equates the in-game "computational artifacts" to persuasive arguments to persuade players in a game (Bogost ix). In Chapters 4 and 5, I also demonstrate multimodal interactivities constitute many enticing "computational artifacts" game participants can use to persuade others.

One of the areas for conducting programmatic research is to examine whether and how existing rhetorical theories can be applied to study game rhetorics. In the previous chapters, I have applied Burke's rhetorical concepts of identification, symbolic actions, and consubstantiality, as well as his Dramatism and Pentad to analyze many intensive persuasive manipulations the gamers have encountered during *WoW* gameplay. The discussions presented in the preceding chapter show Burke's rhetorical concepts and theories can be easily extended to study these persuasive manipulations. A theoretical framework derived from Burke's rhetorical theories and many contemporary game researchers also help the development of a theoretical model (Figure 3.3) to guide this study. As discussed in Chapter 5, despite the multimodal interactivities of *WoW* unseen in Burke's time when his theories were developed, the persuasive processes can be studied similarly through the examination of rhetors' persuasive intents, tactics, and strategies. In Chapter 5, I have analyzed numerous persuasive manipulations produced by game designers and players to respond to different rhetorical situations (such as the tasks to defeat *Festergut* and *Lady Deathwhisper* in the *Icecrown Citadel*, or to kill *Onyxia*, the brood mother of the black dragonflight, in *Onyxia's Lair*). These gaming clips provide representative examples to show how the multimodal interactivities are used for persuasive manipulations and to generate and maintain H.I.R.E. among the participants.

Regardless of what type of multimodal interactive expressions and practices are employed for different gameplay situations, most game participants believe their selection of persuasive devices is likely to produce the intended persuasive manipulations suitable for the particular rhetorical situations. For example, the inclusion of the *Split Personality* achievement in the *Nexus* dungeon (five-player heroic mode raid) functions as a designer-controlled persuasive manipulation to provide many players the pleasure of completing an intense and difficult task. The embedded achievement is created by game designers through the utilization of multimodal interactivities, symbolic actions, forms, and procedural rules to create an immersive rhetorical situation that induces the multimodal rhetorical responses of the gamers. The type and intensity of H.I.R.E. experienced by the raid players depend on whether *WoW* game developers have successfully persuaded them to engage and respond properly, whether they decide to collaborate closely with each other to strategize their in-raid persuasive acts, and whether their manipulations of the in-game design elements is effective and skillful. Only when these conditions are met will game participants experience a high level of H.I.R.E. during gameplay. On a few rare occasions, game designers are forced to alter the procedural rules to avoid the contradiction of the pre-determined in-game character. For example, Ludlow and Wallace reports an incident when the *EverQuest* designers change the rules when the invincible *Kerafyrn, the Sleeper*, is almost defeated by the raiders, which creates a dilemma in the persuasive manipulation of the designers. This case indicates a very dynamic persuasive manipulation during gameplay.

Because the players' rhetorical manipulations during gameplay are contingent upon the composition of a raid group and the characteristics of a rhetorical situation, it does not mean that any gameplay will ultimately lead to gratifying gameplay experiences for players. I argue their rhetorical engagements will contribute to enjoyable gameplay experiences only when players are induced to respond to the multimodal persuasive manipulations co-produced by both game designers and players. As shown in Figure 3.3, H.I.R.E. is the result of the persuasive uses of interactivities as rhetors'

symbolic means, through which gamers feel a sense of persuasive sensory, action-based, and mental immersion, which subsequently leads to gratifying gameplay experiences. In Chapters 4 and 5, I discuss the uses of multimodal interactivities in *WoW*, followed by the discussions of how persuasion is done through the rhetorical manipulations of these interactivities.

This dissertation contends H.I.R.E. in an immersive gaming space should become the new domain of game rhetorical study. Specifically, the study intends to answer the following questions in this chapter: What are the rhetorical characteristics of H.I.R.E. during gameplay? What will be the theoretical and methodological implications for game rhetoricians to study H.I.R.E. as part of gameplay experiences?

In order to describe what MMORPG players experience in digital games in general, and in *WoW* in particular, I claim the concept of H.I.R.E. should be used to understand the persuasive rhetoric during gameplay. I want to claim H.I.R.E. should be used as a pivotal theoretical concept to explain the persuasive process in digital games. A better understanding of H.I.R.E. will help uncover the rhetorical tactics, strategies, and mechanisms of persuasion that lead to gratifying experiences during *WoW* gameplay. To present my arguments convincingly, I use the collected *WoW* gaming clips to answer the questions proposed above by demonstrating that the multimodal interactions with the game, designers, and other players function as a persuasive process in which gamers generate, maintain, and enjoy H.I.R.E. at different stages of gameplay. The analyses of actual *WoW* gaming clips provide more convincing evidence to discuss the rhetorical characteristics of H.I.R.E. commonly found in mediated and interconnected MMORPGs.

I call for “the rhetoric of experience” as a term to study experiential representations and effects from the structural, procedural, locational, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of H.I.R.E. experienced by the gamers. Through the discussions of H.I.R.E., I situate the study of H.I.R.E. within “the rhetoric of experience” I coin to label this new term in the study of game rhetoric.

Before the rhetoric of experience can be examined, it is important to define the concept of “experience.” The term “experience” has not been used extensively in rhetoric, except for the works by Ong, Rigolot and Sharpling. Scholarship on the definition of the term can be found in a limited number of articles in the study of religion (such as Robert Sharf’s “The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion”). In spite of the scarcity in the rhetorical literature, the notion of rhetoric as experience can be date back to Erasmus’s *Ciceronianus* (Sharpling). As Sharf notes, the definition of “experience” is not possible until it is situated within a specific domain. For example, in his study, he tried to define “experience” from the regions study as he talks about people’s religious experience. Therefore, in this dissertation, I attempt to situate “experience” along the line of game rhetorical research.

6.2 H.I.R.E. AND THE RHETORIC OF EXPERIENCE IN WoW

In game research, the concept of “experience” has been widely studied and referred to as “user experience” (Korhonen, Montola, and Arrasvuori), “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi), or “player experience” (Mäyrä). Some scholars have used the term, “gameplay,” to refer to what gamers feel during the game (Tavinor). However, this term may encompass different activities that lead to variations in their experience. Scholars like Peña and Hancock also focus on types of interactions leading to the gameplay experiences felt by players. Among these scholars, experience during gameplay is often treated as multi-dimensional (Mäyrä), contextualized (Mäyrä), and measurable (Korhonen, Montola, and Arrasvuori). Gameplay experiences are often defined as “personal” because they are related to “a user’s skills, knowledge, previous experiences of similar products, and expectations” (Korhonen, Montola, and Arrasvuori 274). These conceptualizations provide an abundant foundation for game rhetoricians to understand how to define experience from an experiential rhetorical perspective.

In Chapter 1, I created the term--*Hybrid Interactive Rhetorical Engagement* (henceforth, H.I.R.E.)-- to examine the gameplay experiences when players encounter different rhetorical

manipulations during *WoW* gameplay. Conceived as a concept of experiential rhetoric, any H.I.R.E. can be argued as what many players have experienced as a result of encountering the persuasive manipulations when playing *WoW*. During gameplay, persuasion is executed almost minute by minute, action by action, and strategy by strategy. From Burke's perspectives, the rhetorical characteristics of H.I.R.E. in terms of its hybridity (multimodality) and interactivity can be argued as the persuasive symbolic actions for rhetors to induce game participants' responses to a designed gameplay situation. The following gaming clip demonstrates how game designers' skillful rhetorical manipulations of multimodal interactivities help generate, maintain, and enjoy H.I.R.E. experienced by the players during the killing of *Onyxia* (Gaming Clip 6.1).

Gaming Clip 6.1 reaffirms my arguments in the previous chapters that playing *WoW* is a persuasive act including the rhetorical manipulations between the game developers and players, and among players. The raid to kill *Onyxia* is offered to the gamers as a task the raid members need to accomplish to advance in the hierarchy of *WoW* to obtain financial, social, and psychological rewards. The rhetorically-created fictitious landscape and task set the stage where the generation of H.I.R.E. is made possible. In other words, the clever uses of multimodal in-design interactive elements in *Onyxia's Lair* make up a rhetorical situation that demands the participating players to produce their own tactics, strategies, and actions to properly respond to the challenges. A poorly-designed game is less likely to have the intended persuasive effects on players to stimulate their interactions with the game. Decreasing number of players is likely to hurt the popularity of a MMORPG, like *WoW*. Once attracted to join the game, the symbolic



Gaming Clip 6.1: Gamers' H.I.R.E. in a Successful *Onyxia Lair* Raid.

actions of gamers are induced by what designers have done to persuade the raid team or the players.

The procedural rules requiring the formation of a qualified raid team to collaborate helps the generation of H.I.R.E. during gameplay. *WoW*, as a multiplayer strategy game, demands all raid members collaborate with each other to determine the most effective strategies for a particular gameplay situation. Therefore, once the players are persuaded by game designers to enter a specific raid, the players need to persuade each other to create effective gameplay strategies. The abilities to produce effective strategies rely on how well the players interpret, from their past in-game knowledge, the designers' persuasive intent and manipulations. In other words, the gamers (particularly, the raid leader) needs to accurately comprehend the rhetorical creation of *Onyxia* as an in-game design element as to what she can do to create and modify the raid situation through her spells and abilities. *Deep Breath*, a breath weapon used by *Onyxia*, can kill the attacking players within a certain range. It thus alters the gameplay situation and determines which players will remain in the game. The weapon is intended as designers' rhetorical manipulation to challenge and to entice multimodal rhetorical responses from the gamers. The embedded dragon boss and her capabilities are the designers' manipulations to generate and maintain H.I.R.E. As seen in this gaming clip, these gamers are required to plan effective raid strategies through persuading other gamers. The rhetorical manipulations of their avatars in a strategic manner help generate and maintain H.I.R.E. as felt by other participating gamers. Effective strategies often depend on the composition of the classes of players equipped with different abilities, talents, and skills. Only when these are taken into consideration can a raid team come up with an effective raid strategy to succeed.

In addition to multimodality and interactivity, another distinctive characteristic of the rhetorical engagement during *WoW* gameplay is the dynamic role-switching of the rhetor and the audience in a persuasive process. For example, in Gaming Clip 6.1, the raid leader, *Brugarude*, is asked about the functions of the healer and the ranged in the pre-raid strategy formulation phase; however, due to his

limited experience, he fails to offer persuasive explanations as to how to place these two roles. The persuasive failure prompts another player, *Chromeastone*, to offer his analyses and immediately becomes the rhetor to persuade the raid team to better position the healer and the ranged. So, the momentum of H.I.R.E. can be maintained in the pre-raid strategic planning situation. Effective strategies will be formed after the raid team members are persuaded by the raid leader, as well as other key players, so all participating players can work together to succeed in the gameplay. As demonstrated in this instance, the maintenance of H.I.R.E. is considered to be the responsibility of all participating players who change their roles to ensure the persuasive processes are smooth and effective to accomplish the common objective of killing the dragon boss, *Onyxia*. Because the ultimate gameplay objective is to succeed in a raid so an enjoyable experience can be obtained, the role-switching between the rhetor and the audience indicates a more fluid relationship during the persuasive process in *WoW*.

The raid to kill *Onyxia* is launched after a *Ready Check* by the raid team to ensure the persuasion is effective. In the process of attacking *Onyxia*, *WoW* game designers continue to use the multimodal interactivities to create numerous engaging game landscapes and monsters to persuade players to interact with the game. For example, *Onyxia* voices her threat by yelling, “Learn your place, mortal!” At the same time, *Onyxia* uses visual, kinetic, and aural interactivities to generate and maintain H.I.R.E. in the raid. Although designers are the rhetors in the persuasive process, these participating gamers also need to persuade each other to formulate strategies to succeed in the raid. For example, in Gaming Clip 6.1, the raid leader, *Brugarude*, persuades one of the players, *Chewchew*, to “make sure you stand on the left over here. Make sure you concentrate on *Attreyu* because he takes butler damage on his face.” If the participating gamers in this raid do not follow the strategy, it could lead to the termination of some player, as in the case of *Attreyu* who is killed because the healers did not heal *Attreyu* on time for the damage he has taken.

Onyxia is killed at the end of this raid as a result of the coordinated efforts of the gamers through the execution of effective attack strategies. Some players cry out their excitement when they see the fall of *Onyxia*. The *Onyxia*'s gigantic collapse on the screen is the designer-created manipulation of visual interactive elements to reward these players for their accurate interpretation of the symbolic actions presented in the raid. To see the termination of dragon boss *Onyxia* helps create a sense of accomplishment among all participating raid players. What they have reacted after the killing of *Onyxia* also demonstrates the highest level of rhetorical engagement (H.I.R.E.) during gameplay. The ecstasy as observed in their multimodal interactive responses shows that, once these players consubstantiate with the rhetorical manipulations of game designers, the persuasive intent of the game participants can be accomplished to create a full spectrum of immersion leading to an engaging gameplay experience. Their enjoyment can be easily observed by the elevated emotional responses in the intensified aural interactivity after the success.

The above discussions summarize the main rhetorical characteristics of H.I.R.E. by focusing on how multimodal interactivities constitute the rhetorical engagements experienced by gamers (also see Chapter 4). The discussions also examine the uses of persuasive symbolic actions employed by designers and players through their manipulations of multimodal interactivities (also see Chapter 5). The analyses of Gaming Clip 6.1 show both game designers and players contribute to the generation and maintenance of H.I.R.E. at various phases of gameplay by shifting their roles in the creation of that rhetorical gameplay situation. In other words, the roles of rhetors and audiences are not static, but rather they are dynamic and responsive to the ever-changing rhetorical situations.

Like the *Gunship Battle*, the killing of *Lady Deathwhisper*, Gaming Clip 6.1 is an example of a successful raid. Will the same processes of generation, maintenance, and enjoyment of H.I.R.E. exist in a failed raid? The following gaming clip records the failed *Split Personality* achievement in the *Nexus* (five-player heroic mode) dungeon to examine whether there are any noticeable differences between the

successful and failed raids. Unlike other raids in the collected gaming clips, the *Split Personality* achievement is an extremely challenging and difficult task that demands the coordination of all raid members to attack the splits of *Grand Magus Telestra* within a pre-designed interval of five seconds. *WoW* game designers create the *Split Personality* achievement, rules of attack, and its subsequent reward through their dexterous rhetorical manipulations of multimodal interactivities and in-game rules. The making of this rhetorical situation helps motivate the gamers to rhetorically engage with the game. To succeed in this raid demanding players' speedy, yet strategic, kinetic interactive responses, it is vital all participating gamers are knowledgeable about what the achievement entails, so they can find an effective strategy to coordinate their attacks within a short interval of 5 seconds. As shown in Gaming Clip 6.2, it is clear the raid leader, *Mysticfever*, is not an experienced and persuasive player. Her lack of in-game knowledge about this achievement may contribute to her failure to persuade other gamers. In the beginning of the clip, *Mysticfever* reveals her lack of the needed in-game knowledge to become a persuasive leader that can pull the whole team together. *Mysticfever* even asks, "Do Mages get stuns?" Other players, *Likimeya* and *Malkie*, attempt to figure out the capabilities of different classes, but it seems no consensus has been reached. The failed attempts to persuade other gamers in the strategy formulation process can be easily observed throughout Gaming Clip 6.2.



Gaming Clip 6.2: A Lack of H.I.R.E in a Failed *Split Personality* Achievement in the *Nexus* Dungeon.

The maintenance of H.I.R.E. is noticeably insufficient in Gaming Clip 6.2 as well. The intention of these gamers to engage with the situation also seem sparse because the lack of the persuasive acts from the raid leader, *Mysticfever*.

Mysticfever fails to persuade *Likimeya* and *Malkie* to stand in a pre-determined position to attack three different splits. As a result, both of them do not respond enthusiastically (such as *Likimeya* says, “Sorry, whatever works. I don’t care.”). Furthermore, players have also failed to come to an agreement in terms of how much *DPS* is expected. *Likimeya* proposes twenty thousands; the raid leader, *Mysticfever*, gives a dubious response. Rhetorical engagements among players are minimal, which leads to a poor strategy. In the end, after several failed attempts, the raid team decides not to continue as a result of their unpleasant experience.

One of the conspicuous characteristics in this failed raid is rhetorical engagements will be limited if designers’ rhetorical manipulations do not produce the intended persuasive effects. Although the embedded rhetorical manipulations by game designers exist in this raid, these elements fail to generate more persuasive responses because of the lack of their own rhetorical responses to make the rhetorical situation appealing. As such, rhetorical engagements mainly occur among the gamers to seek clarifications through the uses of textual and aural interactivities. Applications of other types of interactivities are apparently absent in this raid. Few rhetorical engagements are generated and maintained because the minimal interactions between gamers and designer-generated rhetorical manipulations in this raid. Role-switching is also rarely observed even among gamers in the same team. This failed raid demonstrates what will occur if no H.I.R.E. is present during gameplay. Based on the disappointed and lukewarm reactions gamers have said before exiting the game, the gameplay experience is clearly not satisfying to them. The lack of H.I.R.E. in this raid spirals into a disastrous raid and disappointing experience for the players. The comparison of two gaming clips indicates the relationship between H.I.R.E. and their gameplay experiences. These two clips further show H.I.R.E. and experience are also related to whether participants are capable of using persuasive manipulations during gameplay. Although the generation and maintenance of H.I.R.E. during a raid rely heavily on the manipulations of multimodal in-game design elements to create different rhetorical situations, the

participating gamers also generate and maintain their engagements through their own symbolic actions to respond to each unique gameplay situation. As such, both designers and gamers collaborate to create a gratifying gameplay experience in *WoW*.

To study the generation, maintenance, and enjoyment of H.I.R.E. during *WoW* gameplay inevitably raises an even more important question that requires the examination of experience as a rhetorical phenomenon. My rationale to propose a new domain of rhetorical research is because of the lack of a comprehensive framework to study gameplay experiences experienced by many *WoW* players. A theory of experiential rhetoric thus helps game rhetoricians to better understand important theoretical concepts, relationships, typology, processes, and practices in gameplay experiences. The proposition of such an approach is crucial because the ever-changing roles of rhetors and audiences during gameplay. Furthermore, such fluidity also occurs with rhetorical representations employed by and experienced by the gamers. To be more specific, different gamers may enter the same gaming landscape and encounter the same dragon monster, *Onyxia*. Their gameplay experiences, however, will be different on the basis of the compositions of the raid team, the rhetorical manipulations by the team, and subsequent variations of the rhetorical situation awaiting proper rhetorical responses. As a result, the emphasis on studying what have been designed by the game developers as the computational discourses to be analyzed probably is less useful, given that these discourses and rhetorical manipulations are co-created by all game participants during gameplay.

The study of the experiential aspect of digital games and gameplay has grabbed the attention of game scholars in recent years (Banks; Consalvo; Murray). On the basis of the close relationship between H.I.R.E. and gamer experience, I therefore argue H.I.R.E. constitutes an important part of gamer experience during *WoW* gameplay. Other game scholars also agree gameplay experiences are designed and predetermined (Humphreys), because *WoW* game developers need to utilize available programming devices to create a fictitious, yet believable, gaming space where players participate in the creation and

enjoyment of this unique experience. H.I.R.E. is related to what the gamers will experience as a result of the encountered persuasive manipulations during gameplay. Therefore, the name, “rhetoric of experience,” will be an appropriate nomenclature to describe any rhetorical research in digital games in general, and in *WoW* in particular.

This dissertation claims gamer experience derives from the engagements with the multimodal interactivities created by game developers and players in a particular rhetorical situation. Rhetorical scholars like Burke have also argued the link between symbols (symbolic actions), audience’s experience, and persuasion. In *Counter-Statement*, Burke equates the symbol as “the verbal parallel to a pattern of experience” (152). For the symbol to be appealing to the audience, the patterns of experience of both rhetors and audiences need to “closely coincide” (Burke 153). As stated above, *WoW* is the sophisticated creation of a fantasy game world when game developers rhetorically manipulate the multimodal interactivities, in-game design elements, and procedural rules made available to them. In other words, the symbol-using activities of designers represent the sharing and creation of their own experience in envisioning a fantasy world infested with dragons, mobs, undeads, and mythical characters.

Playing *WoW* thus simulates their willingness to take part in a rhetorical event when they will be immersed in different modalities of persuasion produced by game designers and gamers themselves. The patterns of experience are created with a presupposition they will be shared by participating players during *WoW* gameplay. For them to coincide with developers’ patterns of experience, gamers need to learn and follow in-game knowledge in selecting their avatars, moving around their virtual representations, and collaborating with other gamers when playing *WoW*. The decision is similar to a person sitting in an auditorium to listen to a speech, turning on the television or radio for the President’s *State of the Union* address, or reading an advocacy advertisement in a newspaper or a magazine. Rhetorical scholars should study the subsequent rhetorical experience encountered by the audience after

being exposed to these rhetorical expressions and practices, in addition to examining what has been produced as rhetors' persuasive manipulations.

To conclude, this dissertation proposes the examination of H.I.R.E. to begin the exploration of an emerging rhetorical phenomenon: the rhetoric of experience. For the purposes of my discussion, H.I.R.E. is situated within *WoW* because of its popularity in MMORPGs. The concept, however, can be applied to any digital game platforms in the future, as long as there are persuasive acts involved during gameplay. I conclude this chapter by discussing the theoretical and methodological implications of studying gameplay experience as a rhetorical domain.

6.3 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The rhetorical study of gameplay experiences will have significant theoretical and methodological implications in rhetorical theory when scholars begin to discover a new domain for programmatic study in digital game rhetoric. First, the exploration of experiential rhetoric will discover new rhetorical discourses that can be analyzed. Depending on the conceptualization of rhetorical study, rhetoric can mean the study of multimodal rhetorical expressions and practices, the study of persuasive influence of these discourses and representations, the study of rhetorical representations and knowledge, the study of typology of these rhetorical devices (adapted from Bizzell and Herzberg's definitions). Despite the breadth of rhetorical theories as an interdisciplinary academic endeavor, the foci of conventional rhetorical approaches seem mostly on the process of preparing (such as invention, arrangement, style in classical rhetorical theories), delivery (such as memory and delivery), effects, and representations of the reality and knowledge. In Chapters 4 and 5, I demonstrate the effects of rhetor-initiated symbol-using activities through the uses of multimodal interactivities to create persuasive effects to succeed in the game for more satisfying gameplay experiences, which raises new questions about how experience can be studied as a rhetorical phenomenon.

Secondly, because the creation of gameplay experiences is based on a close collaboration between game designers and gamers, there exists a constant modification of their roles in the persuasive process. As demonstrated in Gaming Clips 6.1 and 6.2, when gamers respond to designers' manipulations differently, distinctive gameplay experiences are created as a result of various participants and pentadic combinations of persuasive manipulations. In other words, at the same time, in-game elements in any raid dungeons and achievements are created as the same gaming space for different raid groups, participating players "create" their own experience, depending on how the team interprets and responds to the designers' multimodal persuasive manipulations. Given the fluidity between rhetors and audiences in MMORPGs, it challenges the very nature of rhetoric as to who produces what persuasive manipulation during a persuasive process that is worthy of examination. The co-generation process of rhetorical discourses poses theoretical and methodological challenges to what and how to study game rhetorics.

I reiterate my arguments below to conclude the discussions on theoretical implications. The emphasis on the central role of rhetors is well-justified because the ability to prepare and to produce persuasive speeches is only limited to a few educated individuals (Taylor). Similarly, importance placed on the study of textual and aural persuasion is also justified because the delivery media during these periods are predominantly print media and speech. Although textual and aural rhetorics continue to be widely used as rhetorical devices today, the emergence of other modes of persuasion has posed challenges to traditional rhetorical theories. Furthermore, the focus on what rhetors do to persuade the audience can no longer be sustained because of interactive media such as hypermedia, computer, or digital games have enabled the passive audiences to take part in the co-creation of persuasive rhetoric (Bogost; Taylor). In other words, persuasion is now a process both rhetors and audiences take part in to make it possible. As such, persuasive discourses are generative and situational. Thus, questions arise as to whether these new modes of persuasive discourses should be included as a new rhetorical domain,

which rhetorical discourses will be more effective than the others, and what types of techniques should be taught so students are familiar with these new modes of persuasion (Bogost).

In response to these new challenges, rhetoricians in these new media have begun to argue if the traditional rhetorical theories are sufficient. For example, Warnick criticizes the problems of traditional rhetorical theories in appropriately analyzing “the disorganized, open texts found in cyberspace” because their focus on “the author as source and persuasion as the aim of communication” (61). All of these criticisms raise important theoretical questions about whether existing rhetorical theories and approaches are able to examine emerging rhetorical discourses and phenomena after the popularity of these new media platforms.

Despite the pessimistic views on what new media technologies will do to the study of rhetoric, I take a more optimistic position (like Ian Bogost), claiming new technologies have presented rhetorical scholars the opportunities to re-examine many underlying assumptions inherited in the traditional rhetorical theories. For example, in her article, “Editing the Rhetorical Tradition,” Patricia Bizzell notes the identification of texts worthy of rhetorical study and the method of studying these texts are two of the important modalities that constitute the rhetorical tradition. Challenges facing game rhetoric scholars help them to revisit these two important questions.

The study of (rhetorical) experience as a result of their encounters with rhetorical discourses during gameplay is the area worthy of rhetorical scholars’ attention. The rhetorical experiences include the interactions with other gamers, with ample in-game design elements by game designers, and numerous persuasive acts by all participants during *WoW* gameplay. Through these interactions, a new type of rhetorical discourses is generated. Playing *WoW* is rhetorical in nature because the process involves constant practices and expressions of persuasion by game designers, and among gamers themselves. In-game design elements are embedded in *WoW* as the rhetorical manipulations of the designers, so gamers can be persuaded to take part in the game. On the other hand, gamers opt to interact

with the game and other gamers by formulating gameplay strategies, so they can complete a raid successfully. The study of gamer experience during gameplay helps rhetorical game scholars focus on the persuasive nature of experiential rhetoric as demonstrated in H.I.R.E. during their encounters with different persuasive rhetorical manipulations in *WoW*.

My proposal to study the rhetoric of experience can be briefly summarized below.

First, an important part in studying H.I.R.E. as the rhetoric of experience needs to examine the meaning-making process that gamers go through in comprehending and agreeing with multimodal rhetorical expressions and practices when playing *WoW*. Because gamer experience is conceptualized as both subjective and personal responses, the roles of motivation, motorics, cognitions, and emotions in assisting gamers with the meaning-making process should also be examined.

Unlike other stand-alone traditional digital games, *WoW*, like other MMORPGs, is distinctive because gamers' interactions during gameplay are also "social ventures" by nature because multiple gamers take part in the game (Taylor 36). Because interactions among gamers consist of an important part of their gameplay experience, the examination of how meanings are created and interpreted is a vital component in the study of experiential rhetoric. Taylor points out "[g]ame rules can be interpreted and reinterpreted toward preferred meanings and purposes, selectively invoked or ignored, challenged or defended, changed or enforced to suit the collective goals of different groups of players" (157). Taylor's statement clearly demonstrates the rhetorical creativity of gamers to manipulate the "procedurality" (Bogost) of digital games in order to accomplish their objectives. Gameplay experiences are rhetorical by nature because they are created after gamers react to the rhetorical expressions and practices when they play *WoW*.

Another interesting area in the study of digital games from the experiential perspective is to examine the collaborative process by which gamers work together to complete a task. As experienced by many MMORPG gamers during gameplay, their intensive rhetorical encounters with numerous

rhetorical manipulations constitute one of the most gratifying social experiences all gamers enjoy. Game researchers like T.L. Taylor agree MMORPG gamers “actively engaged in creating the game worlds they inhabit” (155). Gamers are not “producers” of the imagined virtual world, but they are actively involved in creating multimodal rhetorical expressions and practices through the use of in-game rhetorical devices to persuade other gamers. As demonstrated in the selected gaming clips in Chapters 4 and 5, these in-game design elements and rules are used as an agency when gamers are able to complete the common objectives of generating, maintaining, and enjoying their H.I.R.E.

The experiential rhetoric of H.I.R.E. will certainly pose challenges to rhetorical scholars in terms of what to study and how things work to create gameplay experiences. For example, van den Hoogen, IJsselsteijn, and de Kort observes game researchers are often faced with developing “a coherent and fine-grained set of methods and tools that enable the measurement of entertainment experiences in a sensitive, reliable and valid manner” (11). These problems are likely attributed to the difficulty in defining what gameplay experiences are and what methodological approaches are appropriate to study them. As such, in terms of methodological implications, the study of gamer experience is often problematic in rhetorical research because of the number and types of persuasive manipulations and representations need to work together to create different experiential representations that can later be recorded and analyzed. In other words, the study of gamer experience cannot merely depend on the analyses of textual (such as game narratives or plots), visual (such as the gaming environment), and aural (such as background or embedded sound effects) interactivities. These rhetorical manipulations are only some of the many essential parts in constituting gameplay experiences. Nevertheless, a single rhetorical manipulation does not contribute to H.I.R.E., not to mention that it will not automatically lead to a satisfying experience during gameplay. As argued earlier, different types of interactivities should be treated more than rhetorical devices that game designers use to create an effective digital game and to manipulate the willing participation of the gamers. These types of rhetorical engagements have also

been used by gamers to shape their own rhetorical expressions and practices to persuade other gamers. In other words, they are not merely the properties of a persuasive digital game, but rather the properties of gameplay experiences from which H.I.R.E. help to generate and maintain for the enjoyment of gamers in *WoW*.

In conclusion, game researchers often complain of “theoretical imperialism” within games research. Game scholars often question the indiscriminating adoption of methods, analytical tools, and interpretive approaches developed for other media texts and not applicable to studying game rhetorics. As Aarseth (2003) concurs with this lack of theories and methods in game research, these concerns reflect the problems among game researchers, in that instead of treating the new phenomena carefully, and as objects of a study for which no methodology yet exists, frequently games “are analyzed willy-nilly, with tools that happen to be at hand, such as film theory or narratology” (1). The objectives of this dissertation aim to propose the rhetoric of experience helps focus scholars’ attention on the importance of gameplay experiences in *WoW* as an object of rhetorical research. With this emerging focus on the experience of gamers in general, and their H.I.R.E. in particular, this dissertation intends to provide a preliminary understanding of this important area of rhetorical study for game scholars to explore in the future.

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