

FACULTY PERSPECTIVES OF FACULTY PERSONA IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Immersive virtual worlds provide a new way to deliver online courses or parts of online and face-to-face courses. There is a growing body of research on online learning, and the data on virtual worlds is also increasing. However, literature concerning professors' experiences with specific aspects of virtual worlds is limited. For example, some studies discuss faculty members' overall perceptions of immersive virtual environments, but very few works address the subtleties of professors' virtual world experiences. Therefore, my study examined a particular facet of faculty experience: faculty perception of faculty persona in an immersive virtual world.

My study, a hermeneutic phenomenology, included interview feedback from 10 participants who ran the gamut in virtual world experience and geographic location. I selected participants from the various articles about Second Life™ (SL™), since Second Life is currently a popular choice when teaching in a virtual world. I contacted potential participants via email and set up three interviews with those who chose to participate in my study. Once I collected and coded the data, I divided the data into themes and wrote the findings.

The findings showed some similarities between participants' experiences in traditional online courses and their experiences in the three dimensional virtual world, but many of their experiences and interactions are unique to the immersive virtual world.

DEDICATION

I am thankful to God for allowing me to pursue my dreams and for blessing me with amazing parents. To my marvelous mother, best friend, and encourager, Janice M. Blackmon, and my wonderful father, Steve Blackmon—thank you both for your unconditional love and continued support. Thank you for teaching me to love and depend on Christ, have a “can do” attitude, and love my neighbor as myself. I love you both!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Growth in Online Lives

More and more people incorporate the online environment into their daily lives. Whether checking email, surfing the Internet, or synchronously chatting with family and friends, people go online for myriad reasons. According to a 2010 Nielsen survey of how Americans spend time on the Internet, most people go online to use social networks and blogs. In fact, the share of time spent on social networking and blogging sites increased from 15.8 percent in 2009 to 22.7 percent in 2010, which translates into about 906 million hours spent on blogs and social networks (Nielsen, 2010). The survey also showed an increase in time spent on video and movie websites, such as YouTube and Hulu, and searches—156 million and 138 million hours respectively (Nielsen, 2010). According to a 2011 Pew Research Center survey that included a total of over 2,000 adults ages 18 and older, 78 percent of adult males and females use the Internet (Taylor, Parker, Lenhart, & Moore). A breakdown of various age groups indicated the ubiquity of the Internet in American culture: 95 percent of adults from ages 18-29 use the Internet, 87 percent of adults from 30-49, 74 percent of adults ages 50-64, and 42 percent of adults ages 65 and older (Taylor et al., 2011). The top four reasons U. S. adults use the Internet on an average day are to send or read email, 61 percent; to use a search engine to locate information, 59 percent; to get the news, 45 percent; and to use a social networking site like LinkedIn, MySpace, or Facebook, 43 percent (Taylor et al., 2011).

Growth in Social Networking and Gaming

There has been an attending increase in social networking and online gaming. As noted earlier, social networking increased from 15.8 percent in 2009 to 22.7 percent in 2010, and online gaming increased from 9.3 percent to 10.2 percent for the same periods, coming in second place behind social networking (Nielsen, 2010). That equals about 906 million hours spent on social networking and 407 million hours spent using online games (Nielsen, 2010). The strides in online gaming began with multi-user dungeons (MUDs), and several of these MUDs “were based on fantasy combat” (Boellstorff, 2008). Massively multi-player online games (MMOs) followed MUDs, and MMOs, like MUDs, were used for role-playing games (Warburton, 2009). Talamo, Pozzi, and Mellini (2010) discussed the growth of online role-playing games among adults. They stated that these “playworlds” can often be extensions of players’ social experiences (Talamo et al., 2010). With the advent of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and the like, blogging and chatting continue to increase, and Talamo et al. (2010) also pointed out the social networking uses for MUDs. Today, social networking and online gaming are major parts of life on the Internet.

The Role of Second Life in Increased Internet Use

Second Life is a large part of the social networking and online gaming/role playing movement. Although Second Life is not a game, particularly in the sense that it does not have levels or points and is created by its residents (Ralph & Stahr, 2010), Second Life is still considered a very “playful” environment (Zhou, Jin, Vogel, Fang, & Chen, 2011). Also, in a study on why people use Second Life, some participants listed playing/gaming as a reason to engage in and experience Second Life (Zhou et al. (2011). Others noted that they used Second Life because they liked communicating and interacting with family and friends, in addition to

new people from other countries (Zhou et al., 2011), a form of social networking. Linden Lab released Second Life in June 2003, and currently, residents can meet other Second Life inhabitants, shop, chat, teleport, and participate in various activities via the virtual environment (Linden Research, 2009). Second Life is classified as an immersive virtual world (IVL) (Savin-Baden, 2010), a massively multi-player virtual world (MMVW) (Luo & Kemp, 2008), or a massive multi-user virtual environment (MUVE) (Molka-Danielsen & Deutschmann, 2009), among other names. Each acronym seems to establish the virtual world's ability to immerse large numbers of participants into the online environment. For the purposes of my study, Second Life will be referred to as a virtual world, virtual environment, three dimensional virtual world/environment, or immersive virtual world/environment. I have provided a list of the aforementioned key terms, as well as other key terms, in Appendix A.

The growth of the Second Life environment is evidenced by the number of residents logging in to the virtual world. For example, Second Life has a network capacity of 100 thousand, and the number of users increased by 95 percent in 2007—an average of 40 thousand users with an apex of 58 thousand users (Atkinson, 2008). Also in 2007, the number of new Second Life users increased over 4,000 percent in a year, and the average rate for signup was more than 1,000 people hourly (Atkinson, 2008). While the average number of user hours fell 10 percent in 2010, with 105 million hours at the end of quarter four, the average number of repeat logins for 2010 was 8 percent higher than in 2009, with the fourth quarter of 2010 ending in an average of 795,000 repeat logins per month (Linden & Linden, 2010). According to Warburton (2009), what separates Second Life from other virtual worlds is its open environment; residents create the world and their own narratives.

Growth in Other Aspects of Online Life

As use of social networking and gaming tools has increased, so have other aspects of online life, i.e. online learning. According to Allen and Seaman (2010), online learning course enrollment has increased dramatically over the past few years. A 2011 Pew study found that 51 percent of college presidents surveyed for the study believe that online learning has the same value as traditional face-to-face courses (Taylor et al.). Mayadas, Bourne, and Bacsich (2009) stated that top-level administrators at public universities with large online enrollment “are recognizing the strategic advantages of online and blended education and hence are treating this form of education as a strategic priority” (p. 54). Seventy-seven percent of college presidents surveyed stated that their colleges offer online classes; 15 percent indicated that most of their present undergraduate students have taken an online course, and 30 percent stated that 10 years from now, most of their students will take online courses (Taylor et al., 2011). Although the general public is still skeptical about online learning, and the growth of online learning is slower at private universities (Taylor et al., 2011), there are many administrators, faculty, and students who believe in online learning. Some administrators see online education as an opportunity to help students complete degrees in a more timely fashion and even as a way to reach out to more distance students and faculty (Mayadas et al., 2009).

Growth in Online Education

As more and more people get actively involved with online life via social networking and gaming, it is not surprising that the desire for online opportunities has carried over into other areas. Savin-Baden (2008) noted that “students of the twenty-first century, compared with former years, are more mixed in age range, tend to be in employment whilst studying, learn on the move

and have diverse expectations of what learning should be” (p. 151). These expectations often include flexible learning mediums like online education. Around 30 percent of students take at least one course in an online environment (Allen & Seaman, 2010). About 88 percent of colleges and universities that offer online classes offer them to on-campus students (Taylor et al., 2011). Fifteen percent of online students have earned their degrees online (Taylor et al., 2011). According to Cabanero-Johnson and Berge (2009), digital natives, people born after 1980, are going to require more stimulating educational access via computer simulations. They indicated that because digital natives grew up with more technology, they “operate on a different worldview” and “are driven to interact, immerse themselves and become part of the electronic world they [have] come to know so well” (Cabanero-Johnson & Berge, 2009, p.293).

Furthermore, colleges find that there is increasing competition for online students, and that the economic downturn increased the desire for online learning courses (Allen & Seaman, 2010). With 94 percent of 18 to 29 year olds using the Internet (Taylor et al., 2011), and traditional, college-aged students falling within that age range, the demand for online access to courses and programs is not surprising. Mayadas et al. (2009) emphasized the likelihood of a global competition for online students as online learning continues to grow. According to the Pew Research Center’s (2011) study, over 40 percent of adults ages 65 and up use the Internet, and the percentages for other age groups is higher; therefore, even today’s non-traditional students may have more experience with the Internet than students in past years (Taylor et al.). Again, the frequent exposure to the online environment in everyday life makes the online world more familiar, and possibly a demand for the classroom.

Change in Online Course Platforms: Enter the Virtual World

The platforms for offering online courses has shifted recently. Online learning platforms are the spaces where online courses are accessed. For example, many colleges and universities that offer online programs deliver those programs via the Blackboard course management platform. Foster (2007c) discussed efforts by instructors and researchers to construct a virtual reality platform in online fantasy areas and commercial and non-profit games to help boost online learning. Livingstone and Kemp (2006) stated that environments like Second Life are indicative of “the future of human interaction in a globally networked world” (p. v). In a 2007 survey conducted by the New Media Consortium, 209 educators were asked about their use of Second Life. Thirty-nine percent of the educators surveyed had been using Second Life for six months to one year (New Media Consortium, 2007). While the percentage of educators who use Second Life is not half or more, 39 percent does show that there is some interest in Second Life among educators. Forty-two percent of educators from the survey had participated in virtual environments other than Second Life (New Media Consortium, 2007). At the time of the New Media Consortium survey, 54 percent of participants, out of 104 open-ended responses, were currently involved in an education-related activity in Second Life. Forty-three percent of participants had taken a class in Second Life (New Media Consortium, 2007). Again, the use of Second Life in higher education as a potential platform for online learning is a very real, very current endeavor. Out of 110 open-ended responses, 65 percent of participants were planning new educational activities and projects for Second Life. Stoerger (2010) stated that educators view immersive virtual environments like Second Life as “powerful in that they enable students to learn through seeing, knowing, and doing within visually rich and mentally engaging spaces” (p. 3).

Baker, Wentz, and Woods (2009) noted that virtual worlds are useful in online teaching environments because they can help students interact more with each other, the professor, and the virtual environment. Burgess and Caverly (2009) referred to virtual worlds like Second Life as “fertile ground in higher education” (p. 42). Dreher, Reiners, Dreher, and Dreher (2009) also emphasized the value of virtual worlds for learning. For example, they pointed out that virtual environments allow students to “explore, participate, discover new knowledge, and develop industry relevant skills with greater intrinsic motivation and autonomy” (Dreher et al., 2009, p. 212). Stoerger (2010) lauded Second Life’s ability to give professors flexibility in the types of classroom environments they can provide for students. Pence (2007-2008) stated that Second Life has many advantages: avatars create a human presence that cannot be achieved through email or discussion lists, and time and space do not bind virtual world inhabitants. Pence also noted that virtual environments like Second Life allow users to try new ventures without an enormous amount of risk. For example, if inhabitants want to try new activities such as skydiving, they can do so virtually (Pence, 2007-2008). Carter and Click (2006) stated that Second Life “offers almost unlimited ‘teaching moments’” and that environments like Second Life “are yet another tool in the arsenal of those interested in reaching the Net-Generation learners in interactive, creative ways” (p. 2). Burgess and Caverly (2009) highlighted a few hypothetical “teaching moments” for Second Life. They discussed the idea of a Second Life tutorial center where virtual students and tutors for a university can interact at a distance (Burgess & Caverly, 2009). Burgess and Caverly (2009) also focused on the possibilities Second Life holds for developmental college courses.

Current Examples of Second Life in Higher Education

Several colleges and universities have started using Second Life as a way to provide information about their institutions. For example, Vassar College provides Second Life visitors with video access to their quad; Princeton University uses its Second Life area for musical performances; and the University of North Carolina provides a virtual health clinic via Second Life (Baker et al., 2009). Perhaps the move toward using online games in education is related to the increase in online gaming. In a 2006 study about online gaming, Yee found that half of massively multi-user online role playing gamers worked full-time jobs, and a majority of gamers were ages 18-over. Based on those statistics, online gamers fall between the ages of traditional and non-traditional college and university students. More people are spending more time online, and college students are no exception. In fact, a 2009 Sloan Consortium study indicated that more colleges and universities were increasing online professional and continuing studies courses, which connotes an increase in non-traditional students (Allen & Seaman, 2009).

Many professors have offered courses, or parts of courses, in Second Life. In 2005, for example, Second Life had 10 university courses that dealt with everything from art and architecture to business, gaming, and sociological perspectives (Childress & Braswell, 2006). Crellin, Duke-Williams, Chandler, and Collinson (2009) noted the use of Second Life in teaching computing. For example, at the University of Portsmouth, they used Second Life to develop interactive systems for Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and for system development for computer engineering projects. Herold (2010) discussed the use of Second Life for a media studies course at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The course was designed to not only have students think critically about media studies, but also to think critically about the virtual environment. Ellison and Matthews (2010) investigated the value of having students complete

their semester projects in Second Life as part of the requirements for a course in eighteenth-century culture. As a way to build knowledge about eighteenth-century London and show the importance of social networking for the literary environment in the eighteenth century, students had to use the twenty-first century tools in Second Life to build eighteenth-century coffee houses, gardens, and the like (Ellison & Matthews, 2010). The professors saw the use of Second Life for this part of the course as an opportunity for students to immerse themselves in eighteenth-century culture and get experience with twenty-first century social networking tools, as they had to use texting, chatting, and other tools to gather non-text information from scholars and other experts (Ellison & Matthew, 2010). A few faculty members at the University of Kansas School of Nursing conducted Second Life sessions for the graduate nursing informatics course as they would meetings in the traditional classroom (Skiba, 2009). Students gave PowerPoint presentations in real time, interacted with each other, and interacted with the professors—activities available in traditional classrooms. In addition to other synchronous, team-based activities such as creating a database, students were allowed to participate in the course asynchronously by conducting poster sessions and critiquing the posters of others on their own time. Texas Wesleyan has Genome Island, an area of Second Life where students can learn about genetics (Clark, 2009). Students conducted a number of experiments in Second Life through Genome Island, and the area is open to the public (Clark, 2009). Clark (2009) pointed out that offering areas for scientific experimentation in Second Life allows students “to replicate classic experiment or laboratory activities that might be too dangerous, too expensive, or too time-consuming in the real world” (p. 1). Thomas and Hollander (2010) discussed an urban planning course that was offered in Second Life. Course instructors chose Second Life because they

viewed the environment as a way to give graduate and undergraduate students an opportunity to use the design elements in the virtual world (Thomas & Hollander, 2010). For students in a course on game design, the task was to create games in the Second Life environment (Delwiche, 2006). It is important to reemphasize, however, that Second Life is usually not considered a game (Carter & Click, 2006). The goal of having the course in Second Life went beyond just teaching students about designing games; another goal was to give students first-hand experience with virtual worlds (Delwiche, 2006). Lu (2010) discussed the Second Life experiments of graduate and undergraduate students in a technology course. Lu (2010) stated that the objectives for the Second Life portions of the course were as follows:

- (1) gain first-hand experiences in an emerging virtual environment
- (2) use cutting-edge instructional and visual technology to create and learn about art and digital visual culture
- (3) discuss pedagogy for teaching in the 3D virtual learning environment that is transferable to teaching within VLEs (p. 22)

In addition to learning about creating avatars and navigating an immersive virtual environment, students went on group trips to art galleries, studios, and other virtual locations while studying in the Second Life environment. The students made 3D objects and created presentations as a part of their Second Life experience in the class. In total, students spent about 28 hours of class time on their Second Life excursions and assignments.

Several professors at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh School of Nursing used Second Life for synchronous interaction between nursing students and faculty (Skiba, 2009). Students in the online nursing bachelor's degree programs had access to the school's Second Life

environment for courses and other activities that helped them with public health education. Instructors at Tacoma Community College also had students use Second Life to learn about nursing (Skiba, 2009). For example, one instructor for the college used the virtual world to help students get more experience with patient care.

Similarly, at the University of Kentucky, Second Life allowed health professionals and undergraduate students an opportunity to collaborate and learn more about anatomical science (Richardson, Hazzard, Challman, Morgenstein, & Brueckner, 2011) in different ways. The program placed emphasis on collaborating and learning complex body parts and did not include the patient care component (exposure to 3D patients from various backgrounds with various conditions, i.e. the Tacoma Community College program) (Richardson et al., 2011). Second Life gave them an opportunity to expose students to patient care.

Like the programs at the University of Kansas School of Nursing; the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh School of Nursing; and Tacoma Community College, the Second Life environment at the University of Kentucky gave students and teachers opportunities to connect. Some students indicated that they were able to interact with professors online in a more personal way than in the traditional classroom environment (Richardson et al., 2011). Increased interaction between professors and students in the virtual environment was also a factor in other courses with components in Second Life (Baker et al., 2009). That increased interaction came in the form of virtual office hours in Second Life for online and on-campus students (Baker et al., 2009). Two of the authors from Baker et al.'s work (Wentz and Woods) were students in Second Life and indicated that they felt very comfortable communicating with professors in the immersive virtual environment.

Second Life has afforded students from a number of other disciplines an opportunity to learn and work together in a three-dimensional virtual environment (see, for example, Luo & Kemp, 2008). Some of those courses include management, cultural studies, writing and publishing, feminist studies, journalism, history, computer science, qualitative research methods, English as a second language, media studies, and educational technology (Luo & Kemp, 2008). Much like classes in other programs (Richardson et al., 2011; Skiba, 2009), the aforementioned courses that use Second Life are offered to graduate and undergraduate students. Out of the categories, there was 1 continuing studies course, 14 undergraduate courses, and 4 graduate courses (Luo & Kemp, 2008). The course types also varied, with 3 hybrid, 12 face-to-face, and 6 distance education courses (Luo & Kemp, 2008). The professors who chose to use Second Life for the classes indicated that they used the immersive virtual world to help with collaboration and simulation, among other areas (Luo & Kemp, 2008). Researchers deNoyelles and Seo (2012) discussed the use of Second Life as part of a communications technology course at a Midwestern university. The undergraduate students accessed Second Life via the computer lab for eight weeks. Eleven undergraduate students at the University of Alabama took an ethics course in Second Life to help them compare ethical issues in the real and virtual worlds (Houser, Thoma, Coppock, Mazer, Midkiff, Younanian, & Young, 2011).

Second Life has proven to be an integral part of the class projects to help students work in a more reality-based environment. For example, Second Life provided a more realistic setting for students in a graduate interdisciplinary communications course (Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath, & Trivedi, 2009). Offering the course in Second Life allowed students to “apply, test, fail, repeat, adapt, and improve their demonstrated use of communication strategies, individually

and in teams, in ways that are beyond the reach of [the] physical classroom” (Jarmon et al., 2009, p. 171). The students in the interdisciplinary communications course were allowed to practice their skills, much like the health care students and professionals from other studies were allowed to practice anatomy and patient care (Skiba, 2009; Richardson et al., 2011). In addition to collaborating with others in the course through Second Life, the students also spent time interacting with Second Life residents and communities outside of their course. Dreher et al. (2009) also discussed the realistic environment provided by Second Life; they saw the benefit for information systems courses. For example, the Linden Scripting Language (LSL), according to Dreher et al. (2009), allowed information systems students to learn more about programming and become more prepared for the business world after finishing their programs. Although it is not clear if LSL works well for first-time programming students, Dreher et al. (2009) noted that the overall experience is valuable for real-world, practical experience, stating, “Second Life provides a safe, inexpensive and highly adaptive environment in which to develop industry relevant skills and gain industry experience” (p. 214). Students in the Virtual Organizations and Global Teamwork course at a Hong Kong university also had the opportunity to get real-life experience through the virtual world of Second Life (Wagner & Ip, 2009). As part of an action learning assignment for the course, students were divided into teams and had to use Second Life to build and run their online businesses (Wagner & Ip, 2009). The students had to get real estate, create a product, and generate revenue in the Second Life environment as they would the in the real world (Wagner & Ip, 2009). Second Life gave students an opportunity to experience the business world through a three-dimensional virtual environment, and because of that exposure, students can gain virtual-world experience with real-world applications. In a sophomore business

communications course, students were allowed to practice their interviewing skills in Second Life (Jennings, 2010). Logistically, it was difficult to give students real-life, face-to-face opportunities for mock interviews, but the virtual environment made those interviews possible (Jennings, 2010). Jennings (2010) stated that students were responsible for dressing their avatars in business clothes appropriate for an interview and properly greeting and interacting with the guest interviewer. Students were also given the option to complete the interviews via telephone (Jennings, 2010). Jennings also noted that students in the course were allowed to make group presentations on the school's island in Second Life as an alternative to providing a videotaped presentation.

Second Life has helped several universities reach out and collaborate in new ways. For example, at the University of New Orleans, associate dean Merrill L. Johnson taught a geography course in Second Life (Foster, 2007b). When asked what the university hoped to accomplish by offering courses in Second Life, he noted an aspect of collaboration (i.e. the university wanted to reach the international community). The idea that Second Life helps collaboration is in keeping with what previous studies showed (Richardson et al., 2011; Lou & Kemp, 2008, for example). However, the second element Johnson mentioned was “additional administrative and teaching resilience” in the wake of a hurricane or other natural disaster, such as Hurricane Katrina (Foster, 2007b). Collaboration, according to Leonard, Withers, and Sherblom (2011), is a very valuable asset for Second Life. They noted that collaboration in virtual environments such as Second Life can be “highly efficient and cost-effective” (Leonard et al., 2011, p. 42). Leonard et al. also emphasized the advantages of using Second Life as a collaborative course environment; some benefits they noted included the following: that

there is no need for extra hardware and that there are opportunities for planned and haphazard encounters with others in the Second Life environment. In an instructional technology course at a Midwestern university, the instructor believed that the Second Life environment allowed students to create community with each other and with the professor (Childress & Braswell, 2006). The nature of the Second Life environment allows enhanced interaction for students in the virtual world (Childress & Braswell, 2006). Graduate students at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) had an opportunity to collaborate via Second Life for 90 percent of their courses (Heubeck, 2008). Dr. Michael Frank, vice provost and dean of the Graduate School of Management & Technology for UMUC, stated that online learning is ideal “for more mature students,” similar to the graduate students in the UMUC programs (Heubeck, 2008, p. 31).

What Does It All Mean?

The widespread use of the Internet has not only changed the landscape for how people communicate and interact with each other outside of the classroom, but Internet growth has also changed the way students are educated—even the way they expect to be educated. Numerous colleges and universities have adopted online education, and Second Life is a part of that online movement. As online education continues to grow, and platforms such as Second Life potentially become more common, researchers will need to examine the experiences students and faculty have with these new applications.

Statement of the Problem

The increase in courses offered in Second Life has naturally led to an increase in educators immersed in this virtual world. Exploring the potential relationship between educators

and Second Life began with John Lester (also known as Pathfinder Linden) in 2005 (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006). Lester indicated that in addition to making himself available to help students and educators who were interested in educational aspects of Second Life, he also established resources like SLED (Second Life educators mailing list) to help educators collaborate with each other (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006). By 2006, over 500 subscribers were on the SLED mailing list (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006). The 2007 New Media Consortium (NMC) survey found that although 42 percent of people on the Second Life Educators Listserv (SLED) had participated in virtual environments other than Second Life, 58 percent had not (p. 2).

Research concerning students' experiences in the Second Life classroom environment has grown, seemingly in tandem with the growth of courses in Second Life. For example, Wehner, Gump, and Downey's (2011) article discussed how Second Life influences the motivation of students in an undergraduate Spanish class that was divided into Second Life and non Second Life sections. Students in the course practiced their language-learning skills by speaking with native Spanish speakers, visiting several historical locations virtually, and presenting on different topics related to the course (Wehner et al., 2011). Some of the locations students visited included the Alhambra, Mexico, Guadalajara, and Barcelona (Wehner et al., 2011). Students in the non Second Life section did not get to interact with native speakers or visit sites because of logistical and financial obstacles, as the course was provided at a university in the southern United States (Wehner et al., 2011). Gao, Noh, and Koehler's (2009) article examined students' experiences with role-playing activities in face-to-face environments versus the Second Life environment. Cobb, Heaney, Corcoran, and Henderson-Begg's (2009) work investigated how 85 masters and final-year undergraduate science students fared in a virtual biosciences laboratory

offered in Second Life. Cheal's (2009) article discussed students' overall perceptions about courses delivered in Second Life.

While research on faculty experiences in Second Life exists, the number of those studies is lacking. Dutton's (2009) study examined the overall experiences of faculty in the Second Life environment, and Stoerger's (2010) work served as a guide for professors who want to venture into Second Life. Likewise, Molka-Danielsen and Deutschmann (2009) wrote a guide for those teaching and learning in Second Life. Savin-Baden (2008) noted that "learning in immersive virtual worlds (simulations and virtual worlds such as Second Life) could become a central learning approach in many curricula" and emphasized the need for more research on how the virtual world impacts higher education. Herold (2009) stated that it is difficult to find results on the learning and teaching practices in Second Life. Part of exploring the use of virtual worlds in higher education includes investigating specific aspects of professors' experiences with the immersive virtual environment. However, not many studies focus on educators' overall experiences with Second Life, and fewer studies examine more nuanced components of instructors' experiences with Second Life.

More specifically, there are very few studies on faculty perceptions of instructor persona in Second Life. In Foster's (2007a) *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, she spoke with professors concerning Second Life, but the focus was not specifically on professors' personas, although some idea of the topic was addressed. In a research study conducted by Savin-Baden (2010), she discussed how the online environment allowed professors to shift personality characteristics. However, she referred to professors' Second Life avatars as parts of their identities, not their personas (a distinction I make in Chapter 2).

Also, as online learning continues to grow, it is important to learn as much as we can about the online environment and how professors fare in that environment. Understanding these elements can inform the use of online learning tools and worlds and help improve professors' experiences in the online environment. The 2012 Babson Survey asked 4,564 faculty members various questions about online learning (Allen, Seaman, Lederman, & Jaschik, 2012). One of the questions asked about faculty members' excitement or fear regarding online learning, and although 42.3 percent of those surveyed were more excited than afraid of online learning, 57.7 percent of faculty members reported that they were afraid of online learning (Allen et al., 2012). However, the Babson Survey also showed that 6,714,792 students were taking at least one online course in 2011, a 9.3 percent increase over 2010 (Lederman, 2013). Despite faculty members' fears about online learning, online course enrollment continues to grow. Arguably, we are moving closer to online learning options being a norm for institutions of higher education, and many students may expect online learning options. Therefore, examining faculty in specific online learning environments is a worthwhile endeavor for a number of reasons: (1.) Understanding more about professors in online environments can add to the conversation about professors' fears concerning online learning (2.) Understanding professors' experiences with online learning environments can lead to solutions for allaying faculty members' online learning fears (3.) People spent 906 million hours on social networks and blogs (Nielsen, 2010), so more information about the educational uses of a site like Second Life, which is often used for social networking, could inform how this and other forms of social media are used in the classroom. The growth of online learning and social networking, the lack of information about more

nuanced aspects of professors' experiences in virtual worlds, and professors' overall concerns about online learning make my study both useful and informative.

Purpose

In my qualitative study of faculty who teach or have taught in Second Life, I examined professors' perspectives on faculty persona in Second Life. My goal is not to argue the merits of Second Life for use in higher education or to advocate for or against online learning or online learning platforms. Also, I do not want to give the impression that Second Life is the only new platform used in higher education. Second Life is just one thread of a very large, complex tapestry of online education. I provided a space for faculty to discuss the decisions that go into how they present themselves to students and others in the Second Life classroom. For example, I investigated how these professors made choices about avatars and what underlying notions of professorial image and authority guided their choices.

Significance

My study is significant to professors, other researchers, and anyone with an interest in faculty and the online environment. Because researchers continue to explore online learning generally, a virtual environment-specific study, such as my Second Life study, is right on the cusp of upcoming research about online learning. Professors can read about and learn from the experiences of other Second Life professors—even if those readers do not have much experience with the virtual environment. Other researchers can use information from my study to continue the discussion about faculty persona in Second Life and other three dimensional virtual environments. While there are numerous studies that discuss students' perceptions of Second Life (see, for example, Shen & Eder, 2009) or the use of Second Life for various courses and

disciplines (see, for example, Luo & Kemp, 2008), my study may be useful for higher education administrators, designers, and others who want to know more about faculty experiences in Second Life.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to Seaman (2009), at the time of his survey, 23.6 percent of faculty were teaching at least one course online, and 34.4 percent had taught or currently teach online, so understanding educators' perspectives about online learning in general can help differentiate between the motivations and frustrations that apply to most forms of online learning and the ones that are specific to a three-dimensional virtual environment. This review of literature concerning online learning and virtual worlds will serve as a platform for further discussion about educators' persona decisions in Second Life. The key areas I will cover are faculty concerns about online teaching, faculty motivations to teach online, instructor presence online, instructor immediacy online, faculty persona online, professors teaching in Second Life, and professors' perceptions of Second Life.

Faculty Concerns About Online Teaching

Although a number of faculty teach one or more classes in the online environment, exposure to the medium has not eradicated the concerns several faculty have about teaching in the online environment. Those concerns include lack of administrator understanding, workload/time constraints, student preparedness, academic dishonesty, and lack of face-to-face interaction.

Lack of Administrator Understanding

Lack of management/administrator understanding is a major concern for many online course instructors. For example, Dolan's (2011) study of 28 online adjunct faculty indicated that

teachers felt management or administrators did not appreciate their efforts in the courses and undervalued them as resources for expertise in their teaching areas. The study included feedback from current adjunct faculty, and although several of them had direct relationships with the researcher, other instructors were invited to participate as well. Similarly, out of 101 full and part-time faculty participants from Oomen-Early and Murphy's (2009) study, 87 percent of faculty felt that administrators were not fully aware of the challenges teachers face in online courses. The faculty were from for profit and nonprofit institutions, and they had each taught online for as few as two semesters. Thirteen percent of faculty members were from two-year institutions, two percent were from virtual campuses, and eighty-four percent of faculty were from four-year campuses. Haber and Mills' (2008) study also found that professors had administrative concerns when it came to online learning. The researchers surveyed faculty from Florida's 28 community colleges and decided to invite full-time online faculty from three of the colleges to participate in the study (Haber & Mills, 2008). Those three colleges were chosen because an initial survey of the 701 full-time community college faculty in Florida, faculty who met Haber & Mills' criteria, showed that those three institutions had a "large and diverse portion of the online teachers" (2008, p. 270). The largest college (LCC) had an enrollment of 62,465 with 109 online faculty, the mid-sized college (MCC) had an enrollment of 44,000 with 10 online faculty, and the smallest college (SCC) had student enrollment of 18,000 with 16 online faculty. Fourteen faculty participated in the focus group sessions for the study (Haber & Mills, 2008). The semi-structured focus group sessions revealed that faculty at the LCC felt that their institution was forcing more duties on them, and they were concerned about aspects of certain administrative practices: implementing courses, training, ordering books. Siedlaczek's (2004)

work included a focus group discussion with five full-time instructors for a community college in Ontario, with each professor being part of developing and teaching at least one online course and each with over 10 years of face-to-face teaching experience. The study showed that many online professors think administrators have little understanding of what it takes to teach online (Siedlaczek, 2004). For example, the course policies in place were related to face-to-face courses, not online courses; as a result, students and teachers often felt confused about what to do when involved with online courses.

Hiltz, Shea, and Kim's (2010) study on online faculty showed that several participants did not feel supported by their institutions, technologically or administratively. Faculty members from a small community college and a technological university, both groups experienced in teaching online, participated in online surveys and focus group interviews to provide feedback about their experiences online. An example cited by one of the participants was lack of funding for technology that would enhance online teaching and learning. In a study that included 80 faculty from Indira Gandhi National Open University, Panda and Mishra (2007) found that lack of administrator support in the form of instructional design help and online learning policies negatively affected professors' online teaching experiences. Faculty from the study had an average of over ten years of experience with distance education.

Workload/Time Constraints

Several researchers have found that faculty who participated in their surveys also were concerned about the workload and time involved with online teaching. Conceicao (2006) conducted a phenomenological study to investigate faculty members' lived experiences in online environments. Participants included 10 college professors from four-year institutions around the

United States and Canada. The participants' academic disciplines included business management, adult education, nursing, management information systems, accounting management, library science, workplace learning, and human resources, and they had a combined total of 2-16 years of online teaching experience. Conceicao's (2006) study found that the faculty participants were concerned about the amount of time spent on online courses. For example, Barbara stated:

...[I]f you're trying to write lectures or prepare PowerPoints or activities, and keep up with the dialogue, you can't do it. I learned that early enough; you can't do both. You have to really prepare your materials whether or not they are in exact final format.

(p. 37)

For this professor, there had to be a choice between keeping up with course commentary and creating course activities because of time and workload constraints. A class discussion, from start to finish, becomes an event that must be planned in advance, a different workload commitment than in traditional face-to-face courses. Another faculty member, Mary, mentioned the time and workload differences between online and traditional courses. She stated:

You don't have the 2.5-hour class that meets that week, but instead you're sitting back reading everything every [learner] does and reflecting on it and providing feedback...

In a traditional class, we want participation as well, but you don't sit there in a classroom and record: [Learner] A made three comments tonight and [Learner] B was silent the whole night. You don't do that. You have other ways of trying to gauge how they're developing knowledge and applying it. But in this kind of a course, participation is critical. Everybody's getting something out of it...because these discussions, again, are

to facilitate the dialogue. (Conceicao, 2006, p. 37)

For Mary, teaching an online course meant having to monitor students and class discussion in a way that is not expected or required for traditional courses. Kate, another professor from Conceicao's (2006) study, made a similar observation: "[Learners] were reading their own team comments. But I read everybody's comments" (p. 38). Conceicao noted that reading all students' posts did require more time and work on Kate's part.

Professors from Wasilik and Bolliger's (2009) study listed teacher workload as one of their major concerns with online learning. The study included survey responses from 102 online teachers from a land-grant university in the United States. Workload was considered a problem by faculty in Panda and Mishra's (2007) study, but that item was farther down on the list of problems than some other issues. Zare-ee surveyed 115 faculty members from the arts, engineering, social sciences, and science at three universities in central Iran, in addition to a subsample of 15 instructors with low information communications technology (ICT) use. A little over 20 percent of faculty participants from Zare-ee's (2011) study sited lack of preparation time as a problem with online courses. Schulte (2010) interviewed 13 faculty members from a midwestern university in the United States. The teachers came from the four colleges at the university: Education, Health and Life Sciences, Business and Leadership, and Arts and Sciences. Faculty from Haber and Mills' (2008) study also felt that time was a major concern for online courses. In fact, they noted that online courses took more time than traditional courses, particularly at the outset. The discussion boards and influx of emails were also a concern to professors from Haber and Mills' study. For example, one faculty member stated:

Ten years ago, say, I taught a class in statistics. I walked in, I lectured and I left---three days a week. Maybe two or three people came to my office...Now if you have e-mail, if you don't check into your class on a daily basis, it is an onslaught. (p. 276)

Similarly, Pat, a professor from Conceicao's (2006) study, noticed a difference between the time and workload for online courses versus traditional courses. He stated, "For every course that I teach online, the amount of work--not just to develop it, but delivery of it--it's at least 50% more than the campus course" (p. 38). Pat continued, "[For on-campus classes], I go to class and deliver my lecture and I don't hear or see from the [learners] till next week" (Conceicao, 2006, p. 38). Pat received email from online students almost daily, which could result in multiple emails to several students throughout the day (Conceicao, 2006). An instructor from Schulte's (2010) study stated that the increased workload is "one of the plusses and minuses of technology today" (p. 14). The faculty member continued, "[Technology] allows you to do more, but the more you do, the more time intensive it becomes for you to manage..." (Schulte, 2010, p. 14). Barbara, a teacher from Conceicao's (2006) study, made a similar observation, stating, "You're just online nonstop. You just can't leave" (p. 38). In Ribeiro, de Oliveira, and Mill's (2011) study, which included responses from 59 teachers involved in a partnership between two universities in Brazil and areas that provide infrastructure, the online professors found that online learning courses took more preparation time than face-to-face courses. Faculty in Siedlaczek's (2004) study were concerned that the text-based nature of the online learning environment created more work, as professors had to take time to write out ideas that they would have provided verbally in the face-to-face classroom. Similarly, professors from Hiltz et al.'s (2010) work indicated that it was quite time consuming to ensure that online messages have the correct tone and phrasing.

Also, some of the professors expressed that they were more comfortable communicating verbally than in writing—something they would have to get comfortable with in the online environment (Siedlaczek, 2004). Other professors were also concerned with the text-based feedback of online courses. For example, Coppola, Hiltz, and Rotter (2002) conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 professors to discuss the professors' experiences creating and delivering courses online (or via asynchronous learning networks, ALNs). The faculty taught in the School of Management, Computer and Information Science, Humanities and Social Science, and Electrical and Computer Engineering. One humanities and social sciences professor stated:

With 30-40 students, to give them each individual feedback on everything they write, every week, becomes sort of daunting...Even to write little interlinear comments on each student's journal every week, it really adds up. (Coppola et al., 2002, p. 181)

Faculty from Hiltz et al.'s (2010) study felt that their online courses required more time than their face-to-face courses. For example, one faculty member stated, "I think it's [online learning] more stressful and more time consuming too" (p. 30). Another faculty member described online courses as "double to triple the time" it takes to manage a face-to-face course (Hiltz et al., 2010). When Fish and Gill (2009) surveyed 87 professors who worked for a public university in a southwestern state, they found that there were faculty members who compared preparing to teach online courses as writing a textbook for explaining the textbook. Some professors thought that the workload involved in online courses caused them to neglect their face-to-face courses, stating:

I have a face-to-face class that's three hours a night and I feel I'm short-changing them very badly because maybe I read their papers for eight hours, and I'm there for three

hours so that's eleven hours; but with the online course, I'm off and on and reading their papers and responding to them for maybe twenty hours for one course, and that doesn't count developing the course either. (Hiltz et al., 2010, p. 30)

A faculty participant in Oomen-Early and Murphy's (2009) study stated, "There is just not enough time to do it all: answer all of my emails, design a course or courses, teach them, manage them, grade, research, advise, and so on" (p. 229). Other professors noted that dealing with the "barrage of assignments" delivered online is also quite time consuming (Hiltz et al., 2010, p. 31). In Green, Alejandro, and Brown's (2009) study, which included responses from 135 participants who have taught or currently teach at East Carolina University and California State University, Fullerton, over 50 percent of participants listed concerns about time commitment as a factor that would discourage them from teaching online. Lui's (2009) work, which consisted of feedback from 15 participants at an institution in Hong Kong, found that managing the influx of students' assignments in an online course consumed a great deal of time. In a case study conducted by Choi and Park (2006), the online course professor at a university in the midwestern United States noted that the heavy workload involved with online teaching was a very daunting part of online teaching. The professor attributed her heavy workload to her need to compensate for lack of face-to-face interaction with students; she focused on responding to all individual postings and emails.

Student Preparedness

Many online faculty feared that students were not adequately prepared to take online courses. For example, more than 76 percent of faculty participants from Oomen-Early and Murphy's (2009) study stated that colleges and universities should determine students' readiness

for online learning. Professors from Hiltz et al.'s (2010) study were concerned that online learning is not for all students. One faculty member indicated that students with little to no technology experience have more problems with online courses (Hiltz et al., 2010). A professor from Zare-ee's (2011) study also found that little experience with technology was problematic for some online students. Similarly, nursing professors from Smith, Passmore, and Faught (2009) were concerned that students' lack of technology experience would be problematic. The study included feedback from two instructional designers and seven teachers at research universities in New York and Florida. The faculty members in the study had all taught nursing online for over two years. All participants had designed, taught, or were currently teaching online. According to Koenig's (2010) study, although online learning allowed good students to learn more, the delivery method did not provide the same opportunity for average or poor students, an issue that could be related to student preparedness. Koenig's study included responses from 160 faculty members at a technical institute in a mid-Atlantic state. Similarly, faculty from Fish and Gill's (2009) study stated that online learning works well for students who are already motivated learners, but can be problematic for students who are not as motivated or self-directed. Other professors expressed frustration because students did not seem ready for online courses and had poor communication skills online (Wasilik & Bolliger, 2009). Some faculty noted that students were not prepared to deal with various technology challenges. Professors from Schulte's (2010) study stated that several students do not have the computer skills to be successful in online courses.

While students' technological challenges are often related to trouble with computers, faculty pointed out other technology-related issues. For example, faculty from Siedlaczek's

(2004) study cited the difficulty some students have adapting to the new online environment, particularly submitting postings and receiving/providing feedback in a public setting. For professors in Panda and Mishra's (2007) study, students' lack of access to Internet was a major concern and a barrier to their access to online learning. Another related aspect of student readiness faculty felt should be addressed was students' expectations of professors. One instructor stated, "Some students expect instructor feedback to be as instantaneous as clicking a button, so when it's not, they get upset. They don't realize that it takes time for the instructor to review and respond to what's been posted" (Oomen-Early & Murphy, 2009, p. 231). Apparently, some students are not only expecting immediate access to the course and materials, but also to professors. Another professor stated, "I had to log in a couple of times a day, or sometimes more than that. I had to respond to [students] immediately, otherwise they wouldn't have done their assignments, they would have said, 'Oh, you didn't answer my emails'" (Hiltz et al., 2010, p. 31). Marco, a professor from Conceicao's (2006) study, stated:

I want to be able, if I want, to choose to go online on the weekends. But I don't want a situation where it's expected of me to be going online on a Sunday evening. I want time with my family. (p. 38)

Faculty from Wasilik and Bolliger's (2009) study indicated that students' expectations of online professors were "unrealistic," as many students wanted instantaneous responses from faculty (as noted in Oomen-Early & Murphy's 2009 study). A professor from Schulte's (2010) study experienced similar difficulties with students, stating, "I started having students that thought they could contact me 24/7 [24 hours a day, 7 days a week]. And I know why they think they have one-on-one contact, because they do!" (p. 17).

Cheating

The potential for cheating (such as plagiarism) proved a worrisome aspect of online learning for professors. One professor noted that several students confessed to cheating in online courses: “Everyone can cheat and have someone help them with their work. Who really knows who is doing the work? All students tell me that they have had someone do some or most of their work for an online course” (Fish & Gill, 2009). Faculty from Schulte’s (2010) study were also concerned about plagiarism on research papers and cheating on exams. One professor stated:

And I’ll use the digital copy [of the paper] to do a plagiarism check, basically....And I make sure that students understand that I’m going to be doing just exactly that...just so they know that they are going to be checked I think is absolutely a deterrent. (Schulte, 2010, p. 25)

Professors from Smith, Passmore, and Faught’s (2009) study were also concerned about students cheating on online tests. Even when students were allowed to use notes and books on exams, professors were still concerned that students would work on the tests in groups, something that was not permitted (Smith et al., 2009). Although some faculty noted that students have not accessed test answers thus far, there was still concern about that possibility (Smith et al., 2009).

Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction

Many faculty were concerned about the lack of face-to-face interaction in online courses. For example, professors with positive online teaching experiences as well as faculty with no online teaching experience cited the lack of physical co-presence as a negative aspect of online learning (Fish & Gill, 2009). Kanuka, Collett, and Caswell (2002) conducted a study on instructors’ perceptions of the online environment, particularly asynchronous, text-based

discussion. The study included data from semi-structured interviews with 12 faculty members from the University of Alberta. These professors had different levels of experience with online education. Some of the participants were inexperienced when it came to delivering courses online, and others had experience and international recognition for online learning. Kanuka et al. (2002) noted that some professors missed the face-to-face interaction provided by the traditional classroom. For example, one professor stated:

It's more difficult to build up those kind of personal relationships. I would classify myself as a teacher not the content expert. Teaching is where my interest is. I miss not having that face-to-face time, that relationship building opportunity. I know that it will be different. I like seeing people. I like seeing how they change throughout the term. Their hair grows longer. They dye their hair. They pierce their nose. I like seeing those changes in people, you know. I like being able to have that personal time, which is different in a distance educational environment. So I miss it. But maybe it's different and equally rich, but different. (p. 161)

Another professor from Kanuka et al.'s (2002) study expressed a desire for face-to-face interaction:

As I explored with ways to model thinking skills and the application of theory to practice, I wanted feedback from my students to be sure that I was communicating these ideas effectively. In face-to-face I can 'see' if they are 'getting it,' whereas online, I can't. (162)

Faculty from Zare-ee's (2011) study indicated that although information communication technologies (ICT) are excellent resources, some interaction is lost because of the lack of face-to-face communication. Lui's (2009) study showed that professors were concerned that not

having face-to-face contact with students would hinder their rapport with students. Coppola et al. (2002) found that faculty missed the “facial expressions, eye contact, voice qualities and body movement” traditional courses provided (p. 179). As indicated by these studies, several professors miss the interaction of face-to-face courses.

Summary

Faculty from the studies had a number of concerns when teaching, or preparing to teach, in the online classroom: lack of administrator understanding, workload/time constraints, student preparedness, academic dishonesty, and lack of face-to-face interaction. These concerns about online learning did not specifically include three dimensional virtual environments, but several of these issues could be cause for added reservations in a virtual world. For example, learning how to operate within a virtual world adds to the time professors already spend developing online courses and dealing with the influx of information from online students. Student preparedness concerns may also be heightened in the virtual world because even if students are digital natives or just computer savvy, they may still have difficulty adapting to the three dimensional virtual environment. While faculty did not mention issues with faculty persona in the virtual world, one of the concerns, lack of face-to-face interaction, could affect faculty persona in any online environment. For example, as some faculty noted, loss of face-to-face interaction also means loss of non-verbal elements that many faculty find useful: the puzzled look when a student does not understand or the look of reassurance when a student grasps a concept.

Motivations to Teach Online

While the online classroom can seem arduous at times, many faculty remained motivated to teach online because the medium provides flexibility, the opportunity to work with new technology, organizational benefits, and improved learning for students.

Flexibility

Despite a number of concerns about online learning, faculty also found positive aspects of online learning, such as flexibility. In Green et al.'s (2009) study, over 80 percent of all faculty participants noted "flexible working conditions" as a motivator for teaching online. Kanuka et al. (2002) found that professors appreciated the flexibility that online learning provided. For Hiltz et al.'s (2010) study, flexibility was the primary reason professors wanted to teach online. One faculty member, who is also an administrator, stated of online teaching:

It enables me to teach and I think that really goes under self scheduling because my calendar is so full and needs to be so flexible that if I were to teach a face [to face] course or more than one face [to face] course, it would be impossible for me to schedule other things that need to be scheduled. (Hiltz et al., 2010, pp. 27-28)

Other faculty members from Hiltz et al.'s (2010) study emphasized the value of flexibility in online learning. From the faculty member who was able to take a few weeks to care for a sick relative without missing classes to the mother of young children to the faculty member living abroad, the flexible nature of online teaching allowed each of these professors to balance teaching schedules with personal schedules (Hiltz et al., 2010). Ninety-seven percent of participants in Wasilik and Bolliger's (2009) study stated that the flexibility of online teaching is valuable to faculty. Instructors also indicated that online courses provided them the flexibility to access underserved groups of students (Wasilik & Bolliger, 2009). Flexibility to access

information in online courses also proved important to faculty in the Fillion, Limayem, Laferriere, and Mantha (2009) study, which included feedback from 18 professors from a large Canadian university. One faculty member stated:

...Students have a lot of possibilities in this course to access information, to discuss about it, and to have a doubt about it when they think it is necessary, as well as to be placed in front of numerous 'real life' examples that make such students can establish links between theory and practice. All these elements can only have the effect, I think, to increase the level of understanding of students of the course material. (p. 30)

A faculty member with a negative experience of online teaching lauded the medium's flexibility for students, stating that online learning "provides a flexible forum for individuals who work and cannot meet in a regular classroom environment" (Fish & Gill, 2009). The flexibility of online courses allows faculty to upload a variety of examples and course materials with ease, and students can easily access the various course materials.

Working with New Technology

Several professors were motivated to teach online courses because of the desire to work with new technology. In Dolan's (2011) study of online adjunct faculty and isolation, for example, many of the adjuncts wanted to stay on because of the school's "state-of-the-art course platform" (p. 70). The desire to work with the new technology was so strong that these faculty members were willing to deal with the isolation they experienced just to have access to top technological tools. Green et al. (2009) found that over 70 percent of all participants were motivated to engage in online teaching because of the opportunity to use technology. A professor from Schulte's (2010) study viewed the chance to use new technology with online learning as a

growth opportunity, stating, “I look at what I’ve learned technology wise here and I know that I am a much more marketable person because of what I know and what I’ve done” (p. 14). Panda and Mishra (2007) also found that faculty were moved to teach online because of an interest in technology. Faculty from Hiltz et al.’s (2010) study also appreciated the opportunity to work with new technology as a result of teaching online courses. For example, one professor mentioned “the challenge of the technology” (Hiltz et al., 2010). Faculty in Siedlaczek’s (2009) study were also motivated to teach online because of technology exposure. She noted that faculty were “actively interested” in not only learning more about technology, but also sought various ways to integrate new technology into their classrooms.

Organizational Benefits

Professors were also motivated to teach (continue teaching) online because technology helped many of them keep online course information organized. For example, faculty from Hiltz et al.’s (2010) study indicated that the ability to manage courses with ease motivated them to teach online courses. One professor noted that course management systems provided “easier record-keeping for the class” (Hiltz et al., 2010, p. 29). The professor continued, “Tracking students’ participations and having all their assignments in one place, it’s easier for them too because they can see their grades when they’re posted and they can keep track of the teacher’s comments” (Hiltz et al., 2010, p. 29). A professor from Koenig’s (2010) study found the technology for online courses to be “a wonderful way to ensure organized content, as well as learning objectives” (p. 22). Other professors also agreed that the paperless aspect of online learning helped with organization of course submissions (Schulte, 2010). Some professors

indicated that the organizational aspects of online learning helped them take more time to think through course structure and pedagogy. For example, a school of management professor stated:

It has gotten me to rethink pedagogical objectives, pedagogical techniques. It has exposed me to new ideas and new means of delivery that I hadn't paid any attention to at all. It has gotten me to think about the fact that class does not revolve around me which is what every new teacher thinks. They are more concerned about themselves and what they are doing. We speak about a community of scholars; it's about time that we had a community of learners. (Coppola et al., 2001, p. 180)

More Interaction

Several professors felt motivated to teach online because they believe the medium allows for more interaction between professors and students. An online instructor noted, "Students are more open to ask questions [online] than in face-to-face" (Fillion et al., 2009, p. 31). An educator from Schulte's (2010) study noted that the online environment "probably opens up some students and they communicate their feelings more and their opinions more because they're not face-to-face with you" (p. 16). Online professor Mary stated:

There's a tremendous gratification in [online teaching] because of how well I get to know the [learners], and I believe the opportunities I have to assess their application of the knowledge and skills that we're talking about during the semester...You're sitting back reading everything every [learner] does and reflecting on it and providing feedback... The way I do it is more time consuming, but it's also much more gratifying. I feel like I can have a greater impact on each individual [learner]. (Conceicao, 2006, p. 41)

Another professor stated that because students can “communicate electronically anytime with [the] professor and their peers,” that interaction helps students feel more secure in online courses (Fillion et al., 2009, p. 38). Shea, Pickett, and Li’s (2005) study of 913 faculty members representing 33 colleges (a combination of four-year institutions, university centers, and community colleges) in the State University of New York Learning Network (SLN) for the 2003-2004 term found that online courses helped facilitate more interaction between students and faculty and students and each other. Out of the 14 professors who taught online at the University of Mississippi in 2007, seven of them participated in Ward, Peters, and Shelley’s (2010) study. Eighty-six percent of faculty thought that synchronous interactive online instruction (SIOI) helped facilitate more interaction between students and their peers and students and professors (Ward et al., 2010). Many faculty found that the increased interaction with students, as a result of online learning, helped them learn more about students’ work habits. A professor from Hiltz et al.’s (2010) study said:

You begin to learn about the work habits of your students very quickly and I think you get to know them, because you’re dealing with them in a verbal way as opposed to a visual way...You don’t have these interactions in the classrooms, where mostly I’m doing the talking in front of the classroom and (only) some students will raise their hands, but I won’t get to know them better. (p. 28)

Professors also thought that online courses provided an environment where students who would normally not participate in face-to-face class discussions could participate freely and comfortably (Hiltz et al., 2010). Faculty from Coppola et al.’s (2001) study also appreciated the

increased interaction that came with teaching online. A humanities and social sciences professor stated:

Even though the richness of exchange is reduced, there is a possibility for more intimacy online than in the regular classroom. That's definitely a plus. It's hard to get that, to have that happen. I like that very much. (p. 179)

Although professors may miss the social cues that come with the traditional face-to-face classroom, as noted in the section on faculty concerns with online learning, there are still ample opportunities for student-teacher interaction in the online classroom.

Improves Learning

Some faculty asserted that online courses improve students' learning outcomes. For example, participants in Wiesenberg and Stacey's (2008) study stated that in addition to being more efficient, online learning is better for in-depth conceptual learning. The professors represented a university in Canada, with 12 participants, and a university in Australia, with 10 participants. Teachers from both universities taught in online and face-to-face classrooms, a part of the study's criteria. Online professors from the Fillion et al. (2009) also felt that online learning improved student learning. One professor stated:

Some students are certainly more capable as others to use this type of material on the Web. But I think that ICT [information communication technology] provide students with an advantage at the level of learning. Using ICT in this course, students provide much more pronounced search of information. There is an interaction on the Internet which was not there before in conventional courses. Yes, assuredly, ICT improve learning. (Fillion et al, 2009, p. 30)

Faculty from Siedlaczack's (2004) study were motivated to use the online environment because they believe the medium supports a variety of learning styles, which could also serve to improve students' learning. According to Fish and Gill (2009), professors with positive online teaching experiences felt that online learning positively impacted students' learning. In addition to expressing that the online courses are comparable to traditional courses, the faculty also indicated that most students in their respective areas benefited from online learning, preferred online learning, and had their learning enhanced as a result of online learning (Fish & Gill, 2009). Faculty with positive online experiences also stated that online teaching helps them facilitate higher order thinking in students, and one professor noted that "one advantage [of online teaching] includes facilitating higher order thinking among students and the application of adult learning theory" (Fish & Gill, 2009).

Summary

While faculty were concerned about some aspects of online learning, other aspects of the medium had faculty excited about working in the online classroom: flexibility, the opportunity to work with new technology, organizational benefits, and improved learning for students. Although comments by faculty did not specifically mention three dimensional online environments, virtual worlds such as Second Life are new forms of technology and are asynchronous, so the level of flexibility faculty experience with other online environments is present in three dimensional virtual worlds as well. Also, virtual worlds allow professors to have a different level of interaction with students, as they do not rely solely on text-based communication, but have the presence of avatars that can interact with students' avatars.

Instructor Presence and Instructor Immediacy Online

Because online learning lacks the face-to-face component of traditional courses, instructor presence is a major part of online education. In a study of three online instructors and their 68 students: Class A, Library Science, 19 students; Class B, Communications, 25 students; and Class C, Communications, 25 students, Dennen (2007) described instructor presence as a relationship between how the instructor positions him/herself, how students position him/her, and how he/she accepts that positioning. Instructor presence involves being engaged with students through interaction. The courses for Dennen's (2007) study were labeled according to high instructor activity, Class A; medium instructor activity, Class B; and low instructor activity, Class C. High activity level meant that the professor wrote more than 25 percent of the course messages, medium activity level meant that the instructor wrote 5 to 25 percent of course messages, and for the low activity level course, the professor wrote less than 5 percent of the messages. The professor with a medium level of activity, instructor for Class B, was able to interact with students while showing that he, too, was a learner. The heavy presence of the professor for Class A was an element that worked against his desire to be a facilitative professor for the course. As a result of the low presence the professor for Class C displayed, the students in the course did not interact as much in the discussion area.

Just as Dennen's (2007) study showed, particularly with the example of Class B, that finding the proper balance of instructor presence can work well for professors and students, other studies supported that point as well. For example, Ice, Curtis, Phillips, and Wells' (2007) work discussed using audio feedback to enhance teaching presence, thereby increasing students' sense of course community. From spring 2004 until summer 2005, the authors taught seven asynchronous online classes and wanted to understand the nature of audio feedback in an

asynchronous course (Ice et al., 2007). Therefore, they studied an online curriculum and instruction course at West Virginia University. Participants for the study were 5 master's level pre-service teachers, 15 master's level practicing teachers, and 7 doctoral students. The findings from Ice et al.'s (2007) study showed that the increased instructor presence via audio feedback helped students feel more connected to the course. For example, one student from the course said the following:

Yes, I would have to say that audio [commenting] made all the difference in the world to me. I've taken several online classes here and at [another university] because they are so much more...uhm, easier for me to get to. The downside is that I have felt like I am the girl in the bubble....That said, I get this file where you put in this audio and boom!...It was like the bubble started getting popped in all these different places and made me feel like you were reaching in there and touching me. I know that's probably kind of silly, but just your voice alone made me feel like it was a real class and not this big technology construct that was locking us into its parts. (Ice et al., 2007, pp. 14-15)

For the aforementioned student, the increased presence from the instructor gave her a more positive perspective of online courses. Feeling that the instructor was there and interacting with her via audio feedback caused the student to experience a new level of connectivity with the professor and the course. Increased instructor presence made a difference in the way a student viewed an online course. Marco, a faculty member from Conceicao's (2006) study, talked about the potential lack of presence in online classrooms, stating, "...[T]hey don't have the feedback and they can't hear the laughter or the response of the audience. Online teaching vis-a-vis face-

to-face teaching is similar to performing on stage or filming in front of a camera” (p. 39).

However, the audio commenting would alleviate part of that problem.

Much like the Ice et al. (2007) study investigated whether or not audio feedback enhanced instructor presence, Miller and Redman (2010) explored whether video demonstrations improved instructor presence in an online astronomy course. Surveys were administered to 317 students in an online introductory astronomy course; a total of 204 students chose to participate in the study. Most of the students thought that the videos were effective in creating instructor presence in the online course. Furthermore, Miller and Redman’s (2010) study indicated a positive correlation between students’ perceptions of higher instructor presence and positive attitudes toward the online course.

Lear, Isernhagen, LaCost, and King (2009) also investigated instructor presence, but this study explored the potential connection between instructor presence and student engagement in web-based classes. Lear et al. contacted online professors at four postsecondary institutions in the Midwest. The 241 students from the study were from 31 online sections of classes at the aforementioned universities. The researchers chose to interview 42 of the students to find out if they thought instructor presence was important. When asked if they thought that developing a sense of belonging in a class was more related to course content or the instructor’s course design and presence, 26 of the students responded that developing a sense of belonging was most related to course structure and/or instructor interaction. The study also showed that engagement activities controlled by the professor--direct instruction, facilitating discourse, and teaching presence--were important. Although Lear et al. did not mention students’ preferred modes of

instructor presence, as Ice et al. did in their study, the overall idea is the same as other studies: instructor presence is an important factor in online learning.

Morgan (2011) gave instructors an opportunity to discuss their ideas about teaching presence in a three-site study on teaching presence in the context of international online learning. The sites were as follows: 1.) a postgraduate certificate program in Eastern Europe, 2.) a masters program in distance education at a university in South America, and 3.) a graduate program in education at a Canadian university (Morgan, 2011). By analyzing data that included instructor interviews and course documents, Morgan was able to surmise teachers' perceptions of instructor presence. For example, one professor who co-taught a course saw a direct relationship between his posts in the course and instructor presence:

I felt a responsibility and I looked for my [opportunities] and tried to make contributions either big or little just to have a voice because whether they viewed me as secondary or not I thought it was my responsibility to post and make contributions where I could.

(Morgan, 2011, p. 10)

The professor's posts, everything from word choice to number of posts, dictated how students felt about that instructor's presence and how the professor felt about his own presence as a result of students' reactions. For example, students for the course in question would often email the other teacher without sending an email to the co-teacher as well (the system they used did not allow students to cc other email recipients). Being excluded from several conversations left one of the instructors hesitant about participating, as the aforementioned quote showed. This relationship between instructor presence and interaction with students (via posts, in this case)

goes back to Ice et al.'s (2007) point that teaching presence has a lot to do with professors' interactions with students.

Another professor from Morgan's (2011) study served as an active participant in the course and as the instructor. For example, he posted messages, but they were not long. Also, he encouraged students to interact with each other and often pointed students to the work of other students in the class, which led to much more individualized comments and interactions. As a result, the professor was able to achieve a high level of instructor presence through individualized posts, and encouraged student to student interaction by having the students refer to each other's work.

Reupert, Maybery, Patrick, and Chittleborough (2009) investigated instructor presence in distance education courses. Participants for the study were second-year distance education psychology students taking a mandatory statistics course. Of the 128 students enrolled, 68 of them participated in the study, and some of the students engaged in a focus group with a semi-structured interview and an online survey (survey had 68 responses). Students from the study, 63 out of the 68 surveyed, felt that it was important for students and teachers to have interpersonal contact in the online classroom. While some students did not feel the need to interact with the professor or feel that he/she is personable, other students wanted more connection with the course instructor. One student stated:

It is important to me, as a human being to interact, not with a computer, or a book, but with others, who know more about this subject than I do. They need to be there, to bring it to life, they need to show their human side... (Reupert et al., 2009, p. 50)

In the example, the student is asking for increased instructor presence and emphasizing the importance of feeling that the online learning professor is there and ready to interact with students. The idea of the students in Reupert et al.'s (2009) study viewing instructors as personable or more human is no different from students in the Lear et al. (2009) study wanting more interaction with the professor in order to create a sense of community or students in Ice et al.'s (2007) study being excited about the increased interaction audio feedback provided.

Most of the students from the study agreed that the instructor's personal presence is important (Lear et al., 2009). The students even outlined a few personal qualities they wanted to see in their online professors, something that speaks to specific aspects of instructor presence. For example, one student stated, "A sense of openness to connecting with students is essential to DE [distance education] teaching" (Lear et al., 2009, p. 51). In addition to wanting professors to be present and engaged, students also wanted instructors to be excited about teaching and the subject matter for the course (Lear et al., 2009). Some students indicated that a present and motivated instructor caused him/her to be motivated as well. For example, one student stated, "Some lecturers don't seem that interested. Having lecturers who actually appear to have a passion to want to teach makes me motivated to learn" (Lear et al., 2009, p. 52). Another student stated, "When lecturers make themselves available, and give lots of feedback, I feel less stressed and more comfortable about where I am going" (Lear et al., 2009, p. 53). Feeling that the professor is present, passionate, connected, and concerned seemed to be important to many of the students in Lear et al.'s (2009) study, as it was for students in other studies. One student summed this point up by stating: "Lecturing staff who continually encourage, inspire, challenge and

support students are going to make a difference when studying either on campus or via distance” (Lear et al., 2009, p. 53).

Shea, Vickers, and Hayes’ (2010) study investigated instructional effort by looking at teaching presence. Data for this study was retrieved from two online, upper-level business courses offered at a Northeast United States state college whose focus is on non-traditional adult and distance education learners. Both sections of the course were the same, and the five course modules included case studies, papers, group assignments, and discussions. For this study, discussion posts, small-group discussions, and discussions with the whole class were analyzed, 672 posts for one course (referred to as Course A) and 601 posts for the other course (referred to as Course B). Coders also analyzed an additional 438 messages (course announcements, emails, and other course contributions). The study found that the teacher for Course A had visible teaching presence throughout the course, while the teacher for Course B showed more teaching presence at the beginning and end of the course, as shown by information in the discussion area. However, the researchers did notice teaching presence for both professors outside of the main discussion area. Just because the teacher for Course B did not post as much as the teacher for Course A did not mean one professor was more or less involved than the other. Perhaps the teacher for Course B used a method similar to that of a professor from Morgan’s (2011) study, the instructor who found a balance between teaching presence through individualized feedback and student to student interaction.

Summary

For students from some of the studies, interacting with others was an element they missed in the online environment. However, the studies did not address how instructor presence and

interaction may change in three dimensional virtual environments. For example, in some Second Life classrooms, the teachers are present and teaching, just as they would in traditional face-to-face courses. Students can raise their hands, walk up to a virtual board via avatars, chat with other classmates during group activities, and even go on virtual field trips. In a virtual world, the issue of instructor presence shifts because although the professor is not physically present, as in the face-to-face classroom, the professor is virtually present with a virtual representation of him or herself, which is different from more traditional online learning platforms that only use text. For issues of presence and persona, some faculty may not feel comfortable interacting with students in the online environment. For example, a professor who uses gestures for emphasis in the traditional classroom loses that aspect of his or her persona in the text-based online classroom. On the other hand, the online classroom in a virtual world allows professors to reintroduce gestures and maintain that part of their personas, although, admittedly, the task will not be as easy as just waving an arm.

Instructor Immediacy Online

Instructor immediacy, a concept closely related to instructor presence, is also an integral part of online learning. In their study, Griffiths and Graham (2010) defined instructor immediacy as follows:

non-verbal signals normally achieved in face-to-face communications between instructor and students that can help establish a close and trusting relationship whereby students know their instructor and feel that they are known, where students seek support, where feedback is personal and meaningful, where students have a sense of well being, and where student motivation is positively impacted. (p. 325)

If presence communicates the level of interaction between students and professors, then immediacy is the ease, or difficulty, with which students can approach a professor to initiate interaction. Baker (2004) examined immediacy by surveying 145 graduate students enrolled in accredited, asynchronous online courses. Instructors from eight programs sent invitations to students in order to solicit participation in the study. The results showed a strong correlation between instructor immediacy and affective learning, and there was also a moderate positive correlation between instructor immediacy and cognitive learning. C. Baker's (2010) study showed similar findings concerning instructor immediacy. The study included survey feedback from 377 online graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in a mid-sized regional university. The breakdown of the student population is as follows: 141 graduate students, 236 undergraduate students, 306 students with previous online education experience, and 71 students in their first online course. Baker (2010) also found a positive relationship between instructor immediacy and student cognition, and instructor immediacy and affective learning for students. Creasey, Jarvis, and Gadke (2009) conducted a study with 263 psychology students from a large, midwestern university. Twenty-seven students were seniors, 113 were freshmen, 78 were sophomores, and 44 were juniors. They found that students who reported receiving high verbal immediacy from professors (positive comments, referring to students by name) also reported feeling more connected to the course professor. However, students who were left to rely more heavily upon instructors' nonverbal cues felt more anxiety (Creasey et al., 2009). Melrose and Bergeron (2007) investigated instructor immediacy and group work. In this case study of two health care programs at Athabasca University in Canada, Melrose and Bergeron (2007) garnered the participation of 31 master's-level graduate students in an asynchronous, WebCT environment.

The participants' professions included social workers, physicians, occupational therapists, nurses, and dietitians. Results for the study were divided into the beginning of a course, the middle of a course, and the end of a course. Carrie, a student, felt that a professor's introduction set the tone for how approachable he/she would be in a course, stating, "I found that first introduction really gave you a sense of how closed or open the instructor was" (Melrose & Bergeron, 2007, p. 137).

Another student, Paul, expressed:

Instructors I felt comfortable with set the stage about who they were right off the bat in their introductions. That was very important to me. But, there were other instructors who were quite invisible. You didn't see them. They said that right in the beginning. That that was their style, to stand back unless they were asked questions. That behaviour right away I felt like, well, they are not that interested in us and I was less likely to approach them. (Melrose & Bergeron, 2007, p. 137)

Paul provided a direct example of the relationship between instructor presence and instructor immediacy. The professor's stance to not get involved unless directly asked made him/her seem absent (lack of instructor presence) and unapproachable (poor instructor immediacy). Derrick stated, "Instructors see the postings. You know big brother is watching, but not intervening at all, so you're not really sure if it's safe [to make contact]" (p. 137). Melrose and Bergeron (2007) also found that students appreciated instructor-created networking opportunities. Sean noted that it is important for

...instructors to spend some time at the beginning [of the project] encouraging us to introduce ourselves to one another and provide some biographical information. That really helped make others in the group more than just a name. It really encouraged you to

start looking at people as people and to share what we were doing both in careers and personal life. That built networking. (p. 138)

Although students would be working with each other in groups, Sean felt that it was still necessary for the professor to make the introductions, an immediacy behavior that could show students that an instructor will be approachable after the group projects begin. For example, Jin had comments to share related to immediacy and groups. She stated:

I think part of the challenge with groups, and it needs to be clear up front, you develop your group norms, your group expectations, but [what about] the instructors? There's always that sense that they can see maybe people aren't participating, that the group is asking 'where's your work', 'what do you think about that.' And the instructors are not sort of jumping in. (p. 138)

Cara noted, "You HOPE they're looking!" (p. 138). Students desired not only the immediacy, but also the presence of professors to provide guidance and security. Lisa provided an example of an environment where the online professor provided just that. Students do not want professors to overlook them or underestimate their capacity to deal with a problem in the group. However, they seem to expect professors to provide an open line of communication that shows presence and approachability. Anna discussed a similar incident with the instructor stepping in to provide guidance:

The instructor(s) would gently bring things back to probably what the learning objectives of the course and that kind of thing were. They set some of those limitations...Tell you to focus or re-do, [that] was so helpful. (Melrose & Bergeron, 2007, p. 140)

Other students also valued immediacy actions like asking how a student is doing or providing feedback. For example, Beth said, “Ask how [a student] is doing. How are you doing--and continue to explore that. It’s an easy question” (p. 139)

In an earlier Melrose and Bergeron (2006) study, they examined online graduate students’ perceptions of immediacy. Study participants were graduates from the Master of Health Studies program or the Master of Nursing program, both at Canada’s Open University, Athabasca University. The data included 10 audio-tape recorded interviews, transcribed, and two focus groups. Students expressed positive feelings about the verbal immediacy of personal email introductions from the professor. For example, when Lana received a personal email from her professor stating, “Welcome Lana, nice to have you from Toronto, you bring a lot to us because of your focus and where you work,” she felt welcome in the course (Melrose & Bergeron, 2006, p. 7).

Another immediacy action that students appreciated was prompt responses to emails and assignments. For example, Kristin expressed:

I felt like I wasn’t just a student at a computer. My instructors were always there. They allowed you to ask questions, no matter how silly they sounded. The more you could question the more connected you felt. With the best professors, you felt heard and that it mattered to them that you were there and that what you were contributing was useful. (Melrose & Bergeron, 2006, p. 8)

Again, instructor immediacy and instructor presence are connected. Professors’ positive immediacy behaviors made students feel that their instructors were present and concerned about the students’ welfare and success in the course. Some students responded positively when

professors showed an interest in them regarding other aspects of their lives. Delayed responses made students feel that professors were not interested and “could not be bothered” (p. 8).

Summary

Instructor immediacy can simply be described as how easy or difficult it is for students to interact with professors (instructor presence). Positive immediacy behaviors, such as a welcome message for students, made faculty seem approachable. Immediacy behaviors that students saw as negative were directly related to a professor’s invisibility in the online course. As noted in the summary on instructor presence, some faculty may not feel comfortable in the online environment, so a professor who usually has a friendly, open persona in the traditional classroom may not necessarily have the same persona in the online classroom. In the online classrooms of virtual worlds like Second Life, instructor immediacy is a little different because professors can choose to be present and teach the courses virtually, or they can have students complete assignments and activities asynchronously, and not conduct a synchronous class session. Aspects of a professor’s face-to-face persona may be transferable to the virtual world classroom, but the option to not use the interactive elements available is also present.

Educator Personas or Identity Online

Educators in the online environment often have issues with adapting their personas and identities to the online classroom. For example, a humanities and social sciences professor stated:

I found that my persona did not work well online. Here the instructor has to be more proactive, more aggressive, and directive in terms of a leadership role; however, that’s not my style. I found myself in a position where I needed to change my teaching style,

and I didn't know how to do that. (Coppola et al., 2001, p. 181)

Another professor also indicated that the virtual classroom shifts his/her usual classroom persona, stating, "In ALN,...I see myself more as a facilitator, I'm more there to answer questions, steer them in the right direction that will aid understanding something" (Coppola et al., 2001, p. 181). A professor from Kanuka et al.'s (2002) study found that he had to make adjustments to fit the online learning format. He stated:

I use an illustrated kind of presentation and I found the technology really inappropriate to help me communicate graphically on the board...In the classroom, give me a blackboard and I'm away. I get really excited...This technology is inappropriate in terms of being able to do that. And that was frustrating. (p. 161)

Coppola et al. (2001) found that the persona of an online professor is often a shifting, evolving one, stating, "Implicit in the responses [of the professors] is the sense that the online persona is one in transition" (p. 182). Seventeen out of the 20 faculty participants felt they had to change their teaching personas online. A humanities and social sciences special lecturer indicated, "You can't be extemporaneous with this [ALN] the way you can be...in the classroom" (Coppola et al., 2001, p. 183). The lack of spontaneity experienced by the aforementioned professor is similar to the feelings of other professors. For example, a faculty member from Conceicao's (2006) study expressed:

Things are much more structured and perhaps rigid than they are in a regular course.

When I teach a course, oftentimes I find topics and readings and things of interest the day before I teach. I read a book, I read a new journal article, I would see something in the paper. I bring that into class. And I modify and adjust my syllabus accordingly. In an

online environment, I have to make decisions about what to teach, what to talk about, what content to cover 6 months in advance, without knowing the audience, without knowing their specific needs, without being able to react to what's coming from the class.

(p. 35)

For these professors, their usual personas, the ones exhibited in traditional face-to-face classrooms, shifted in the new medium. Some of them found it challenging to maintain the face-to-face class persona in a virtual classroom environment.

Some professors noticed that they were more formal online. For example, a professor stated, "I found myself having a completely different personality in [ALN], writing initially much more stilted things, more formal things" (Coppola et al. 2001, p. 182). Another professor had a similar problem, stating, "At first, I was more formal online. But later on I got more informal" (Coppola et al., 2001, p. 183). While this professor started out with a formal persona, he/she transitioned into a persona that was more informal, something a school of management professor from the study felt, stating, "It takes time. An ALN professor is not born; they evolve from this and it takes a long time" (Coppola et al., 2001, p. 183). Another professor also noted a difference in his/her online persona: "In the conferencing system, I'm pretty consistent, I think. I've become more precise in what I say. Not guarded, but precise" (Coppola et al., 2001, p. 183). The online classroom did not make the professor more formal, just more careful about what he/she stated online. Other professors seemed almost perplexed by their persona shifts in the online environment. One professor stated:

I'm more reserved online. I don't know why. In the classroom I tend to be more energetic and I use humor a lot; I use energy a lot. Online, I tend to be more reflective and

introspective...It'[s] driven me to be more intellectual, to write well-crafted answers, to ask better questions, to think more abstractly and to think about the total implication.

(Coppola et al., 2001, p. 180)

Similarly, an associate professor from the study, too, felt like his/her persona online was unrecognizable:

I felt that a lot of my skills...that I would traditionally rely on--like body language--I don't have anymore. Smiley faces, they're not my thing...So it took a while thinking about all that good stuff and wondering, how do I get that back?

(Coppola et al., 2001, p. 183)

Some professors viewed teaching in Second Life as an opportunity to experiment with their online personas. For example, in Savin-Baden's (2010) study of 10 staff and 10 students from undergraduate and postgraduate courses, one educator chose to shift online personas, chose a name that could be viewed as male or female, and shifted between male and female avatars. Another professor made a distinction between identity and the actions of an educator's avatar in Second Life, calling the act role play (Savin-Baden, 2010). Boon and Sinclair (2009) also discussed perceptions of the avatar, saying that "it can be nearly impossible to assess the real identity and/or authenticity of another user" (p. 21). They drew from their own experiences to provide insight into online experiences.

While Second Life may provide an opportunity for faculty experimentation, the medium also can provide an unexpected shift in roles. Professor Sara Robbins noted how Second Life creates a more equitable classroom because the "role markers" disappear (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006, p. 37). However, she asserted that the loss of authority on the professor's part resulted in

ownership attainment for students. Robbins also indicated that Second Life complicates the identity of faculty because students are able to keep up with professors' movements in-world, even when faculty are not teaching (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006). Other educators shared in some of Robbins' sentiments concerning Second Life. For example, in the faculty focus group from Dutton's (2009) study, one faculty member expressed frustration over students not knowing who the professor (or guest lecturer) was when the teacher chose to embody a different persona. The confusion over who was "in charge" led to students talking and engaging in other activities when the professor needed to exert his or her authority to get students' attention. Another professor in the work noted that when he or she was in Second Life for personal use, students asked real-life questions about the course (Dutton, 2009). Because students can track when teachers are in-world (as Robbins indicated), they can access professors—even on personal Second Life time.

Summary

As noted in the previous summaries and in the studies of educators' personas in online classrooms, several professors have trouble developing their online personas. For professors in Second Life, however, the persona issues were quite different. Instead of being concerned about hindrances to interactions with students, some virtual world professors had to negotiate aspects of their personas. For example, the woman who gives acoustic guitar performances in a Second Life club could also be the biology professor for a course delivered via Second Life. Her students have access to her in the classroom as well as during her performances; there is no separation.

Professors Teaching in Second Life

Professors have worked in the three-dimensional virtual world Second Life for several years now. Linden Lab, the creators of Second Life, began establishing a relationship with

educators in 2005 when John Lester (also known as Pathfinder Linden) sought to get more educators involved in the three-dimensional virtual world (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006). Lester indicated that in addition to making himself available to help students and educators who were interested in educational aspects of Second Life, he also established resources like SLED (Second Life educators mailing list) to help educators collaborate with each other (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006). By 2006, over 500 subscribers were on the SLED mailing list (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006). The 2007 New Media Consortium (NMC) survey found that although 42 percent of people on SLED had participated in virtual environments other than Second Life, 58 percent had not (p. 2).

Educators' Perceptions of Second Life

While faculty in the School of Allied Health and Life Sciences at the University of West Florida appreciated the potential value Second Life could add to courses, they were worried that technical problems with the environment could create a decrease in student engagement (Sutton, White, Mbizo, & Stewart, 2010). For example, when students completed an activity in Second Life, about half of them experienced problems with installation and navigation (Sutton et al., 2010). Although the Sutton et al. (2010) study indicated that students who did not have technical or navigational problems with Second Life enjoyed the virtual world, the trouble several students had with Second Life could, as professors worried, result in student disengagement.

Other professors discussed worries about harassment in the immersive virtual world (Bugeja, 2007). In his initial article, Bugeja encouraged educators and higher education institutions to thoroughly investigate the ramifications of using Second Life, as there had been several cases of 'griefing' (online harassment). While a Second Life company representative

indicated that private islands, guidelines created by colleges, and best practices guidelines, among other tools, could help professors limit the amount of problems they experience with grieving (Bugeja, 2007), educators continue to have problems limiting others' access to their classroom environments (Young, 2010). Some researchers advocate limiting students' access to areas of Second Life (Atkinson, 2008). Despite various problems with Second Life, professors continue to be very interested in 3D worlds for higher education, even if some are searching for alternatives to Second Life (Young, 2010).

Summary

The problems students and faculty encountered when using Second Life, everything from harassment to technical difficulties, caused concern and frustration, according to the studies. Although Second Life representatives provide suggestions for minimizing problems like harassment, some faculty are not satisfied that those suggestions completely alleviate the problems. Despite growing concerns over classroom interruptions, navigation concerns, and technical problems, faculty are still interested in learning more about delivering courses in the three dimensional virtual world.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of persona is the framework for my study. My decision to choose persona was based on aspects of Palmer's definition of identity and a literary definition of persona. According to Palmer (1998), identity can be summed up as the following:

An evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me

harm, the good and ill I have done to others and to myself, the experience of love and suffering—and much, much more. In the midst of that complex field, identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human. (p. 12)

The identity comprises all aspects of a person, the parts seen by the outside world and the interior components that shape which facets of a person the outside world experiences. When I say “outside world,” I mean more than the university environment outside of Second Life; the outside world includes the grocery store, the home, the board room, the faculty meeting—everything. Because I am only interested what goes into creating the online educator in Second Life, that may or may not involve all of the elements Palmer discussed. A more fitting definition for what my study is trying to access is persona, as expressed in literature. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Baldick, 2008) provided the following definition for persona:

The assumed identity or fictional ‘I’ (literally a ‘mask’) assumed by a writer in a literary work; thus the speaker in a lyric poem, or the narrator in a fictional narrative... Some theorists of narrative fiction have preferred to distinguish between the narrator and the persona, making the persona equivalent to the implied author.

The persona is not the “author” but the “implied author,” which implies a hint of uncertainty that lends itself well to the virtual world. Virtual world participants create themselves anew in the immersive virtual environment, and who they are in reality can be masked or fictional. However, some virtual world participants may choose to replicate their real-life personas in the virtual world, much like an author can write nonfiction and fiction—an autobiography as well as a science fiction fantasy. The three dimensional virtual environment allows participants to create

narratives that are exactly like their real lives or that are completely different from who they are in real life. Savin-Baden (2010) discussed the idea of fluid identity in the immersive virtual world, but my study operates on the premise that the educator's image in Second Life represents an aspect of the identity, the persona. I will examine various aspects of faculty perception of faculty persona in Second Life.

The concept persona shaped my thoughts about faculty representations in virtual worlds and my interview questions. As I noted earlier, the professor's image in an environment like Second Life is not identity, but a piece of identity. Identity includes every experience or encounter a persona has ever had--the totality of life experience, internal and external. However, persona only deals with the external. Therefore, my questions for participants were guided by the notion that their online representations of themselves are personas and goes so far as to ask participants what they think of when I say faculty persona. The participants' ideas about persona will guide the data, as my understanding of the concept is more of an entree into the topic than a prescriptive definition that I will impose on participants. I did not use the concept of persona in my findings, but references to the literary interpretation of the concept appear in my Discussion.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

Because qualitative research is a way to explore and understand the meanings people give to human and social problems (Creswell, 2009), the qualitative approach worked best for my study. I investigated professors' perspectives on their personas in Second Life, a question of the meanings faculty attach to some aspect of their experience as professors in the immersive virtual environment. I did not have a theory about faculty personas that I wanted to test, so the quantitative and mixed methods approaches were not appropriate for my study. I explored professors' perspectives on their Second Life personas—the thoughts and ideas that influenced the decisions about avatars, the construction of their online personas, their interactions once they were navigating the virtual environment. My research question fits the qualitative approach because qualitative research questions are broad and ask “for an exploration of the central phenomenon or concept in a study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 129). According to Creswell (2009), components of a qualitative study include a natural setting, the researcher as the key instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive data analysis, participants' meanings, emergent design, a theoretical lens, interpretive inquiry, and a holistic account.

Research Questions

The following was my main research question: What are professors' perspectives on faculty persona in Second Life? My subquestions were as follows: How do faculty negotiate their personalities and personas as professors when making persona decisions in an immersive virtual world? How do faculty negotiate their personas when interacting with students in Second Life? Because Second Life's use as a classroom environment is relatively new, and because

faculty buy in can affect decisions to continue or discontinue use of teaching tools, studying faculty perspectives of their personas in Second Life is an important endeavor.

Research Inquiry

I conducted a phenomenological study, an approach that allowed me to access the lived experiences of participants. According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study describes several individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to describe the "universal essence" of the phenomenon described (Creswell, 2007, p. 58); therefore, conducting a phenomenological study allowed me to access the "universal essence" of faculty perspectives on faculty persona in the immersive virtual environment. Creswell (2007) described two types of phenomenology: van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology and Moustakas' empirical, transcendental, or psychological phenomenology. My study was a hermeneutic phenomenology, as described by van Manen (1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to get closer to participants' lived experiences and provide interpretations of the data I gathered on participants' experiences. This methodology also allowed me to gather data about participants and interpret what they said and what the data implied. For example, some participants did not think that their avatars impacted their relationships with students because the avatars resembled the real-life versions of those participants. However, participants who did not choose real-life avatars noticed some differences in how students treated them. I was able to interpret what those differences may imply. By using hermeneutic phenomenology, I was able to spend time accessing and interpreting participants' lived experiences, whereas transcendental phenomenology "is focused less on the interpretations of the research and more on a description of the experiences of participants" (Creswell, 2007). The hermeneutic phenomenological research inquiry, as explained by van Manen, does not prescribe

a specific methodological structure, but the design does have some “methodological features” (van Manen, 1990, p. 30). Those features are as follows:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 30)

According to van Manen (1990), “phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world” (p. 9). The point of my study, then, was not to provide a general theory about faculty persona in Second Life, but to bring the audience into more direct contact with the experiences of these professors. The phenomenon I explored was faculty perspectives of faculty persona in a virtual world. By undertaking a hermeneutic phenomenology, I understand that I attempted to provide a full description and interpretation of some aspect of the human condition, which will always be too complex to fully explicate (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen’s approach to phenomenological research emphasizes writing about lived experience. I explored professors’ experiences with faculty persona in Second Life, so investigating, reflecting on, and describing those experiences as they lived them provided insight that touched on the universal essence of creating and maintaining faculty persona in a virtual world.

Participants

I interviewed 10 participants from various colleges and universities around the world. By conducting the 10 interviews myself, I met two requirements of qualitative research as outlined by Creswell (2009): the researcher as the key instrument and multiple sources of data. Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for my study, I set out to find 10 participants who had taught a course completely in Second Life or who had taught part of a fully online course in SL. I did not limit my participant pool based on tenure/non-tenure, years at an institution, number of online classes taught (although I asked about the number of online classes taught for background purposes), or choice to teach online (voluntary vs. compulsory). I did not limit my study to only full-time professors or only university faculty because I did not want to purposely set out to exclude data that could be useful for insights in my study or for further research. For example, the experiences of a full-time faculty member in Second Life may be different from those of a part-time faculty member in the virtual world, and I wanted that data available in my study. In order to find those participants, however, I had to go back to the Second Life literature I collected when beginning my study. When gathering information about Second Life, I scoured ERIC, EBSCO, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Google Scholar, and the University of Alabama library's Scout book/article search tool to find articles on virtual worlds. I used the search terms "virtual world," "Second Life," "virtual environment," "virtual world education," and "immersive virtual world" to locate research articles, opinion pieces, first person accounts, books, or descriptions about virtual worlds or Second Life. If articles were written by Second Life users or mentioned Second Life users at any institution (four-year, two-year, college or university), I recorded the users' names, institutions, and email addresses (if listed) in a computer file on my personal computer. I did not want participants to feel that I chose them just to have a large number of participants; I wanted participants to understand that I chose them

based on insights I thought they could bring to my study. Once I had a list of 30 potential participants, I cross-checked the information with the websites of potential participants' institutions. For example, if the article Dr. Anonymous wrote stated that she worked at Private University, I checked Private University's website to see if Dr. Anonymous still worked there and had the same email address. When I was done checking the information for all 30 potential participants, I contacted them via email. If I thought that the writer of the article or person mentioned in the article could provide some insight for my study on faculty persona in a virtual world, then I contacted the person by email. I had a little success with the first round of emails and received six responses. I decided to contact 20 more potential participants and went through the same process to locate them. The final four participants came from the final round of emails. While I extended invitations to faculty members at various institutions around the world, all of my participants are from four-year colleges and universities. Participants taught the course/ courses for a college or university in the United States or abroad. A full description of each participant is provided below:

Participant 1: Frank is a university professor and department chair for a 5,000-student institution in the southeastern United States. Frank has taught at that institution for about 10 years, and he has taught numerous courses in SL (he could not remember how many). He began using SL for teaching purposes in 2006.

Participant 2: Greg is an associate professor at a 3-to 4,000-student undergraduate institution in the western United States. Greg has taught at that institution for six years, and has taught one fully-online course using SL as part of the course.

Participant 3: Ian is an associate professor at a university in the southwestern United States. He taught in SL when he was an associate professor at a mid-sized, approximately 13,000-student

university in the midwestern United States. He worked at this institution for 14 years. Ian has taught in SL for seven years and has taught over 40 sections of a particular course (courses) in SL.

Participant 4: Carla is an associate professor at a doctoral granting institution in the southeast. Carla has taught at this institution for nine years, and she has taught one course in SL (for several semesters).

Participant 5: Eva is a full professor at a doctoral granting institution in the southeast. Eva has taught at this institution for 30 years and teaches part of her fully online course in SL. She has taught two courses using the SL/traditional online format over the past two years.

Participant 6: John is senior research fellow at a university in the United Kingdom. John has worked at this institution for four years and worked with a previous UK institution for seven years. He has taught several courses in SL (at least five that were SL only) for numerous universities across Europe.

Participant 7: Martin is a senior lecturer for a mid-ranked Australian distance university. Martin has taught at that university for eight years and has taught two classes (twice) in SL.

Participant 8: Adam is a junior lecturer at a university in southeastern Sweden. Adam has taught at that university for almost 12 years and has taught two courses (several sections of one of the courses) in SL.

Participant 9: Emma is a research fellow at a distance learning institution in the United Kingdom. Emma has worked for that institution for about four years and taught the SL portion of an online course.

Participant 10: Mel is a clinical assistant professor at a public comprehensive university in the midwestern United States. Mel has taught at that institution for eight years and has taught three online courses with SL as a component for about one year.

Phenomenological Studies of Online Learning

Phenomenological studies have been used to share the lived experiences of online faculty and online students.

Phenomenological Studies of Online Faculty

Several researchers have used phenomenological studies to examine some aspect of professors' experiences with online learning. For example, Dutton (2009) conducted a phenomenological study on professors' overall experiences in Second Life. With semi-structured focus groups, Dutton spoke with educators about their various perspectives on the immersive virtual environment. Beebe, Vonderwell, and Boboc's (2010) study examined professors' experiences with transferring face-to-face assessment techniques to the online environment. The seven participants were scheduled to teach online classes at a two-year institution and a four-year institution, both in a midwestern city. The researchers conducted pre and post semi-structured interviews to elicit more information about the instructors' experiences.

Phenomenological Studies of Online Students

Researchers have also conducted phenomenological studies on students' experiences with online learning. Al-Harhi's (2005) phenomenological study investigated the experiences of Arab distance education graduate students getting degrees in U. S. programs. The students were from Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. Al-Harhi used van Manen's phenomenological research approach and conducted a one-time, semi-structured interview with each participant via the telephone. Bambara, Harbour, and Davies (2009)

conducted a phenomenological study on community college students in the American southeast who were in online courses described as high risk. The text described high risk courses (HRCs) as college courses with a 30 percent or more withdrawal or failure rate (Bambara et al., 2009). The researchers used Moustakas' phenomenological approach, and they conducted in-depth interviews with 13 students from the HRCs in order to learn more about their lived experiences (Bambara et al., 2009). Also through a phenomenological study, Hsu, Chang, Mathews, and Carr-Chellman (2009) explored the experiences of five undergraduate students in a web-based science class. The Energy and Environment science course was offered at a northeastern research university in the United States, and the students were enrolled during the summer of 2007 (Hsu et al., 2009). Hsu et al. also used van Manen's phenomenological approach. Ke and Carr-Chellman (2006) explored the lived experiences of five online learners through the use of the phenomenological approach. The researchers wanted to know how solitary learners experienced a collaborative online learning environment (Ke & Carr-Chellman, 2006). In addition to in-depth interviews, Ke and Carr-Chellman used field observations and document analysis to collect data for their study. To learn more about the lived experiences of RN-to-BSN students who moved from the traditional classroom to the online classroom, Rebar (2010) conducted a phenomenological study. The researcher selected five out of 70 students from traditional Associate's Degree programs who were currently students in an online RN-to-BSN program. The students participated in semi-structured interviews on the telephone, via email, or through online chat sessions.

Like the researchers in the aforementioned studies, I used the phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of professors in Second Life by examining their perspectives on faculty persona.

Data Collection

Because of hermeneutic phenomenology's emphasis on a descriptive interpretation of lived experience (van Manen, 1990), I decided to use semi-structured online interviews for data collection. I conducted these online interviews in Second Life with faculty who teach or have taught in Second Life. However, I had concerns regarding privacy issues in Second Life. For example, section 7.2 of the terms of service states the following:

...by uploading, publishing, or submitting any Content to or through the Servers, Websites, or other areas of the Service, you hereby automatically grant Linden Lab a non-exclusive, worldwide, royalty-free, sublicenseable, and transferable license to use, reproduce, distribute, prepare derivative works of, display, and perform the Content solely for the purposes of providing and promoting the Service. (Linden Lab, 2010)

I was concerned because the language in this section of the agreement does not state that certain communications are excluded; also, instant messages in Second Life are sent via Linden Lab servers. For participants who actively use Second Life, their use of the medium implies that they have read, understand, and agree with Linden Lab's privacy policy and terms and conditions. However, I wanted to remind participants to review those terms. I sent informed consent documents via email, had participants sign the forms, and had participants return the forms to me via email. The informed consent sheet also included links to the privacy policy and terms of use for Second Life, with the statement that it is the participant's responsibility to read the policies and terms and conditions that govern the site.

The semi-structured online-interview approach worked best for the topic of faculty persona because the process lent itself to establishing themes about persona based on the experiences of professors who teach or have taught in Second Life. Because my study addressed

a facet of online learning, I conducted interviews in the online environment. Interviewing faculty online provided the natural environment that is essential to qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). The online interview process also allowed me to interview participants in the area where they experience and use their personas. I chose a semi-structured interview process to allow for questions that may emerge during the online interview process, as emergent design is another aspect of qualitative research. The interview process itself worked well for the qualitative nature of my study because, as Weiss (1994) stated, through interviewing, researchers have access to “people’s interior experiences,” an element that is imperative for a phenomenological study. Interviews also allow others to learn more about “what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions” (Weiss, 1994), another element that helped me to capture participants’ lived experiences. While van Manen (1990) noted that it may be better to ask questions aloud instead of in writing because writing may cause participants to get further removed from the lived experience, the spontaneity of online chats can often mimic a face-to-face conversation. Therefore, I moved forward with online interviews. The semi-structured interviews lasted about 30 minutes to one hour, and I conducted three interviews with each participant. Because I conducted multiple interviews with participants, I divided the protocols according to theme. For example, the first interview addressed participants’ perspectives of persona, which laid the foundation for later discussions about how persona functions in the virtual world. The second interview protocol dealt with aspects of persona construction, and the final protocol addressed persona interaction in the virtual environment. Conducting the interviews in this order allowed the conversations with participants to move from general to specific: I began with participants’ general thoughts and responses on persona, moved into a conversation about how participants construct/constructed persona (based on how they view the

concept), and ended with how that constructed persona functions (interacts with others) in the virtual world. Before addressing questions about faculty perceptions of their personas in Second Life, I asked general background questions. My research agenda is shown below, and the interview protocols are provided in Appendix B:

- 1.) Searched Second Life literature to locate potential participants
- 2.) Contacted potential participants via email to solicit their participation in my study
- 3.) Explained the nature of my study, provided privacy policy and terms and conditions links, garnered participants' informed consent
- 4.) Practiced navigating Second Life and chatting and saving interview data before conducting interviews with participants
- 5.) Scheduled an online meeting time with participants
- 6.) Met with participants in Second Life
- 7.) Captured the interview text in Second Life and saved the data

Throughout the process, however, I considered van Manen's (1990) following point:

To do a phenomenological study of any topic, therefore, it is not enough to simply recall experiences I or others may have had with respect to a particular phenomenon. Instead, I must recall the experience in such a way that the essential aspects, the meaning structures of this experience as lived through, are brought back, as it were, and in such a way that we recognize this description *as a possible experience*, which means *as a possible interpretation* of that experience. (p. 41)

Therefore, when I interviewed participants, I tried to ensure that my follow-up questions, as well as my research questions, allowed participants to recall, relive their experiences. The focus was

not on having every detail of participants' memories be completely correct, but on recognizing the possibility of their experiences to provide the possibility of an interpretation.

Confidentiality

I want to protect professors' privacy in my study as much as possible, so emails and informed consent forms containing professors' identities were kept on my personal computer and only viewed by me. However, the names that professors created when establishing Second Life accounts were associated with their comments in Second Life. Despite that association, I used pseudonyms in my study. Also, I did not mention participants' institutions by name. As noted earlier, Second Life's terms state that they can use any information sent through their servers for promotional purposes. Therefore, I did not ask participants questions about job performance, administrations, institutions, or anything that has a foreseeably negative impact on their jobs or livelihoods. Participants were pleased to share their lived experiences on faculty persona, as noted by some of their comments during the interview.

Data Analysis

I examined the interview data and analyzed the information using qualitative coding to surmise various themes. Van Manen (1990) referred to themes as "structures of experience," as they are used as a way to order the information gleaned about participants' lived experiences. I allowed the themes to develop based on participants' responses and meanings as provided in the interview, which constitutes inductive data analysis and participants' meanings—another key aspect of qualitative research. Themes are a way to capture some aspect of the phenomenon and how participants experienced the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). For the hermeneutic phenomenological study, van Manen (1990) discussed three ways to isolate the themes of a phenomenon: "the wholistic or sententious approach, the selective or highlighting approach, and

the detailed or line-by-line approach” (p. 93). I used these approaches to examine the meaning of the whole text, select certain components of the interview data to examine, and choose lines of interview information to review, all in an effort to isolate the themes for my study. Each of these steps served as a coding mechanism of sorts, and I used each step to help me analyze the interview data.

Quality Assurance

As for quality assurance, interviewing participants in a chat room ensured that responses were accurate and alleviated the need for transcription. On the other hand, because I did not personally know the participants, interviewing them in the virtual environment could have created questions of authentic identity. In order to help eliminate any potential problems with mistaken identity, I thoroughly researched participants’ department, faculty, and course lists. Member checks were not necessary because participants have access to their words via the chat log and do not have to check the accuracy of someone else’s transcription of their words. I used faculty/peer debriefing as a trustworthiness measure because hermeneutic phenomenologies rely heavily on the description of lived experiences. In order to gauge my effectiveness in expressing some notion of the instructors’ complex human experiences, I received feedback from an experienced faculty member with several years of university-level teaching experience; he served as my faculty/peer debriefer.

Researcher Positionality

I viewed my study through the phenomenological lens as outlined by Barker, Pistrang, and Elliott (2002) and Savin-Baden and Major (2012). Ontologically, the phenomenological lens shows that the essence of experience can be known, as it is the phenomenological researcher’s responsibility “to attempt to understand the person’s thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and

interpretations of the world” (Barker et al., 2002, p. 76). Therefore, epistemologically, knowledge of those thoughts and feelings is ascertained by allowing people to share their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and interpretations on a particular phenomenon. Savin-Baden and Major (2012) noted that in addition to recognizing how experiences and background influence research, phenomenological researchers also focus on showing participants’ perspectives on a particular phenomenon. The goal of the phenomenological lens is not to impose a reality upon participants, but to understand, what Barker et al. (2002) term, participants’ ‘lifeworlds.’ Therefore, I did not impose my perspective of persona on participants, but gained an understanding of their perspectives on what persona means to them. I know that my perspectives and biases influenced the research, as is often the case in hermeneutic phenomenology, but recognizing that influence is part of the process. Also, taking on the phenomenological lens as a researcher means that I anticipated coming to a closer understanding of an issue, in this case the essence of faculty perspectives on faculty persona in a three dimensional virtual world (i.e. Second Life), by examining data on participants’ lived experiences. By using this lens, I communicated my belief that faculty perspectives of faculty persona can be known by asking faculty members to share their experiences with me; I also communicated that others who read about the participants’ experiences could also come to a closer understanding of faculty persona in the three dimensional virtual world. The phenomenological perspective and the phenomenological approach work well together, as van Manen stated the following:

Phenomenological human science is not external, top-down, expert, or contract research. It is done *by* rather than *for* the people, as critical theorists would say. Phenomenological engagement is always personal engagement: it is an appeal to each one of us, to how we understand things, how we stand in life, how we understand ourselves as educators, etc.

(van Manen, 1990, p. 156)

Therefore, the insights I gleaned about faculty perspectives of faculty persona in Second Life were not presented as objective renderings of a static reality, but as intersubjective realities (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012) that may differ from participant to participant and that involve my interpretations as the researcher. However, the focus is on participants' lived experiences. I adopted a situationalist orientation, as I believe that my philosophical stance guided my study; also, I utilized the philosophy that I felt suited my research question and the needs of my study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012).

Imposing my assumptions about faculty, as a student and former instructor, was an ethical consideration for my study. I did not want my ideas or experiences with faculty persona to overshadow the wealth of information I learned from faculty interviews, but researcher bias is a part of my study that I had to consider (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). One of the ways I tried to reduce the bias was by asking faculty several "how" questions about their perspectives of faculty persona in Second Life. The aforementioned types of questions provided a more open forum for faculty to express a multitude of ideas, concepts I may or may not have considered. Also, while I have been a student in fully online courses, I have not taught in a fully online environment, and I have not been a student or instructor in Second Life. My limited personal experience with Second Life did not completely remove bias, but it limited the number of assumptions I could make about the medium.

While my personal experience with Second Life is limited, my experience with online learning research is a little more extensive. Upon deciding to pursue my Ph.D., my goal was to research and learn about online learning. I believe that the online learning experience can be valuable, and that perspective comes not only from research, but also from my personal

experience as an online student. I acknowledge that online learning comes with various challenges, but the online medium can also be beneficial to a number of students, professors, and administrators.

The small amount of exposure I have had to Second Life helped me solidify my interest in faculty perspectives on faculty persona in Second Life. I was excited about setting up a Second Life account, knowing a little about the three-dimensional world that awaited me—flight, teleportation, and free travel. Upon clicking the bright yellow “Join” button, I was soon presented with my first online persona challenge, username. Because I planned to use Second Life only for academic purposes and not for general social networking, I could not decide between a username related to my studies or a username related to some of my interests. Another choice that complicated matters was avatar selection—an issue I fondly think of as the unicorn dilemma. I was torn between choosing a person as an avatar, one that could be dressed professionally or casually for faculty interviews and other study-related activities, and a unicorn. What type of first impression would a unicorn provide for study participants? Would professors take my study seriously with a unicorn avatar? Would professors doubt my commitment to my study? To avoid any potential misconceptions, I decided to choose a human avatar. My questions about the Second Life persona of a doctoral student made me more curious about professors’ experiences with persona in Second Life. They have to interact with students, administrators, and other professors when teaching classes in Second Life. However, some of them have in-world activities that are outside of the Second Life classroom, so faculty persona may take on a different form.

Another important aspect of research for me is the value of multiple perspectives. One of the reasons I chose to write a phenomenological study on faculty perspectives of faculty persona in a virtual world is because I want numerous professors to share their myriad experiences. Conducting a phenomenological study placed the focus of my work on the participants' lived experiences, but I had to be careful not to let my constructions overshadow the participants' voices. I closely examined the interview data, reflected on the information about participants' lived experiences, and wrote/rewrote, as van Manen (1990) emphasized, to ensure that the participants' perspectives were highlighted. I also understand, as van Manen indicated, that my findings are not "complete" because the full experience of the participants cannot be captured. Therefore, as I reflected, wrote, and rewrote, I remembered that there will always be more to know about my participants and their lived experiences with faculty persona in a virtual world.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Because I conducted three interviews with each participant, I divided the interviews into the following categories based on the questions I asked participants: faculty persona, persona construction, and persona interaction. Each category consists of a description and various themes gleaned from the interview interactions with participants. In keeping with van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology, I employed the wholistic, selective, and line-by-line approaches to code the data and isolate the themes for my study. I described and interpreted the data, and I provided those descriptions and interpretations under each section. Although each participant indicated their roles as faculty and research fellows, I did not consider faculty role when coding and interpreting my data because the data did not explicitly or implicitly show that faculty role was a factor. I did not consider number of years teaching/number of years teaching in Second Life or gender (as it relates to gender roles). I considered how faculty create/recreate themselves in a virtual world, choices faculty make in construction of avatars, the explicit and implicit affects their avatar and persona choices have on interactions with students, the advantages and challenges of teaching in a virtual world, and the persona elements faculty considered important in the virtual world (similarities in real-life and virtual world personas and unique features of the virtual world).

Faculty Persona

I wanted to avoid providing participants with a prescriptive definition of persona, so I asked participants what "faculty persona" meant to them. Although there was a small terminology hurdle to overcome, (the term "faculty" in Europe can mean school or college, such as faculty of arts and sciences) participants viewed faculty persona as who they are when they

teach. Soliciting each participant's definition of faculty persona helped ensure that participants and I had a shared understanding of a key term that was integral to other questions in the study. The major themes related to faculty persona are virtual world/real world overlap, virtual world/traditional online overlap, advantages of virtual world persona, and challenges of virtual world persona.

Virtual World/Real World Overlap

Participants mentioned numerous similarities between their personas in the virtual world and their personas in the real world (traditional classroom environment). However, many of the professors were deliberate in their efforts to have the same persona for all teaching environments: virtual world, traditional classroom, and traditional online classroom. For some faculty, the virtual world brought out different facets of their personas. Although students may not have noticed the differences, faculty definitely felt those differences. For example, some professors were more guarded than they would be in traditional classrooms. Others felt a difference in confidence level, with some being more confident in the traditional classroom setting and others feeling more confident in the virtual world classroom.

Similarities. At times, participants indicated an almost-indiscernible overlap between their real world personas and their immersive virtual world personas, as represented by their avatars. Most participants thought that their traditional classroom and virtual world personas were similar in many ways. When discussing if there was a difference between his virtual persona and his traditional classroom persona, Frank responded, "Not at all." Ian noted: "I dress very much the same and interact with my students in a very similar manner. My online or SL persona is simply an extension of me represented in a different environment." When expounding on the aforementioned interactions, Ian added that his persona is "very personable, professional,

helpful and demonstrative of an academic...” (ellipsis in original). Greg described his virtual world persona as, “similar to [his] real life persona.” He explained: “I try to make my classrooms conversational, meaning that I encourage students to talk and ask questions as much as possible...Most students are respectful of me but also feel comfortable interrupting me to ask questions” (Greg, Participant 2). “I honestly don’t think I have any differences,” stated Carla when discussing her virtual world classroom and traditional face-to-face classroom. She continued, “I try to be consistent despite the environment. I work very hard at that” (Carla, Participant 4). Martin also noted consistency despite online or traditional environment: “I tend to be a talker in class and in SL--and engage on an informal level with students- pretty much the same in SL.” Mel also noted continuity between her virtual world classroom and her face-to-face classes: “As far as professionalism, my persona doesn’t differ from the traditional classroom,” she stated. Adam’s experience is different in that he spends most of his time in the online classroom: “I’ve been working online for a long time now, say, since about 1995.” He indicated, however, that he may have “evolved into a sort of ‘digital clone’” of himself (Adam, Participant 8), so the traditional classroom connection did not dissipate completely.

Participants purposely created the symmetry between their traditional classroom personas and virtual world personas, which suggests that even though the classroom environment changes, the pedagogy does not. Participants emphasized the importance of sharing knowledge with students; however, the virtual world classroom seemed to provide most participants with a flexibility for activities and communicative exercises that may have been more difficult in the traditional face-to-face classroom. Although the aforementioned participants focused on different

aspects of their virtual world and traditional courses, they mentioned the similitude their virtual world courses share with their non-virtual world courses.

Differences. While the virtual world/real world overlap was quite pronounced for some participants, others noted the unique dissonance between the immersive virtual world and the traditional, face-to-face environment. “See--here I am folding my arms again--I wouldn’t do that in RL- put my arms up to separate me from others like that,” noted Emma. She recognized that through her avatar, she displayed different, more guarded body language than she would in real life. Eva stated:

In the traditional classroom, I clearly have a deep and wide knowledge base about every aspect of what I’m doing. That’s not the same in SL--so my persona is not as confident and directive in SL as I might be in traditional face to face teaching.

On the other hand, some participants indicated feeling a little more comfortable in the virtual world. For example, John said, “I think I’m more confident here [in Second Life].” He continued: My persona...actually my identity...in SL is different from my real life in that it is more outgoing, confident. I feel this is an environment where being a bit more...erm unconventional is ok” (John, Participant 6, ellipses in original transcript). John also added, “Plus this is my environment :-) I know what I’m doing here more than most.” Both Eva and John indicated that for them, one of the differences between the real world and the virtual world is confidence level.

Virtual World/Traditional Online Overlap

Another element participants pointed out is the overlap between the virtual world and the traditional online environment. For the purposes of my study, the traditional online environment included outlets such as Blackboard, Moodle, email, chat rooms, and social networking sites.

Participants seemed to associate the traditional online environments with their real-world personas and not the virtual world. For example, John expressed, “In other online environments...I’m me...so I think the persona is very similar to RL [real life]” (ellipses in original). Adam made a similar observation: “You can be a lot more laid back here [in Second Life].” He continued, “The class I was doing on Monday took place in Adobe Connect...which in turn makes the interaction into something much more like the interaction in an f2f classroom” (Adam, Participant 8). Although the virtual world classroom and traditional online classroom require the Internet for course delivery, some participants mentioned how the virtual world allowed them to share more of their personalities. Eva indicated:

I think in SL my personality is more easily discerned--I can use my voice, my movements, my appearance to reflect who I am and what I am. In Blackboard or e-mail I have to use a more standard approach that doesn’t allow my personality to carry me or my message.

While traditional online courses and the virtual world both boast text-based communication mechanisms and some voice-based options as well, the virtual world allows professors to provide three dimensional representations of themselves. Students are also represented via three dimensional avatars, so for courses where faculty and students may never meet face-to-face, they are able to represent themselves physically through avatars. For example, Martin stated, “I am more engaged in SL than elsewhere- not a huge user of social networking (Facebook etc).... For some reason SL seemed to be more useful and appropriate to what I want to get out of the virtual world.” Martin does not often meet his students in person, so the three dimensional representative seems to make all the difference. Unlike the traditional online environment, the avatars in virtual worlds allow students and faculty to experience another level of presence. Most

of the professors used Second Life synchronously for classes, so they were present through voice-based chat and avatars.

Although several participants indicated that their faculty personas are the same across classroom environments (face-to-face, traditional online, and virtual world), the influence of the avatar cannot be completely dismissed. For example, participants saw the virtual classroom as a place where they could extend their personas, show more of their personalities, challenge social norms, and communicate with students in a way that may be more challenging in the traditional online classroom. Other participants did not recognize any differences between their face-to-face, traditional online, or virtual world personas.

Advantages of Virtual World Persona

Participants noted two advantages to having a virtual world persona: freedom and interaction. Even though their personas did not change, many participants valued the changes they could make to their avatars. Some of those changes included clothes and hair. The virtual world afforded faculty members options that are not easily accessible in the traditional face-to-face classroom and almost impossible in the traditional online environment (since that environment does not include a three dimensional representation of the faculty member).

Freedom. Eva discussed the freedom she experiences in the virtual world: “I can be someone I’m not--totally--and not be distracted by my own self. My avatar does my work--so I just control her--and she’s really awesome--and not distracted by my infallibility,” she said. Likewise, John mentioned the liberties he experiences with extending his personality and his group of colleagues:

I think it [the virtual world] gives me more freedom...both personally and professionally. Personally it’s allowed me to explore different aspects of my personality. Professionally

the main reason is that it's brought me into contact with a lot of people whom I wouldn't have known otherwise.

The delights of flight, teleportation, great hair, and a change of clothes cannot be overstated. For example, Carla mentioned the freedom virtual-world clothing choices provided, stating, "During the holidays, you can dress up and be somebody else." Some professors used their newfound virtual world freedom to add elements that are not present in real life. For example, Mel stated, "You can be something you are not... tall, for instance. You can get a new skin, hair, whatever" (ellipses in original). Frank pointed out the "playfulness" of the immersive virtual world.

Some of the very differences participants pointed out between traditional classrooms and virtual classrooms were also highlighted as advantages of the virtual world. Again, the virtual world afforded faculty members options that are not easily accessible in the traditional face-to-face classroom and almost impossible in the traditional online environment. Participants also valued the interactions they had with students in the virtual world: field trips, conversations, role playing patient exercises for nursing students, and the like.

Interaction. Along with increased freedom, the virtual world also facilitated increased interaction between some faculty and their students--more interaction than they experienced in traditional online classrooms. For example, Greg shared, "I think SL really is a great way to allow faculty to interact with students online. There is certainly a greater sense of community in SL than through e-mail threads of discussion forums." The voice chat functions and numerous areas for virtual world exploration provided faculty with multiple ways to interact with students and many ways for students to interact with each other. For example, Greg also noted the potential for interaction with different environments within the virtual world:

I have taken students on tours in SL (like we go see the Sistine Chapel). This is one of the big advantages of virtual environments; you can do things that are not possible to do in the real world. Or at least would be much more difficult.

Martin also discussed the interactions virtual worlds can facilitate: “For DE [distance education] students especially I wanted to build more that sense of collegiality which you miss by having no classroom contact...and SL definitely helps with this” (ellipses in the original). He continued:

In this context, it [the virtual world persona] does enable you to do things not possible in the physical world-- i. e. meet the ‘students.’ But also of course it does provide opportunities to explore different ways of presenting material (and student assessment tasks) as well as the broader thing of checking out different worlds. (Martin, Participant 7)

Adam noted:

The extremely ‘rich’ environment here helps to ‘suspend their [students’] disbelief’ in the same way as happens in a theatre when you’re watching a play. They get overloaded with sense impressions...and forget that they’re [completing tasks for the course]. In other words if ‘they’ make a mistake...it wasn’t them, it was their avatars! (ellipses in the original).

For Adam, students’ performance of course tasks was positively influenced by their interactions with the immersive virtual world.

Challenges of a Virtual World Persona

When discussing the challenges of a virtual world persona, almost all participants mentioned both technological and behavioral challenges.

Technology. Problems with technology ranged from possibly not having the right equipment to in world issues with visuals. Although some participants did not see the technology problems as directly related to faculty persona, the technology challenges could prohibit some students and faculty from fully engaging in the class. For example, Ian indicated that while there were no challenges for his virtual world persona, “hardware wise it can be a challenge for those without requisite equipment, ...speed of computer, headphones, mic, etc... makes interacting more difficult without modern equipment” (ellipses in original). Unfortunately, hardware and computer problems can make it difficult for students to experience the virtual classroom environment and interact with the professor and other students. If students and faculty experience technology problems, then they lose a level of three dimensional interaction because their personas, avatars, and environments are hindered by the technology problems. Therefore, technology issues are related to persona. Problems with technology also affect which tools faculty and students use to interact with each other. For example, if the voice chat function is not working, then faculty and students who rely on that mechanism have to choose other ways to express their personas and interact with others. Technology issues can also present problems specifically for faculty. For example, Eva noted:

The technology can be distracting as you learn how to function as an avatar. I know I’m still growing and developing myself as an avatar --and learning how to do this kind of teaching well. I love the learning part of it--and think about how I am doing frequently! I almost feel like a novice teacher again--even after all these years I’ve spent as an educator!

In that example, Eva connected who she is in the virtual world to the technology. For example, if she has trouble getting the technology to work, or trouble getting adjusted to the technology, then

that affects what she chooses for her avatar. The technology can limit or enhance the elements of persona faculty choose to share. Technology was the largest challenge for professors' virtual world personas, and each participant mentioned technology issues. However, participants seemed to work through technology issues and continue operating in the virtual world. Eva, undaunted by the technology challenges, stated, "Yes--it adds to the challenge of teaching--but it's really teaching about how to deal with challenge. As I said before, I'm trying to model how to do things differently and take risks as a teacher." She continued, "The technology is the opportunity--not just the challenge" (Eva, Participant 5). Other faculty also viewed technology challenges with the virtual world as no different from other challenges. John stated, "There are challenges with just getting the technology working. I've been using OpenSim and just finding out where to get walk animations from is tricky." Seeing technology challenges as an opportunity also allows faculty members to share aspects of their personas with students. For example, a faculty member who complains to students about the technology challenges sends a different message from the faculty member who discusses technology challenges as chance to work through problems in the classroom. John added that apart from the challenges with animations and "recreating" personas across virtual worlds, "the challenges are no different from the physical world." Martin responded by stating that the challenges he experiences are "technical mainly I think." He continued:

Although usually it is OK, there are times when things seem to change and you have problems. But for persona I'm not sure I have had any real challenges...just the elearning curve on moving around, finding places etc...but that is the same in any software. Can also use up too much time of course! (Martin, Participant 7)

Again, a participant mentioned how technology challenges can cause problems with the avatar's movements. Technology problems that limit what the avatar can do, or what the user can choose for the avatar, could send unintended messages. For example, if a participant wanted his avatar to shift his feet or move from side to side in a more natural way, then he could choose settings to show that part of himself—the natural, real-life movements. However, if there are problems with technology, then the user may be limited or unable to add movements to his avatar. The professor loses the option to share that aspect of his persona. Adam also cited “problems with technology.” Similarly, Emma noted, “There still remain these huge technical challenges—I’ve been in world for over 90 [minutes], and I still can’t see what’s going on...so I’m used to that sort of thing, but it’s very off-putting when you’re new.” Later she added, “What do you do when you’re giving a presentation at a conference, but no one can see you because of lag?” These types of technology problems dictate what users see and do not see in virtual worlds. Participants cannot fully interact with an environment or the people in that environment if elements of the world are not present because of technology problems. For a faculty member who took great pride in a special suit for a conference, technology issues could preclude others from experiencing that aspect of the professor's persona. Likewise, if a professor chose whimsical classroom elements to express and share his love of the arts, technology problems could make it difficult for others to experience that extension of the professor's personality.

The technology issues can present problems for students, but participants seemed to imply that some of those same issues can be challenging for faculty as well. Even though participants were frustrated at times, no one mentioned completely withdrawing from the virtual world altogether, and even those who spent less time in Second Life seemed open to trying other virtual worlds. Also, just as technology issues can hinder participants' persona expressions, the

technology challenges allowed some participants to express other aspects of their personas. For example, Eva saw technology as an opportunity and expressed that sentiment to her students. The way she handled technology issues also created an opportunity for her to show students that part of her persona includes working through challenges.

Behavioral Challenges. As for the behavioral issues, some faculty felt that students had trouble taking the virtual world seriously. Greg indicated that at times, students may not respect the virtual classroom environment in the way they would the traditional classroom. He stated, “...For the students I’d say that they may tend to do things that they would not typically do in the real world. Some students have a hard time taking it seriously.” Greg added, “Some [students] just do not show up at all- others act inappropriately. At one point I decided to establish a code-of-conduct that described how I expected students to act while in SL class.” Perhaps the animated nature of the environment is overwhelming to some students, leading them to assume that the freedom of the virtual world environment also includes freedom to behave inappropriately. Emma discussed potential behavioral challenges in the virtual world, stating, “The VW [virtual world] persona has to deal with a whole series of unexpected challenges- what do you do when someone gets bored in an informal meeting and starts throwing fireworks?” For Frank, the behavioral challenges came from people who were not affiliated with his course, an occurrence often referred to as griefing. He stated, “Once, when I was concerned that inappropriate activities were taking place on [the course island], I used [an alternative avatar] to check out the island when [my] avatar was away” (Frank, Participant 1). Frank found that people outside of the class were causing trouble on the island (an incident known as griefing). He indicated that the problem was handled and did not note any additional problems with griefing. Overall, however, behavioral challenges came from students in the courses delivered through

Second Life, not those outside of the courses. Not many faculty experienced behavioral issues with students, and those who did had no trouble helping students understand that the virtual world course carries the same gravitas as face-to-face and traditional online courses.

Persona Construction

Persona construction involves participants' tangible decision-making tools when creating their avatars, such as the virtual world choices for clothes, skin, eyes, hair, height, as well as their intangible decision-making tools, such as ideas about professorial image and unique personality traits they wanted to transfer to their avatars. The themes for the Persona Construction section are avatar choice, material messages, professionalism, and the promise of possibilities. From realistic avatars to aliens and the space in between, participants' avatar choices were tied to who they are in real life. Even when participants chose to make small changes to stock avatars, that action communicated something about their personalities. An avatar may have sometimes deviated from the way a participant looks in real life, but no avatar deviated from what a participant values in real life. Also, each participant modified his or her avatar; no one chose to teach with an off-the-shelf avatar with no modifications. One reason for that may be to help students distinguish between other students and the professor, as students and professors can access the same off-the-shelf avatars.

Avatar Choice: Doppelgängers and Deviations

Participants ran the gamut from those who wanted their avatars to serve as realistic versions of them in looks and deeds to those who wanted their avatars to move away from social conventions and realistic physical representations. For those who wanted replicas, their avatars mirrored their hairstyles, complexions, and clothes. Others wanted avatars that were somewhat like them and chose to add a few details that may not be present in real life—additions to height

and subtractions from age. In the cases where participants' avatars seemed a few years younger than participants are in real life, they were quite open (and humorous) about their youthful avatar appearances. As noted earlier, one advantage participants enjoyed was the freedom of the virtual world, and that freedom includes the ability to make minor adjustments to age, height, hair color, and attire. The opportunities for exploration are plentiful.

Doppelgängers. Several participants wanted their avatars to mimic what they look like in real life. For example, Greg stated, "I made something that sort of looks like me." He continued, "Since my students know who I am in SL, I try to project the same image in SL as I would in the real world" (Greg, Participant 2). Similarly, other participants also opted for avatar replicas: "My avatar looks pretty much like me, hair, figure, etc." noted Carla. She continued, "I am very much a by the rules kind of gal, so I would never think of going against what is expected. I am very conservative in dress, so I suppose it carried over to my avatar" (Carla, Participant 4). Likewise, Eva described her avatar as being a lot like she is in real life. Eva stated, "I wanted to be blonde in SL--I am in my real life--and I wanted to have blue eyes--I do in real life!" Eva also indicated that her personality was "definitely reflected automatically" because she controls her avatar. Adam also wanted his avatar to mirror who he is in real life:

I just took one of the standard avatars available at the time and tweaked it a bit to make it look a bit more like what I look like IRL [in real life]. I keep getting offers from friends to take me shopping...but I'm a bit of a slob IRL too, so I didn't want a fancy avatar!

"Have you seen the SL episode of The Office?" asked Frank. "I didn't want to make an exact copy (as Dwight did)," he continued, "I made 'me with some mods' (as Jim did)" (Frank, Participant 1). Although Frank tried to move away from a three dimensional carbon copy of himself, he indicated that he and his avatar are quite similar. Frank also mentioned how he

influenced his avatar and how his avatar influenced him in real life. He stated, “Of course, like many longtime users of SL, the human-avatar connection results in feedback. The gloves I am wearing...I have real ones now” (Frank, Participant 1). Frank added, “I now have a few T-shirts that are similar to my early [avatar’s] clothes.” Other participants also mentioned the importance of having digital replicas with modifications. For example, Ian stated, “Ethnicity was important to me as there are so few African American professors here in SL.” He added, “Build, eye color, hair, facial hair...those were things I tried to match as closely as possible” (Ian, Participant 3). However, he joked that his avatar is a “much younger” version of himself (Ian, Participant 3). Likewise, Mel wanted “consistency with [her] own ethnic heritage,” and she made modifications: “As far as appearance I am very short in the real world, my avatar is very tall. I have short fine hair in real life, you can see I have a lot of hair in SL” (Mel, Participant 10). Mel, like Frank, made a three dimensional version of her real-life likeness with a few modifications. Emma designed an avatar replete with her real-life characteristics: “So [my avatar] is female, like me, she’s white like me, she’s more glamorously grey haired than me, but that’s supposed to be a reflection of me being older than the students.” Emma added, “Coming down to it, practically, with experience of having tried various avatars, I’m not comfortable if I’m not a female human.” However, Emma did not want her avatar to be too much like she is in real life, emphasizing that she is not concerned with “absolute realism” for her avatar.

Deviations. Other participants created avatars that were less like digital replicas. However, even though these participants’ avatars did not resemble who they are in real life, the avatars displayed characteristics or represented ideals that the participants value in real life. For example, when Martin described his avatar, he stated, “I hasten to add my avatar...is nothing like me!” While Martin noted that his avatar possessed qualities that Martin valued, such as staying

fit, his avatar was not a digital replica of him in the virtual world. Martin, like Ian, joked about his avatar being “much younger” than he is in real life.

For the participants whose avatars did not match what they look like in corporeal form, the choices were still very deliberate. While some participants chose to make adjustments to their ages via their avatars, another participant, John, saw his avatar as a conduit for challenging social norms. John’s avatar choices included much more than tinkering with time; he purposely deviated from what he considered to be the norm. He stated, “Even choosing a name was tricky. [I] didn’t want something too ridiculous but also didn’t want it to be too normal either” (John, Participant 6). John has more than one avatar, and no avatar is what one would consider a “traditional” human form. He noted elements that influenced his avatar choice(s), stating, “I think my fascination with science fiction/fantasy has an influence” (John, Participant 6). He added, “I’ve tried to pick avatars that don’t really reflect my ethnicity or sometimes species. They are all male though” (John, Participant 6). He also emphasized, “I wanted to remove people’s expectations about my ethnicity and didn’t want to buy into one particular one” (John, Participant 6). John is careful about choosing avatars, saying, “Some avatars I rejected because they would have caused too much offence.” John also indicated that although his avatar choices are unconventional, they reflect some of his real-life characteristics:

...I think the important thing to help interactions in for the avatar to convey as much a sense of a person as possible so I have facial animations, I have an animation overrider to give me a normal walk, I use emoticons and so on and gestures. So even though it [my avatar] may not be entirely realistic...it gives some sense of a person at the other end.

Even when participants’ avatar choices deviated from their real-life appearances, they chose attributes for their avatars based on their real-life personalities and values.

Material Messages

Clothes/skins/movements, the materials of the avatar, send a clear message about the user's expertise. Several participants agreed that the way an avatar looks and the avatar's creation date can influence perception. Premium skins and designer labels often connote expertise with the virtual world. For example, Frank stated, "I shopped for premium skins, clothes, hair, shoes." He added, "They [colleagues] know the brand names, the designers" (Frank, Participant 1). When asked if labels still matter, even in Second Life, Frank responded, "Of course." John noted:

I wanted to show I understood this medium, had adapted to it. So I wanted to get the animated walk and a proper skin and hair. I felt I needed to look accomplished...that was the image I wanted to project.

Attire makes the avatar. Expertise in Second Life is judged by the outfit and advanced nature of the avatar and avatar creation date. An early avatar creation date has also been used to indicate virtual world proficiency. However, some participants were quick to note that creation date can be deceptive, as creation dates do not communicate how much time a user has spent in the virtual world since creating the avatar. For example, John questioned the focus on avatar creation dates; however, he also added that "you can develop status here [in the virtual world] by buying stuff, mixing them." Emma also reified the notion that attire matters in the virtual world. Emma stated, "I also wanted an avatar who looked fairly competent, so I bought [my avatar] a skin and hair and poses." She continued:

I pay for my own Linden dollars, so I wasn't going to go overboard on kitting [my avatar] out. On the other hand, I haven't got infinite amount of time for shopping around freebie stores, so I'm okay with spending some money on her. (Emma, Participant 9)

She added, “I like to look as if I know what I’m doing in world, so I like to have a good quality skin and at least some animations” (Emma, Participant 9). Adam and Eva seemed to confirm the idea of material messages as well. Adam stated, “I’ve sometimes been looked down upon in some SL environments for not looking spectacular enough...but those are not opinions I pay much attention to.” Eva noted:

..I’m somewhat intimidated when the other avatars are clearly more advanced than I am. I always check out their clothes, hair, and overall appearance, but more than that, there’s an ease and familiarity with SL that some other ‘adult’ avatars have that I haven’t developed yet. I feel a bit like an awkward teenager.

For other participants, the material message was implied. For example, Carla stated, “When I was brand new in SL, I only cared about my physical characteristics. Once I became more experienced, I cared about my clothes and changing them.” Carla also customized her avatar’s movements once she became more familiar with the environment. Although Carla did not explicitly state that her upgrades sent a message about her expertise in the virtual world, she seemed to imply that there is a connection between more customized avatar elements and experience in the immersive virtual world. When explaining the time he spent creating his avatar, Martin said:

I was a bit unsure how to do it [develop the avatar] so accepted the default and fiddled a little bit with that. I wasn’t sure it was going to really work so didn’t want to spend too much time on it. Now I think I am willing to put in a bit more effort (and of course \$\$).

Martin, not unlike Carla, expressed an underlying connection between what the avatar looks like and the experience level of the user. However, Martin seemed to broach the issue of comfort with the medium, which comes with experience. Similarly, although Eva stated that she “didn’t care

much about the clothes or the other items” and stuck with items she liked when she found them, she added, “Perhaps I’m still just at the basic avatar stage and don’t have the comfort level of making lots of unusual choices so I just stay the same.” For several of the participants, material messages were also related to the spending of Linden dollars, which connotes a connection between economy/money and an increase in avatar status. Some participants were very comfortable in the virtual world but used stock avatars with modifications, while others were also comfortable in the virtual world but created very advanced, fashionable avatars. In the virtual world, a user can become anything: another person, a vampire, a hot air balloon, or a big bunny. However, the same assumptions that create problems in the real world environment carry over into the virtual classroom. Even though professors’ levels of expertise may be the same, their proficiency and knowledge are sometimes judged by how their avatars look.

Professionalism

Maintaining professionalism in the virtual world was important to each participant, even though there were slight differences in how participants achieved professionalism in the immersive virtual environment. For some participants, there was a direct connection between avatar attire and professionalism, and for others, the choice between human and non-human avatars sent a message about professionalism.

Attire. Some faculty members did not feel comfortable dressing their avatars in attire that they would not wear in the face-to-face classroom. If those professors usually wore slacks and dress shirts to class or jeans and a sweatshirt, then that is how they chose to dress their avatars. These were also some of the same professors who emphasized the similarities between their traditional classrooms and virtual world classrooms. For example, Greg stated, “I guess I wanted to make sure that I maintained the same sense of professionalism that I try to do in the real

world.” He added, “Thus, I dressed my avatar conservatively and I try to interact with students professionally” (Greg, Participant 2). When discussing if he had any concerns when constructing his virtual world persona, Ian responded, “No real concerns as this is simply an extension of whom I am in RL...so just making sure that what I do here I would not mind doing in RL...again, that professional image and behaviors.” Ian, like Greg, valued a professional image. Similarly, when noting the factors that influenced avatar choice, Carla responded, “Professional image.” She continued, “We don’t have dept. rules [departmental rules for Second Life], but the university asks that we maintain a high level of professionalism” (Carla, Participant 4). Carla also described professional attire, stating, “I always dress for my classroom professionally- a suit or casual pants or skirt/sweater, much like in a classroom (traditional style).” Eva wanted professionalism peppered with personality: “I knew I wanted a professional appearance--and I tried to develop some way to personalize my avatar to be somewhat like me. Thus, I have a sparkly bracelet and ‘bling’ shoes--I love bling!” Mel stated, “I remember looking at clothes and thinking that is too risqué or immodest to wear with the students.” She emphasized “wanting to look contemporary but professional” (Mel, Participant 10). She also noted that professionalism was one of the most important elements when constructing her virtual world persona and tied professionalism to authority, stating, “...A professional demeanor helps maintain authority in a virtual world” (Mel, Participant 10). Each participant focused on maintaining professionalism in the virtual world classroom (the same type of professionalism they exercise in non-virtual world classrooms). However, there was also a connection between avatar choice and professionalism.

Avatar Choice. Heretofore, most participants’ idea of professionalism has been associated with attire: a modestly-dressed avatar; however, participants also associated professionalism with avatar choice. Even when some professors were not as focused on attire,

they associated professionalism with a human avatar. For example, when discussing what outside factors influenced his avatar choice, Ian mentioned the focus on professional image and also stated, “Outside factors only include wanting my students not to be distracted by an unusual avatar, as opposed to someone/my avatar that is more representative of who I am in RL.” Ian expounded on the phrase “unusual avatar” and explained, “Well, I’ve seen colleagues of mine who have avatars of dragons, aliens, or some other inhuman or animalistic character. I did not want that and thought it would be more distracting, albeit entertaining.” When asked what she meant by “professional image,” Carla responded, “I think the term is all encompassing. We are expected to look like humans and dress in professional attire.” Carla stated, “...I always appear in human form and my appearance looks pretty much like I do in real life. I don’t allow vampires or non-humans in my classroom (too distracting).” Carla also provided additional examples, such as having her avatar wear a suit for professional conferences in the virtual world. “I just wanted her to fit in,” Eva said of her avatar. She continued, “I didn’t want her to be the avatar who was a horse or wore a toga for class. I ask my students to dress like a teacher--and that’s what I wanted for myself too” (Eva, Participant 5). Martin also emphasized avatar choice and wanted to avoid being “too outrageous,” which included “anything non-human, the wrong sex (I have had a few male students come in as female)...not too sexy or over-the-top with costume.” Like other participants, Emma thought that certain avatars could be too distracting. Emma said, “I didn’t want one [an avatar] that would be too distracting. If you are a furry or a tiny, that distracts people into talking about what you look like.” Mel noted, “I have seen some animal avatars that look fun but I wanted to portray the activity is serious and we are there to learn. So we do not allow animal avatars....”

Most participants associated a professional persona with a human avatar in professional attire, or at least the attire they would wear in the face-to-face classroom, but one participant, John, felt differently. He saw experimentation with the avatar as an opportunity to show professionalism. John's avatar served as an example of his virtual world/teaching adeptness. The non-human avatar was also a way for him to challenge his students' assumptions about how a professional looks. Professionalism is important to John as well, but his expression of professionalism is different from other participants'. He said:

People who've come in [into Second Life] more recently go straight to being professional looking. I've not followed that trend I think because I resist that move towards conformity. And maybe my professorial image in the physical world is not so determined by peers anyway. (John, Participant 6)

John continued, "I felt I needed to look accomplished...that was the image I wanted to project and that was where I saw my professionalism being not wearing something that looked normal, although that's also important I realise now." He also noted, "But there's too much normal in the real world :-) don't want to bring it into here [virtual world]" (John, Participant 6). Again, each participant valued professionalism, and each participant indicated a connection between professionalism and avatar choice. However, while most participants saw the choice of a non-human avatar as a move away from professionalism (or at the very least a distraction), John saw the choice of a non-human avatar as an opportunity to express professionalism and mastery of the virtual world medium. John associated his professionalism with the material message he was sending: the more advanced his avatar, the more expertise he showed with the medium. Both perspectives are valid, and as noted later under the *Avatar Influence* theme, none of the participants encountered major problems as a result of their avatars.

Promise of Possibilities

Although participants mentioned the challenges with the virtual world, they also appreciated the choices and possibilities the environment provided. For example, Frank enjoyed the idea of customizing his avatar: “I did like having sunglasses and a bolder wardrobe,” he said. Participants were able to experiment with their looks, mannerisms, and locations. The virtual world, as participants indicated when discussing the advantages of a virtual world persona, comes with certain liberties. However, even if participants do not immediately engage in all of options available to them, those options remain possibilities for them.

Greg stated:

I found the technology very exciting. The ability to design an avatar to look however I wanted. Of course, as I already mentioned, I did not try to make my avatar real extravagant, but it was fun to play around and see what was possible.

The virtual world, specifically Second Life, has numerous choices available for clothes, skin, hairstyles, and accessories, and users can visit college campuses, tour the Sistine Chapel, or ride a whale in Hawaii. Even though some areas may no longer be available, users still have many choices in the virtual world. A multitude of possibilities exist, and faculty members thought the possibilities were appealing. For example, Ian found the virtual world technology exciting: “Well [I was excited] that I could fly, and add animations to make my avatar seem more natural when standing, walking or talking, and was very excited when I found a custom African American skin!!” As with the theme of *Advantages of a Virtual World Persona*, participants valued the choices the virtual world presented, even if they did not take advantage of those choices. For example, Carla noted, “I did like the idea that I could change my appearance and clothes easily if I wanted to.” Carla did not focus on any major changes she made to her avatar, but she noted the

appeal of that possibility. She stated that her avatar allowed her a freedom she would not experience in real life. In like manner, Eva enjoyed being able to change the size of her avatar. For John, shopping was an exciting element of the virtual world. He added, “It was a way in for me to explore the virtual world” (John, Participant 6). Martin was excited about “the possibility of being able to create ‘anything.’” He continued, “If I had more time I think I could get involved and maybe create a more interesting persona and explore further...I suppose the potential is exciting” (Martin, Participant 7, ellipses in original). Like Ian, Emma was excited about flight and teleportation. She also stated that she was excited about the ability to “try out new possibilities” (Emma, Participant 9). Mel was excited about having her avatar “look attractive and contemporary.”

While Adam was excited about using the virtual world, his reasons did not really include persona elements. He stated, “Gosh, I’m so boring! I was more excited to be using the environment than to be constructing a persona!” (Adam, Participant 8). All of the participants looked forward to the possibilities that came with using a virtual world like Second Life. The virtual world, like the face-to-face classroom and the traditional online classroom, has sui generis elements, and participants appreciated those elements. Participants also considered possibilities for other courses in the virtual world, or portions of courses in the virtual world, and some of them were looking forward to other ways to integrate the virtual world into their courses.

Persona Interaction

The persona interaction section addressed how professors interacted with others in the immersive virtual environment. Based on participants’ feedback, the themes for persona interaction are professorial authority, traditional/virtual world classroom differences, avatar influence, and technology improvements.

Professorial Authority

Some participants indicated that professorial authority in the virtual world classroom is quite different from professorial authority in the traditional classroom. “It is harder for me to get their [students’] attention when they are in SL. They become engrossed in the game world,” said Frank. Greg also noted issues with authority in Second Life, saying that he thought professors had “less control in SL.” He added:

Like I said, in my classes I usually just use the group chat window so anyone can say anything to anybody at any time. The instructor loses some control in this type of situation. However, I think as an instructor you have to adapt to the environment.

(Greg, Participant 2)

Likewise, Adam said,

It’s obviously easier to maintain authority IRL...students have to take loans to study and they come into ‘my’ space. However, in the virtual space, it’s easy for them to ‘disappear,’ so it has to be the quality of the educational experience they’re having which keeps them there (and keeps them listening and taking part)!

Both Greg and Adam mentioned the shift in professorial authority in the virtual world and emphasized the need for the professor to adjust to the new environment, perhaps as he or she would to any new or different teaching environment. For some participants, professorial authority had to be renegotiated in the virtual world classroom. They noted that these negotiations were necessary because the virtual world environment can shift the balance of power. Some participants noted that this shift happened because the virtual world served as a neutral territory of sorts, while others thought that the action anonymity the environment provides leaves faculty to negotiate authority and ensure the students’ investment, since students

can possibly leave their computers and still seem present via the avatar. For example, Adam stated:

As a teacher, I have far less control over what happens here in SL, so I have to be a lot more flexible...So I have to make sure that everything that happens is clear to the students and involves them doing things, rather than sitting around passively waiting for something to happen. In other words this is a much more active environment than most of them are used to.

Adam provided a caveat for those looking to exert undue control over their students, stating, “In an environment like this, though, a lot of the latent factors which back up a power-hungry teacher just aren’t present.” In a similar manner, Emma described the authority between professors and students in the virtual world as “a much more negotiated relationship.”

Other participants did not indicate differences between their authority in the virtual world classroom and their authority in more traditional classrooms. Ian described the authority he experienced in the traditional classroom and the immersive virtual world as “exactly the same.” He continued, “It could be because I see them during orientation to the environment face to face for approximately 2 weeks before our meetings commence exclusively here in SL” (Ian, Participant 3). Similarly, Carla did not see a difference between the authority she experienced in the traditional classroom and the virtual world classroom. Likewise, Eva felt that the authority she experienced as a professor was the same in both environments:

...I guess I’ve been doing this so long that I don’t ever allow a student to question if I’m in charge. I think I’m just one of those ‘statements’ that make an impression as ‘I’m the teacher so it’ll be this way’ and I don’t think that’s different for me in SL.

Martin described his authority in the traditional classroom and the virtual world classroom as “pretty much the same.” Mel also stated that the authority she experienced in the traditional classroom and Second Life classroom were not very different. Some participants made an implicit connection between professorial authority and avatar choice. For example, as with professionalism, a few participants associated human avatars with authority. Of course, the interactions with students played a large role in maintaining authority in the virtual world classroom, but some participants thought that students would not take the virtual classroom experience seriously if the professor were dressed as a vampire, for example.

For John, the authority he needed to exert depended on the student. He indicated that when students were more mature, “the students were engaged, so I didn’t need to exert it [authority], you can treat them like equals” (John, Participant 6). With students who were less mature, he stated, “I did need to be more authoritarian...just to get them to behave enough to participate” (John, Participant 6, ellipsis in original). However, John used a non-human avatar and was able to overcome some students’ prejudices toward him (as a result of his avatar choice) through his interactions with them. While the idea of staving off potential problems by choosing a human avatar could be helpful, it may also be helpful to challenge the preconceived notions of others by choosing a more unconventional avatar. Both positions have merit.

For some participants, professorial authority had to be renegotiated in the virtual world classroom, but for other participants, there was no difference between the professorial authority they experienced in the virtual world classroom and the traditional classroom.

Traditional/Virtual World Classroom Differences

For many participants, the difference between the traditional classroom and the virtual world classroom was interaction. However, participants never touted one classroom environment

as better than the other. Several unique features of the virtual world may have helped with these interactions. Avatar choice or discussions about avatars could help students and faculty learn more about each other. For example, when describing his virtual world classroom, Ian responded, “I think it’s more relaxed...we tend to converse more and I feel they feel freer to talk about almost anything.” Ian added,

I love it...when they [students] log in usually one at a time it’s fun to greet them by their avatar name, getting them used to the idea that their avatars are really an extension of their real life selves. I comment on their outfits and interesting places they have visited as well as about their real life activities. (ellipses in original)

Ian also indicated that the virtual world allows him to access extensions to students’ personalities “because of the personalization we experience when here...they [students] chat freely about most anything.” Many of the participants said that the virtual world is more open. Some professors stated that students who may have been shy in other classroom environments were more open in the virtual world. Just as the virtual world allowed faculty to explore other aspects of their personalities, students experience a similar freedom. For example, Martin recognized that his interactions with students in the virtual world were “quite a bit different in some ways.” He also stated, “In SL I am very much more conscious of the need to let/encourage others to participate so I am pretty sure I say a lot less and the students say more.” Martin also mentioned the marked difference some students show in Second Life, such as an increase in confidence:

I know some students interact more in SL because they are not so confident in the classroom setting so the ‘anonymity’ of SL benefits them. I am fairly easy going in the classroom or SL and think most students feel comfortable in both.

Martin explained: “Maybe I am just more aware...but also perhaps I am conscious that for some students this technology is also a bit challenging at first and I don’t want to put them off in any way...”

John saw some similarities between the traditional and virtual world classrooms, but he also emphasized the unique nature of the virtual world classroom:

However, the biggest difference is that I do more types of things here. So I may stand and talk, but I can also show them artifacts I’ve made and can also take them on field trips to illustrate my point or get them making things.

He continued:

So intrinsically the subject matter is different, it’s more conversational because part of what I’m teaching about is connected to their own personal experience of this space. So... some things are the same, but the biggest differences arise from the different sorts of things I teach here, and also the more flexibility with the environment. (John, Participant 6)

John was able to interact with the virtual world classroom in a way that he could not really interact with the traditional classroom. As for his interactions with students in the virtual world classroom, John stated, “In some ways I think I could be more inventive.” He added, “There are lots of very innovative things that could be done here and I often resort to putting a Powerpoint presentation on a wall and talking through it” (John, Participant 6). John appreciated the virtual world classroom because of its openness, stating, “ I think it’s [the virtual world] a leveller in a lot of ways. We lose our usual roles and can talk more openly.” When sharing her lived experience on teaching in the virtual world classroom, Emma stated, “Well you move around a lot more- you have much more opportunity to interact with the environment.” However, she

noticed some differences as well: “You don’t have the same cues- you’re not always clear what they’re [students are] doing or whether they are engaged or even what they are looking at” (Emma, Participant 9). As far as her interactions with students, Emma stated, “I always enjoy them because there is lots to think about.” Like John, Emma also saw the equality of the virtual world, stating, “The 3D world quite often sets you in a position of equality- you are both facing a problem together- how do you deal with it.” Adam also highlighted the differences between the interaction in the traditional classroom and the virtual world classroom: “You have to rely on your voice (and the way you set up the activities) a lot more [in the virtual world classroom],” he said. He added, “I’ve got to ‘sound’ interesting- and the activities have to be explained very clearly. It’s also hard to gauge when a student is having difficulties....” He noted, “My basic aim is to get the students doing things, so they have to feel the demands I’m making on them are reasonable and achievable” (Adam, Participant 8). On the other hand, Adam noted, “However, it’s harder for them [students] to ‘hide’ in SL too.” Like Emma, Adam missed the cues in traditional classrooms; however, he felt that the virtual world offers its own measures to supplement missing cues. He stated, “One thing I notice, though, is that the visual and audible ‘clues’ students receive very quickly make up for the relative ‘poverty’ of the environment” (Adam, Participant 8). Technological difficulties notwithstanding, Adam is able to interact with students in the virtual world in a way that mirrors the interactions in his traditional classroom. While some participants missed the facial cues they get from students in the face-to-face environment, something difficult to duplicate in the virtual world, participants indicated that other intricacies of the virtual world can compensate for some of those missing elements.

However, some participants missed some of the elements available in more traditional classroom environments such as the lack of vampires and the fascination of all things avatar or a

board for writing. For Frank, the difference between the traditional classroom and the virtual world classroom is the same as the issue with professorial authority: distraction. He stated, “They [students] are easily distracted in SL. With each other. Their appearances. Guns. Monster trucks. Vampires. Etc.” (Frank, Participant 1). However, Frank does enjoy his interactions with students in the virtual world classroom, stating, “I like chatting. The 3D gives a sense of place. I also like designing 3D content.” Greg mentioned some of the challenges he experienced when interacting with students in the virtual world instead of the traditional classroom: “SL is not real life, so there are obvious disadvantages just because of the technology,” he said. He continued: For instance I like to write on a marker board, but this is hard to do in SL (maybe there is some technology I am not aware of but it is just easier to walk to the board, pick up a marker, and start writing)” (Greg, Participant 2). Greg also missed other elements from his traditional classes, stating,

I also have students do computer lab activities in my courses. When students need help, they can just raise their hands and I can walk over to them. I am not aware of a similar way to do computer lab sorts of things in SL.

However, Greg does not see Second Life as a way to “replace the way [he teaches his] courses now.” He stated, “...Where you cannot meet face-to-face, or in situations where the anonymity of a virtual world makes students more comfortable talking, then SL is great” (Greg, Participant 2). “Students seemed much more willing to talk in SL than in real life when they were somewhat anonymous,” Greg noted. Greg believes in using “SL in [his] courses for the types of things it is good for” and “using traditional teaching approaches when they are more appropriate.”

Carla noticed “quite a few differences” between her traditional classroom and her virtual world classroom. She stated, “...Even though I can see the avatar, the representation of the student, I

still can not see the student, so I do not always pick up on facial expressions and traditional verbal cues” (Carla, Participant 4). Like Greg, Carla missed the elements and interactions from the traditional classroom. Carla also said, “I think it takes a lot more energy to keep the students engaged.” Similarly, Eva also lamented not having the cues from the traditional classroom. She said,

In the face to face environment, I get to ‘read’ their faces and see the looks as they learn or want to ask a question. In the SL environment, I have to rely on the chat feature or on a headset to realize student questions and concerns. (Eva, Participant 5)

Eva also got frustrated when the technology in the virtual world is not dependable. However, Eva emphasized:

I think I’m a leader, but also a learner beside my students. I don’t consider myself super- advanced in SL--but always interested in the new possibilities of what we can do to learn more about the content I teach.

She also indicated that she enjoyed her interactions with students in the virtual world. When detailing her interactions with students, she said:

I think they’re pretty effective, although I still feel slightly ‘clumsy’ with the environment, especially if we’re using the chat function. I think I just need to improve so I can continue to model skills for my students. Overall, I’m definitely able to communicate with them and have found some interesting ‘connections’ with my students in past semesters. (Eva, Participant 5)

Eva was able to connect with one of her students in Second Life by helping the student develop a product to sell in world. Again, although participants had challenges in the virtual world, they were positive about their overall experiences in the environment.

Avatar Influence

The theme avatar influence addressed the way students reacted to professors' avatars, and overall, most of the professors stated that students provided no response or a positive response to professors' avatars. Outside of the occasional comment about an outfit, many professors did not see that their avatars influenced their interactions with students. One participant mentioned that students probably found it strange to see their professors as avatars, but he did not indicate any problems as a result of those feelings. Mel stated, "They [students] seem to respect me. It's not like it's a joke or anything." When discussing how his students respond, Frank stated, "I don't know if they do much. There is a small chuckle when they see the avatar. I imagine there would be a small chuckle no matter what my avatar was." Ian said, "I think they [students] respond positively...." He added, "Well, it [his avatar] really has no bearing because I wanted it to really resemble me fairly closely...so it's really the same or close to the same as possible" (Ian, Participant 3, ellipses in the original). In like manner, Adam did not see a difference in the response he received in the traditional classroom and the response he received in the virtual world classroom. He noted, "...I think they respond more or less as they would if we were meeting IRL [in real life]" (Adam, Participant 8). While Carla does not think her avatar influences her interactions with students, she indicated that students ask questions about her avatar. She stated,

...I have had students ask if I look anything like my avatar. When they see me in real life, they do comment that I am much shorter than they thought I would be. I also get comments when I dress up for holidays. (Carla, Participant 4)

Martin had a similar experience with students' questions, but that experience seemed to be integrated into the class. He stated, "I think most [students] respond well...we always chat in the

first session about how/why you decided on the look you did...in some ways it works well for breaking the ice in SL” (Martin, Participant 7, ellipses in original). As for specific aspects of his avatar, Martin noted,

Well I think being fairly bland and mainstream it is fine...they sort of get nothing too unexpected. That’s why I feel a mainstream avatar is probably better than something too outrageous. I want them to feel comfortable with me..not freaked out! (ellipses in original)

Eva said, “I don’t see much influence from my avatar--that’s just a physical representation of me in that body, so it’s the same as if I’m there--and as if they’re [the students] there too.” She also said,

Because my class is probably the only one where they [the students] deal with Second Life, they’re fascinated by the entire process. I don’t know if they react to my persona or to the technology--but I think I get pretty positive responses. (Eva, Participant 5)

Like Martin, Emma also saw discussions about avatars with students as a way to help everyone get comfortable in the environment. She said, “In a wider context, avatars often give you a starting point- you can talk about details of each other’s avatars, and it’s an intro to the conversation...” (Emma, Participant 9). Although many professors indicated that their avatars do not greatly influence their interactions with students, the fact that some of those avatars are replicas of people students have met in real life (or replicas of human forms) may influence how students react or behave. In this particular case, I would say that no influence is itself a type of influence. For example, when participants noticed similarities between how different sets of students reacted to them in the face-to-face classroom and the virtual world classroom, those

similarities may exemplify avatar influence in the virtual world. No reaction becomes a type of reaction.

Greg did not notice any issues with students' reactions to his overall virtual world persona or interactions with his avatar. However, he mentioned that some students behaved differently because of the different medium. He stated, "I think most of them [the students] respond in the same way as they would in real life. Some, however, dress or act in ways that they would never do in real life..." (Greg, Participant 2).

John had trouble with one student because of the students' perception of the professor based on his avatar choice. A student tried to judge the professor's level of expertise, his ability to do his job, based on the way his avatar looks. John, who created an avatar that does not resemble him, has only had one negative reaction to his avatar. He noted that responses were "mixed," but "On the whole, they [students] seem to like it" (John, Participant 6). He continued, "They acknowledge the extra work that's gone into it, and recognise that I've got some experience in here because I'd have to be familiar with SL to some extent to find everything" (John, Participant 6). John believed that the one negative reaction he received was because the student may have perceived the avatar as "a bit too unconventional" and that the professor "possibly didn't know what [he] was talking about." Although John was able to successfully deal with the student, the avatar's influence in that situation was more pronounced than in other situations. When students encounter a more "conventional" avatar, it is possible that the avatar's influence is understated because students are experiencing the familiar.

Technology

Once again, technology came up as an area participants wanted to see improved. There were concerns about the virtual world platform's, in this case Second Life's, technology,

institutional technology, and students' familiarity with virtual world technology. Technology issues create persona problems because students and faculty lose out on the persona experiences if there are problems with the avatars, firewalls at a university, voice chat, text chat, etc.

Virtual World Technology Issues. Participants were not always pleased with the technology in Second Life. There were problems with areas not being available due to maintenance, and the system seems to require constant updates. The updated version of Second Life must be downloaded before users can enter the virtual world. Some faculty members also worried that Second Life was not as technologically advanced as other programs. However, one participant thought that the in world technology had improved. As a faculty member concerned with Second Life technology, Greg stated:

...I have found it awkward trying to get my lecture slides into SL. I have found that having slides makes it easier to focus the conversation. Things may have changed, but when I started doing this I had to pay money to import my slides into SL. It is possible to place Web links into your text and students can click on the links to go to Web pages. This might be a solution, but you cannot control that everyone is looking at the same thing.

Eva noted, "...Sometimes the delay is tricky--I think it actually slows me down just a bit--but I keep working to make things run as smoothly in SL as I do in a regular classroom." Delays can cause avatars to do (or not do) certain actions, causing persona and interaction issues. For example, if a professor is meeting with a student or another professor, an SL delay can prevent the other party from seeing the professor. Instead of an avatar, the other person may see a luminescent white dot. After a few moments, usually, the avatar appears. However, if the avatar does not appear, or if the world is not visible, as Emma noted earlier, then the opportunity to

experience and interact with the immersive virtual world extension of that faculty member is lost.

Like Eva, Emma stated:

I'd like the world to be less glitchy- I still get thrown out sometimes when an area is up for maintenance. I'd like the sound to work better and more consistently. I'd like to be able to use a world and to be sure that the world itself and its underpinnings will work without problem- then the problems I have to deal with are only ones to do with the teaching and learning.

Martin added, "...Sound issues in particular seem to have plagued a number of students (not good when they are doing presentations!) and SL does update itself a lot which can cause issues I think." Frank also thought that the virtual world technology could be improved. He stated that Second Life needed, "Better controls. Better graphics" (Frank, Participant 1). Frank noted that Second Life still uses graphics from 2005. Sound problems, better controls and graphics, and constant updates are all issues that could potentially affect persona construction and persona interaction. For example, access to graphics directly affects the options faculty and others have when creating their virtual world selves. If the option for blonde hair were not available or not functioning properly, then that would have changed what Eva was able to share about herself in the virtual world. Participants are limited or empowered to create their personas based on the graphics and options available in the environment.

Adam saw improvements in the graphics. He stated: "...I've noticed that SL has become smoother and smoother as the years have gone by, and that smoother operation is really the best enhancement I could get. By 'smoother,' I mean that the environment is working better and

better” (Adam, Participant 8). Participants were not completely dissuaded by virtual world technology, but they noted the difficulties in the virtual world.

University Technology. A few faculty members highlighted concerns about university technology. Sometimes the firewalls and administrative codes made it difficult for faculty to access virtual worlds on their campuses. Emma pointed out technology problems at some universities. She stated,

From my perspective it’s a lot of technical things. Such as- the university wireless networks not really supporting SL or other virtual worlds. I’m online at home today- and this is the first time I’ve actually been able to see you or your environment.

(Emma, Participant 9)

Participants cannot interact with students or others in the virtual world if the firewalls prevent them from accessing course or college islands. Mel also cited “technical difficulties” that were a combination of problems with the technology at her university and problems with Second Life. She stated, “That adds to stress and a feeling of isolation in students if they miss interacting due to technical difficulties” (Mel, Participant 10). Likewise, Martin stated, “...Most institutions have firewalls etc that can make life tricky; in parts of Australia bandwidth will not be sufficient.” Also, using a reliable virtual world and having the technological infrastructure to support connections to a virtual world may continue to be a concern for students and some institutions. As Mel pointed out, technology problems affect students’ experiences with faculty and the course. If a university does not have the infrastructure to support a virtual world, or if there are Internet connection problems, then students and faculty miss opportunities to get to know and interact with each other in the three dimensional virtual world.

Students' Familiarity with Technology. Another major technology concern for participants was students' technology readiness. For example, a few faculty thought that some students were not adequately prepared to take a course online, particularly in a virtual world. As a suggestion, many of those same faculty members recommended everything from course prerequisites for students to mandatory training sessions. If students do not feel comfortable using the virtual world technology, then they may miss the conversations that Ian and other professors referred to earlier: those conversations about avatar choice and interesting SL locations. Students who are not familiar with the technology will be limited in the types of avatars they can create or amend. Those students will also be limited in the locations they can visit, since a part of visiting different locations includes a basic understanding of SL navigation. As a professor who thought that students should fulfill a prerequisite before taking a course in a virtual world, John stated:

It's unlikely to happen soon, because not that many people are using virtual worlds[,] but I think once they become more stable and more embedded more people will use them. So a single class to introduce students, to help them establish an identity here [in the virtual world] that would help. So when you start you know that they have acquired the necessary skills.

It is important to remember that as the choices for virtual worlds change, the types of prerequisites may change as well.

Although John implied having some issues with virtual world stability, most of his comment was directly related to students' familiarity with virtual worlds. Martin made a similar comment, stating:

...We run a couple of familiarising sessions which are voluntary before we start but many students don't attend the familiarisation sessions and assume they'll be fine..then aren't. A surprising (for me) number of students were not familiar or that confident in the SL environment. So greater preparedness beforehand would definitely help. Maybe we should make the familiarisation session compulsory.

While participants mentioned problems with technology within the virtual world as well as at universities, several mentioned the desire to help students become more familiar with virtual world technology.

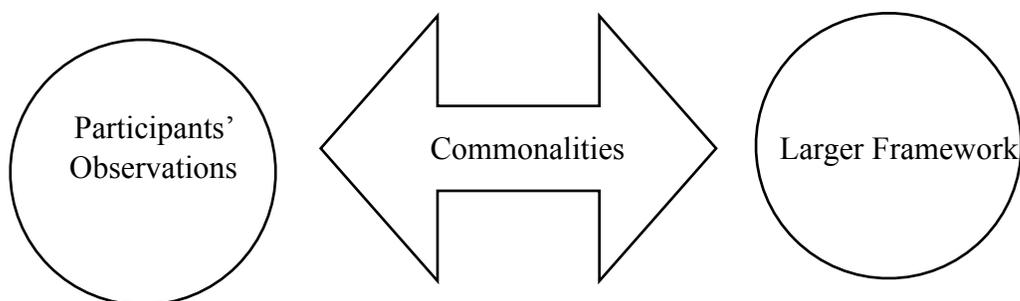
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Prior to conducting this study on faculty perspectives of faculty persona in a virtual world, I only had my limited personal experience to draw from when considering the nuances involved in constructing a virtual world persona. I investigated the phenomenon of the faculty virtual world persona by learning more about professors' lived experiences with the phenomenon. As I indicated in the findings, participants defined faculty persona as who they are when they teach. Therefore, participants had to construct or recreate themselves in the three dimensional virtual world. In T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Prufrock reassures himself that there will be time to "prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (1920, line 27). Similarly, participants in my study had to consciously prepare their faces/ the virtual-world versions of themselves to meet their students and others they interacted with in the virtual world. James Lang discussed what it means to look like a professor in his 2005 article "Looking Like a Professor." He noted that the way professors dress could send students and others messages about everything from that professor's teaching style to personality traits (i.e., those who prefer to dress up or those who prefer more causal attire). Many of my participants made it clear that those elements of professorial attire do not disappear in the virtual world. From material messages to avatar choice, professors sent very clear messages through what they chose to wear and how they designed their avatars. In Thomas' work on digital literacies (2004), she discussed the cyber body as text. Although she discussed this topic as related to young girls in online environments, some of her observations work well for the experiences of faculty in my study, particularly in the area of persona creation. For example, even though immersive virtual worlds allow participants access to more than just words for expressing extensions of

themselves, the avatars are professors' digital forms. Participants used the digital tools to write (or digitally script) themselves into the virtual world. Those three-dimensional renderings, the avatars, were either autobiographical (doppelgängers) or works of fiction (deviations). Sometimes participants chose names or other characteristics that alluded to pop culture or history, much like writers do in their literary creations. The allusions provide context and let the reader/viewer know a little more about the character or story. Participants' allusions provided the same type of context and helped to express more about their personas in the virtual world. Just as authors create works of literature and personas to tell their or others' stories, immersive virtual world participants also create personas to extend themselves in the virtual environment.

The findings resulted in a dialectic that included feedback from professors of various genders, geographical regions, races, ethnicities, and virtual-world experience levels. The questions were divided according to faculty persona, persona construction, and persona interaction, and the themes from the data are as follows: virtual world/real world overlap, virtual world/traditional online overlap, advantages of virtual world persona, challenges of virtual world persona, avatar choice, material messages, professionalism, the promise of possibilities, professorial authority, traditional/virtual world classroom differences, avatar influence, and technology improvements. I highlighted a few of the common areas my participants discussed, and I also noted how the findings from my study relate to the larger frameworks about online learning and virtual worlds. A diagram of that relationship is shown below:



Technology

I found that although faculty were generally pleased with the idea of learning about new technology and using that technology in their classrooms, they were not naive about the potential challenges with technology. For example, Eva saw her experiences as a newer virtual world professor as an opportunity to model dealing with challenges for her students. She experienced difficulties with the technology, but used those challenges as a catalyst for showing her students how to deal with technology problems in the classroom. The problems with new technology provided a teaching opportunity. Similarly, Martin looked forward to doing more work in the virtual world, and he saw the technology challenges as no different from the challenges with any new program. Other researchers also found that some faculty look forward to working with new technology. For example, faculty in Green et al.'s (2009) study appreciated the opportunity online teaching gave them to use new technology, and faculty in Siedlaczek's (2009) study looked for ways to integrate new technology into their classrooms.

Student Preparedness

Findings from my study showed that student preparedness is a major concern for some faculty. Faculty were concerned about students being prepared to work online generally and in the virtual world specifically. For example, Martin mentioned making virtual world preparedness sessions mandatory, and John thought that students should have a prerequisite to help them become more familiar with virtual world technology. Although more traditional online course environments are quite different from virtual world environments, faculty from both areas emphasized the importance of students' familiarity with technology before taking an online course. Just as faculty from Oomen-Early and Murphy's (2009) study thought that universities

should measure students' online learning readiness, faculty from my study made a similar comment.

Interaction

My study showed that faculty appreciate the interactions they have with students in the virtual world classroom. For example, Ian, Martin, Carla, and several other participants mentioned the types of conversations (typically “ice-breaker” conversations) they have with their students as a result of the virtual world. Faculty (and sometimes students) ask questions about avatars, comment on in world activities, or comment on avatar choice. Unlike some other studies (i.e. Fillion et al.'s 2009), faculty from my study did not state that their interactions in the online classroom, specifically the virtual world classroom, improved their interactions with students. My study showed that faculty discussed different but positive interactions. Even when participants referred to their virtual world conversations with students as a little more relaxed, they did not indicate that the virtual world improved interaction between professors and students.

Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction

I found that lack of face-to-face interaction was a concern for many faculty, but they also thought that the virtual world provided opportunities for other unique interactions. For example, Eva stated that although she missed the face-to-face interaction of the traditional classroom, she has been able to connect with her students in other ways (such as helping a student develop a virtual world product). Also, Adam indicated that students and faculty compensate for the loss of face-to-face interaction through ways that are particular to the virtual world. Just as faculty with negative and positive online learning experiences missed the face-to-face interaction of traditional courses (Fish & Gill, 2009), participants from my study made similar observations.

However, my study also showed that faculty members enjoy some of the features specific to the virtual world classroom.

Flexibility

My study showed that flexibility took on new meaning for faculty in the virtual world. Although several online learning studies indicated that professors value the flexibility of online learning courses, participants from my study on virtual worlds did not mention flexibility, at least not in the traditional sense. Participants from my study discussed flexibility in terms of persona, persona construction, and interaction. Faculty members in the virtual world have a little more flexibility than traditional online faculty when creating their online personas (avatar features, avatar attire, voice morphing, and the like). The virtual world could also provide the traditional form of course flexibility, as professors can access virtual world courses from any area with a good Internet connection. For example, the traditional flexibility of the virtual world environment allows participants John, Adam, and Martin to teach courses to students in completely different cities or countries. However, participants highlighted the way the virtual world allows them to extend themselves and their personalities in ways that are specific to the virtual world classroom environment.

Other Observations

Faculty from my study highlighted areas that may be unique to the virtual world, and they did not touch on many of the themes that are prevalent in discussions about traditional online learning. For example, participants did not indicate any issues, positive or negative, with university administrators in the virtual world. Also, my participants did not mention problems with workload/time constraints or make any claims about whether or not courses in virtual worlds can improve (or hinder) learning. Perhaps that difference is to be expected since the

virtual world classroom is quite different from the traditional online classroom. However, many faculty from my study did not mention some of the major issues that were often associated with the virtual world classroom such as grieving. “Griefing” (harassment in Second Life) and technical difficulties were concerns for faculty in virtual worlds (i.e. Sutton et al., 2010), but only one participant in my study mentioned a problem with grieving. However, when Frank had an episode with grieving, he did not mention how taxing it was or that the issue was ongoing. No other participant mentioned issues with grieving.

Participants from my study, overall, were comfortable working as virtual world professors and were able to maintain authority in their classrooms, even if some of them had to make adjustments because of the medium. For example, Adam stated that teaching in the virtual world is not for faculty who crave dictatorship, and both John and Emma indicated that authority in the virtual world is negotiated. Just as faculty members from Livingstone and Kemp’s (2006) and Dutton’s (2009) studies saw a shift in authority when teaching in Second Life, faculty members from my study made similar observations. Faculty from my study who discussed the shift in authority did not do so in a way that made the adjustment seem burdensome or problematic.

Suggestions for Further Research

Exploring faculty perspectives of faculty persona in immersive virtual worlds prompts other conversations about virtual world environments. For example, I found that faculty (Emma, Eva, Frank, John, Adam, and other participants) frequently mentioned how status and material messages carry over into the virtual world, so researchers should investigate perceptions of those messages and how material messages are created. Perhaps a virtual ethnography would be an appropriate way to conduct a study on material messages, since the researcher would be

immersed in the online environment (a classroom or group) and could observe interactions and references to material messages. Researchers should also ask those environment participants about their perceptions of other avatars. I found that faculty members noticed avatar creation dates, the avatar's clothes, and the overall look of the avatar (premium skin, hair, actions), so questions about those elements could lead to greater insight about material messages in the virtual world.

Particularly for an environment like Second Life, researchers should examine how the SL economy and use of Linden dollars influence image, as I noticed in my study that several participants had to use Linden dollars in Second Life to gain access to premium skins and clothing—while those who did not invest in Linden dollars were limited to more standard items. For example, John and Emma discussed spending their Linden dollars to access better accoutrements for their avatars, while Greg and Adam chose not to invest in Linden dollars and could not access premium products, although they were not concerned about making purchases for their avatars. A researcher who wants to study SL economy could contact participants via various SL groups or listservs and conduct a survey or interviews to examine how the use of Linden dollars influences those participants' experiences in SL. In my study, there was a correlation between advanced avatars and the use of Linden dollars, so researchers could examine the link between economy and expertise. There may be an implied relationship between Linden dollars and assumed expertise, since some faculty members purchased more accoutrements to display their expertise in the virtual world.

I also found that faculty highlighted unique differences between immersive virtual worlds and traditional online classes, so researchers should also investigate those similarities and differences. A phenomenological or grounded theory study on the similarities and differences

between virtual worlds and traditional online environments could yield rich data on both of those environments. For example, participants indicated that immersive virtual worlds allow them to interact with students in ways that are not possible in the traditional online environment. Because participants saw that distinction as important, future researchers should spend more time asking faculty about additional similarities and differences and what those elements mean for them as professors.

My study also showed that faculty value their interactions with students in all classroom environments, including the virtual world. Faculty noted some specific elements that could help enhance virtual world interactions, so other research areas should include students' reactions and interactions with professors in virtual worlds and motivations to use immersive virtual worlds in online and face-to-face courses. I found that faculty really capitalized on the voice and text-based tools in Second Life, and John mentioned having a special needs student in one of his courses; he had to consider ways to help the student feel equally included in the course, so researchers may want to investigate virtual world options that help all students feel like valued contributors to courses. A research study on this topic could be quantitative and employ a survey to gather data or be qualitative and gather data through interviews with students in immersive virtual world courses.

Researchers should also examine how faculty roles play a part in professors' use of three dimensional virtual worlds. For example, the professors in my study were research fellows, assistant professors, or associate professors. Although the data did not point to their positions affecting their use of virtual worlds, that may be an area for further research. A researcher could use grounded theory and semi-structured interviews to examine if faculty members' roles affect their use of virtual worlds. For example, would money for Linden dollars come out of a

professor's pocket or the department's budget? How would part-time faculty access funds to make adjustments or add features in Second Life? How many part-time professors use virtual worlds as opposed to full-time faculty members, and do those roles dictate how or why they use the virtual world? These are questions that could be answered with further research.

There are also a number of ethical considerations researchers should be aware of when investigating virtual world environments. For example, Second Life allows users to save chat information, and Linden Labs has access to the information and saves it to their servers. In a study where participants are being asked about seemingly innocuous issues (overall experience, persona construction, virtual world likes/dislikes), the fact that their comments are associated with their avatars may not matter. However, a researcher would have to question whether Second Life is the right environment to discuss more serious issues. For example, if a participant makes a negative comment about a colleague or supervisor, his/her comments are visible to the researcher, participant, and Linden Labs. Researchers need to consider these issues when conducting research in the virtual world.

Suggestions for Practice

My study showed that the immersive virtual world provides opportunities to teach and interact with students in ways that face-to-face and traditional online classrooms do not provide, so those who seek to use the virtual world classroom should learn about and take advantage of the learning opportunities in the virtual world. However, as Greg pointed out, face-to-face and traditional online classrooms also have unique properties that cannot always be duplicated. Both John and Martin lamented that students were not as prepared to enter the virtual world as they would have liked. Therefore, those interested in using the virtual world for a course or part of a

course should also provide tutorials for students on entering the virtual world and setting up an avatar.

Participants in my study did not note any problems with virtual world content, but Adam indicated that some professors may have concerns about content and activities on other islands. When students create SL accounts, they can access these other islands (if not from a school computer then on a personal computer). Researchers and professors should think through how to avoid more explicit content or prepare students for the sometimes-graphic avatar images in SL, as it was an area that came up, briefly, in my study.

The underlying idea that many faculty from my study expressed was that each classroom environment (face-to-face, traditional online, and virtual world) has peculiarities, so faculty, administrators, students, and researchers who want to use the virtual world should be well aware of the immersive virtual world's benefits and drawbacks. They should practice creating/changing avatars, visiting different areas, and operating avatars. Failure to practice in SL could leave faculty and students feeling isolated and confused, as Mel noted when discussing technology problems.

The point of my study was to provide a space for participants to share their lived experiences related to faculty persona and the virtual world, and they graciously obliged. While intrepidly stepping into the three dimensional virtual world can work well, as participants from my study showed, users should be aware of the medium's highlights and challenges. For example, Martin and John mentioned technological difficulties and the need for student prerequisites in order to help students feel more comfortable in the virtual world classroom.

Overall, participants' experiences were positive, but not without challenges. However, as Martin noted, all new software requires adjustments. Professors, students, administrators, and anyone else with an interest in what happens in the virtual world classroom can learn a great deal from these participants' experiences with a virtual world. Using technology can be very beneficial, and immersive virtual classrooms can help professors interact with students and course material in innovative, effective ways; however, those who use the virtual world environment must remember that the focus should be on the goal(s) of the course first and then the technology, as participants from my study indicated through their actions in their courses.

CONCLUSION

Participants defined faculty persona as who they are when they teach, and the participants valued extending their classroom and traditional online personas to the immersive virtual world. However, the nature of the immersive virtual world, avatars; accessories; flexibility with location; voice- and text-based chats, gave them an opportunity to interpret their online faculty personas in many ways. The virtual world also gave faculty members an opportunity to construct themselves in a new environment. They authored their faculty personas in a virtual world and controlled whether the stories of their digital selves were fiction or non-fiction. Just as authors intricately weave elements to show their personas or those of characters in their works, these participants selected numerous aspects of their avatars in order to show who they are in the virtual world. Their faculty personas were extended to the virtual world, and participants used tools available to create themselves in the virtual world. Even though these extensions of their personalities were quite different, they all seemed positive, overall, about their experiences constructing and interacting with their virtual world personas. That is not to say that participants did not see some drawbacks to the virtual world. However, faculty seemed to appreciate many of the unique qualities the immersive virtual world provided. For those interested in using the virtual world or for anyone who wants to know more about faculty in virtual world classrooms, one important part of my study is how participants dealt with challenges. None of the professors seemed dispirited by the technology troubles or occasional behavioral problems. Perhaps one reason for this is that each professor approached the virtual world with a pedagogical eye. They examined how a tool, in this case the immersive virtual world, could help them deliver course materials to students. The focus was not on the technology but on the teaching.

Lastly, the purpose of my study was to examine one aspect of online teaching and learning, professors' perspectives of faculty persona in a virtual world. Right now, Second Life is a part of social media and a part of online teaching and learning. However, technology changes and new environments are developed on a regular basis. The point, then, is to understand professors' experiences in this particular environment to help shape and inform the development of new online tools as well as maximize the use of tools that are already available.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

KEY TERMS FOR FACULTY PERSONA IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

Key Terms

Below is a list of terms and their definitions for the purposes of my study

Avatar: a computerized or digital representation that usually interacts with the computer user, like the puppy or paperclip in Microsoft Word, or other avatars in a virtual world

Faculty: a full-time or part-time teacher at a college or university (also referred to as instructor or educator)

Furry: animal figure with human characteristics

IRL or RL: in real life or real life

In World: in Second Life or in the virtual world

Persona: the outward, negotiated representation of a person--not their identity in its entirety, but one aspect of that identity

Second Life: one of many three dimensional virtual worlds (also referred to as a virtual world, virtual environment, three dimensional virtual world/environment, or immersive virtual environment)

Tiny: very small avatar

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR FACULTY PERSONA IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

Date:

Online location:

Interviewer:

Participant:

Script

You are being asked to participate in a research study on faculty perspectives of faculty persona in Second Life. The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of faculty who teach or have taught in Second Life and their perspectives on faculty persona in the immersive virtual environment. This is the first of three interviews, and this interview will focus on background information and persona. Because this one-hour interview is taking place in the online environment, I will save the text of our interview chat on my personal computer; however, Second Life may automatically save the text as well. Your participation in this interview via Second Life indicates that you agree to the privacy policies and terms of use for the service. You may choose not to answer some or all of the questions. Your username will be visible, which means that your responses will be associated with your username. However, I will give you a pseudonym in my study. Also, I will not include the name of your institution. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study.

Question set

1. Please describe the type of university where you teach/taught the course(s) in Second Life.
2. Please describe your position at the institution.
3. How long have you worked (did you work) at the institution where you taught a class in SL?
4. Are you currently teaching a course in Second Life?

5. How many classes have you taught in Second Life?
6. When I say “faculty persona” to you, what comes to mind?
7. How would you describe your Second Life persona?
8. How does your persona in Second Life differ from your persona in the traditional classroom?
9. How does your persona in Second Life differ from your persona in other online environments (Blackboard, email, chat rooms, etc.)?
10. What are some advantages to having a virtual world persona?
11. What are some challenges for the virtual world persona?

Closing

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Because this is the first of three interviews, I plan to contact you in the future with follow-up questions. If you have any questions, please contact me at sjblackmon@crimson.ua.edu or 205-908-3304. Thank you for your participation.

(Adapted from *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice*, Savin-Baden, M., & Major, C., 2012)

Date:

Online location:

Interviewer:

Participant:

Script

You are being asked to participate in a research study on faculty perspectives of faculty persona in Second Life. The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of faculty who teach or have taught in Second Life and their perspectives on faculty persona in the immersive virtual environment. This is the second of three interviews, and this interview will focus on persona construction. Because this one-hour interview is taking place in the online environment, I will save the text of our interview chat on my personal computer; however, Second Life may automatically save the text as well. Your participation in this interview via Second Life indicates that you agree to the privacy policies and terms of use for the service. You may choose not to answer some or all of the questions. Your username will be visible, which means that your responses will be associated with your username. However, I will provide you with a pseudonym in my study. Also, I will not include the name of your institution. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study.

Question set

1. How did you decide on an avatar?
2. What outside factors (departmental rules, ideas of professorial image) influenced your avatar choice and persona construction in the virtual world?

3. What internal factors (personality, interests) influenced your avatar choice and persona construction in the virtual world?
4. What concerns did you have when constructing your persona in Second Life?
5. What elements were you excited about when constructing your persona in Second Life?
6. How much time did you spend on developing your avatar?
7. How often do you make changes to your avatar (hair, clothes, the whole avatar, etc.)?
8. How closely is your avatar tied to real-life aspects of yourself (gender, eye color, and the like)?
9. What elements were most important to you when constructing your virtual world persona?
10. What elements were least important to you when constructing your virtual world persona?

Closing

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Because this is the second of three interviews, I plan to contact you in the future with follow-up questions. If you have any questions, please contact me at sjblackmon@crimson.ua.edu or 205-908-3304. Thank you for your participation.

(Adapted from *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice*, Savin-Baden, M., & Major, C., 2012)

Date:

Online location:

Interviewer:

Participant:

Script

You are being asked to participate in a research study on faculty perspectives of faculty persona in Second Life. The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of faculty who teach or have taught in Second Life and their perspectives on faculty persona in the immersive virtual environment. This is the third of three interviews, and this interview will focus on persona interaction. Because this one-hour interview is taking place in the online environment, I will save the text of our interview chat on my personal computer; however, Second Life may automatically save the text as well. Your participation in this interview via Second Life indicates that you agree to the privacy policies and terms of use for the service. You may choose not to answer some or all of the questions. Your username will be visible, which means that your responses will be associated with your username. However, I will provide you with a pseudonym in my study. Also, I will not include the name of your institution. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study.

Question set

1. How do students respond to your online persona?
2. How would you describe the authority you experience in the traditional classroom versus the authority you experience in the virtual classroom?

3. How is interacting with students in the three dimensional virtual environment different from interacting with them in the traditional classroom?
4. How do you feel about your interactions with students and others in the three dimensional virtual environment?
5. What could enhance your interactions with others in the three dimensional virtual environment?
6. How does your avatar influence your interactions with others in the three dimensional virtual environment?
7. How often do you venture outside of your classroom to interact with others in Second Life?
8. How does your online persona change when you are interacting with people in Second Life who are not your students?
9. How have your interactions with students and others changed since developing your persona at the beginning of the course?
10. How often do you interact with administrators or other professors in Second Life?

Closing

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I may contact you in the future for follow-up questions. If you have any questions, please contact me at sjblackmon@crimson.ua.edu or 205-908-3304. Thank you for your participation.

(Adapted from *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice*, Savin-Baden, M., & Major, C., 2012)

APPENDIX C

PRIMARY INTERVIEW LOCATIONS



University of Alabama, College of Education Island



My avatar seated on a bench on the College of Education Island, The University of Alabama

APPENDIX D

PROTOCOL FOR FACULTY PERSONA IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

1. Purpose

a)

Provide a 3-5 sentence lay summary of the purpose of the study.

In my qualitative study of faculty who teach or have taught in Second Life, I will examine professors' perspectives of faculty persona in Second Life. My goal is not to argue the merits of Second Life for use in higher education or to advocate for or against online learning or online learning platforms. Also, I do not want to give the impression that Second Life is the only new platform used in higher education. Second Life is just one thread of a very large, complex tapestry of online education. I want to provide a space for faculty to discuss the decisions that go into how they present themselves to students and others in the immersive virtual classroom.

b)

What does the Investigator(s) hope to learn from the study?

I hope to learn more about professors' perspectives on their personas in the immersive virtual worlds: the decisions that go into the creation of their online, three dimensional, avatar-represented selves.

2.

Study Procedures

a)

Describe all study procedures.

My study will be a hermeneutic phenomenology, as described by van Manen (1990). I plan to interview 10 participants from various colleges and universities. Participants for my study will include instructors or professors from two-year colleges and four-year colleges and universities. I do not plan to limit my participant pool based on tenure/non-tenure,

years at an institution, number of online classes taught (although I plan to ask about the number of online classes taught for background purposes), or choice to teach online (voluntary vs. compulsory). I do not want to limit my study to only full-time professors or only university faculty because I do not want to purposely set out to exclude data that could be useful for insights in my study or for further research. Each participant will have taught at least one course offered completely in Second Life or a fully-online course that uses Second Life for some aspects of the class. The courses must take place completely in Second Life or completely online with Second Life as an added component because any face-to-face interaction in the classroom could easily lead to a conversation about face-to-face instructor persona versus online instructor persona, something that would move my study in a different direction. I want to focus on professors' persona experiences in the immersive virtual environment. Participants will have taught the course/s at a college or university in the United States or abroad. I do not want to limit the pool to only US or only international participants because insights about those differences could prove useful for my study. I plan to use the Second Life studies I have accumulated to find potential participants for my study because I want participants to know that I am already familiar with some aspect of their experiences in a virtual world. I have decided to use semi-structured online interviews for data collection because that format allows me to ask participants questions that I think are important and leaves room for me to follow up on related issues that participants think are important. I plan to conduct these online interviews in Second Life with faculty who teach or have taught in Second Life. Once professors confirm that they will participate in my study, I will get their Second Life usernames and set up a meeting with them in Second Life. The chat/IM function in Second

Life allows users to conduct private chats. Participants' use of Second Life to conduct a class implies that they have read, understand, and agree with Linden Lab's privacy policy and terms of use. I will inform participants that Second Life's parent company, Linden Labs, has access to information sent through their servers, including private chats. However, I want to remind participants to review the policy and terms. I will send informed consent documents via email, have participants sign the forms, and have participants return the forms to me via my personal email address. I will also include links to the privacy policy and terms of use for Second Life. The semi-structured interviews will last one hour, and I will conduct three interviews with each participant. Because I plan to conduct multiple interviews with participants, I divided the protocols according to theme. For example, the first interview will deal with participants' perspectives of persona, which lays the foundation for later discussions about how persona functions in the virtual world. The second interview protocol will deal with aspects of persona construction, and the final protocol will deal with persona interaction in the virtual environment. Conducting the interviews in this order will allow the conversations with participants to move from general to specific: get participants' general thoughts and responses on persona, move into a conversation about how participants construct persona (based on how they view the concept), and how that constructed persona functions (interacts with others) in the virtual world with the statement that it is the participant's responsibility to read the policies and terms of use that govern the site. Each participant needs to read the privacy policy and terms of use because the documents may contain language that affects a participant's choice to continue with the study or to refuse to answer certain questions in the study. I want to protect professors' privacy in my study as much as possible, so emails and informed consent forms containing professors' identities

and usernames will be kept on my personal computer and only viewed by me. I am the only person with access to my password-protected laptop computer. I plan to use pseudonyms in my study. Also, I will not mention participants' institutions by name. I plan to examine the interview data and analyze the information using qualitative coding to surmise various themes. As for quality assurance, interviewing participants via online chat ensures that responses are accurate and alleviates the need for transcription. In order to help eliminate any potential problems with mistaken identity, I plan to thoroughly research participants' department, faculty, and course lists. Member checks may not be necessary because participants have access to their words via the chat log and do not have to check the accuracy of another person's transcription of their words. I plan to use peer debriefing as a trustworthiness measure because hermeneutic phenomenologies rely heavily on the description of lived experiences. In order to gauge my effectiveness in expressing some idea of the instructors' complex human experiences, I want to get feedback from a faculty member and have her/him serve as the peer debriefer.

b)

State if audio or video taping will occur. Describe what will become of the tapes after use, e.g., shown at scientific meetings, erased. Describe the final disposition of the tapes.

I plan to conduct live chats within Second Life®, so I can copy the text from the chat and paste the information in a Word document on my personal computer--no transcription necessary. All chat texts will be stored in a folder on my personal computer, and I am the only person with access to my password-protected computer. I will delete the files from my computer after one year.

c)

State if deception will be used. If so, provide a rationale and describe debriefing procedures.

Submit a debriefing script in Section #11 (Attachments).

No

3.

Background

a)

Describe past findings leading to the formulation of the study.

The increase in courses offered in Second Life has naturally led to an increase in educators immersed in this virtual world. Exploring the potential relationship between educators and Second Life began with John Lester (also known as Pathfinder Linden) in 2005 (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006). Lester indicated that in addition to making himself available to help students and educators who were interested in educational aspects of Second Life, he also established resources like SLED (Second Life educators mailing list) to help educators collaborate with each other (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006). By 2006, over 500 subscribers were on the SLED mailing list (Livingstone & Kemp, 2006). The 2007 New Media Consortium (NMC) survey found that although 42 percent of people on the Second Life Educators Listserv (SLED) had participated in virtual environments other than Second Life, 58 percent had not (p. 2). In other words, 58 percent of the educators who used Second Life had not used any other virtual world.

Research concerning students' experiences in the Second Life classroom environment has grown, seemingly in tandem with the growth of courses in Second Life. For example, Wehner, Gump, and Downey's (2011) article discussed how Second Life influences the

motivation of students in an undergraduate Spanish class that was divided into Second Life and non Second Life sections. Students in the course were able to practice their language-learning skills by speaking with native Spanish speakers, visiting several historical locations virtually, and presenting on different topics related to the course (Wehner et al., 2011). Some of the locations students visited included the Alhambra, Mexico, Guadalajara, and Barcelona (Wehner et al., 2011). Students in the non Second Life section did not get to interact with native speakers or visit sites because of logistical and financial obstacles, as the course was provided at a university in the southern United States (Wehner et al., 2011). Gao, Noh, & Koehler's (2009) article examined students' experiences with role-playing activities in face-to-face environments versus the Second Life environment. Cobb, Heaney, Corcoran, & Henderson-Begg's (2009) work investigated how 85 masters and final-year undergraduate science students fared in a virtual biosciences laboratory offered in Second Life. Cheal's (2009) article discussed students' overall perceptions about courses delivered in Second Life.

While research on faculty experiences in Second Life exists, the number of those studies is lacking. Dutton's (2009) study examined the overall experiences of faculty in the Second Life environment, and Stoerger's (2010) work served as a guide to professors who want to venture into Second Life. Likewise, Molka-Danielsen and Deutschmann (2009) wrote a guide for those teaching and learning in Second Life. Savin-Baden (2008) noted that learning in immersive virtual worlds (simulations and virtual worlds such as Second Life) could become a central learning approach in many curricula and emphasized the need for more research on how the virtual world impacts higher education. Herold (2009) stated that it is difficult to find results on the learning and teaching practices in Second

Life. Part of exploring the use of virtual worlds in higher education includes investigating specific aspects of professors' experiences with the immersive virtual environment.

However, not many studies focus on educators' overall experiences with Second Life, and fewer studies examine more nuanced components of instructors' experiences with Second Life.

More specifically, there are very few studies on faculty perceptions of instructor persona in Second Life. In Foster's (2007a) *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, she spoke with professors concerning Second Life, but the focus was not specifically on professors' personas, although some aspects of the topic were addressed. In a research study conducted by Savin-Baden (2010), she discussed how the online environment allowed professors to shift personality characteristics, but again, the work did not focus specifically on professors' perspectives on their personas in Second Life. Therefore, I would like to help decrease the gap in the literature concerning professors' personas in immersive virtual environments by conducting a study on said topic.

a)

State how many subjects will be involved and describe the type of subjects (e.g., students, patients with cardiac problems, particular kind of cancer, etc.) and state the reason for using such subjects.

I plan to interview 10 participants from various colleges and universities, and they may be part-time or full-time, tenured or non-tenured. I do not want to limit my study to only full-time professors or only university faculty because I do not want to purposely set out to exclude data that could be useful for insights in my study or for further research. For example, the experiences

of a full-time faculty member in Second Life may be different from those of a part-time faculty member in the virtual world, and I want that data available in my study. Each participant will have taught at least course offered completely in Second Life or a fully-online course that uses Second Life for some aspects of the class. The courses must take place completely in Second Life or completely online with Second Life as an added component because any face-to-face interaction in the classroom could easily lead to a conversation about face-to-face instructor persona versus online instructor persona, something that would move my study in a different direction. I want to focus on professors' persona experiences in the immersive virtual environment. Participants will have taught the course/s at a college or university in the United States or abroad. I do not want to limit my study to certain locations, years at an institution, or full-time/part-time status because doing so would limit the valuable information I could glean concerning faculty persona in an immersive virtual environment. I plan to use the Second Life studies I have accumulated to find potential participants for my study because I want participants to know that I am already familiar with some aspect of their experiences in a virtual world.

b)

State the age range, gender, and ethnic background.

I plan to conduct my study in Second Life, and my list of potential participants includes both males and females. However, I have not met my participants outside of the virtual environment, so I cannot speak to their age ranges, other than the fact that they are adults, or ethnic backgrounds. As I verify participants' institutions and email addresses, the fact that they are employed as faculty will confirm that they are adults. However, I may not be able to confirm ethnic background, and I do not plan to ask any questions about ethnic background (or gender for that matter) in my study.

c)

State the number and rationale for involvement of potentially vulnerable subjects to be entered into the study, including minors, pregnant women, economically and educationally disadvantaged, decisionally impaired, and homeless people. Specify the measures being taken to minimize the risks and the chance of harm to the potentially vulnerable subjects.

I do not plan to involve potentially vulnerable participants in my study.

d)

If women, minorities, or minors are not included, a clear compelling rationale must be provided.

Minors are not included in my study because they do not serve as professors at two-year institutions or four-year institutions.

e)

State the number, if any, of subjects who are laboratory personnel, employees, and/or students.

They should render the same written informed consent. If compensation is allowed, they should also receive it. (Please see University policy at <http://www.keyusa.com/IRB.htm>).

All 10 of my participants will be employees (faculty/instructors) at two- or four-year institutions in the US or abroad.

f)

Describe how potential subjects will be identified for recruitment (e.g., chart review, referral from individual's treating physician, those individuals answering an ad). Describe how subjects will be recruited and how they will initially learn about the research, e.g., clinics, advertising (attach recruitment materials in Section #11 (Attachments)). You may not contact potential subjects prior to IRB approval.

I will select participants from the Second Life articles and studies I used in chapters 1 through 3 of my dissertation. My reference list is where all of the studies and articles are listed, and I typed out a separate list (based on the reference list) of the names and institutions of professors from

those articles/studies who teach or have taught in Second Life. I also added email addresses, if that information was listed in the article or study. I chose to select participants from works I used in my study because I want the participants to know that I am familiar with their work and did not just randomly select them in order to get a large number of participants. Potential participants will learn about my study in an email I plan to compose telling them about my research topic and asking them to participate. Please see the example below:

Dr./Ms./Mr. ...:

My name is Stephanie J. Blackmon, and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education Administration at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, AL. I am currently working on my dissertation, and my topic is faculty perspectives of faculty persona in virtual worlds. My study will be qualitative, a hermeneutic phenomenology, and I plan to conduct three interviews with study participants on persona, persona construction, and persona interaction. I read your study/work on [insert professor's paper topic here] in Second Life, and I would like to know more about your experience with persona in the immersive virtual world. Would you be willing to participate in my study? Thank you for your time.

Best,

Stephanie J. Blackmon

I will email informed consent forms to participants, and I will have participants return the signed consent forms via email to my personal email account. I am the only person with access to my email account.

g)

Describe your recruitment procedures. Attach advertisements, flyers, etc., in Section #11 (Attachments).

Potential participants will learn about my study in an email I plan to compose telling them about my research topic and asking them to participate. Please see the example below:

Dr./Ms./Mr. ...:

My name is Stephanie J. Blackmon, and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education Administration at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, AL. I am currently working on my dissertation, and my topic is faculty perspectives of faculty persona in virtual worlds. My study will be qualitative, a hermeneutic phenomenology, and I plan to conduct three interviews with study participants on persona, persona construction, and persona interaction. I read your study/work on [insert professor's paper topic here] in Second Life, and I would like to know more about your experience with persona in the immersive virtual world. Would you be willing to participate in my study? Thank you for your time.

Best,

Stephanie J. Blackmon

h)

Payment. Explain the amount and schedule of payment, if any, that will be paid for participation in the study. Include provisions for prorating payment.

I will not pay study participants

i)

Estimate the probable duration of the entire study as well as an estimate of the total time each subject is to be involved and data about the subject is to be collected (e.g., This is a 2 year study).

This is an 18-month study (approximately), with the data collection/interview portion of the study ranging from 4-6 months. Each subject will be involved in my study for three hours, three

one-hour interviews with a different day set aside for each interview. I will collect interview data about professors' perspectives of faculty persona in the virtual environment.

5. Risks

HHS Regulations define a subject at risk as follows: "...any individual who may be exposed to the possibility of injury, including physical, psychological, or social injury, as a consequence of participation as a subject in any research, development, or related activity which departs from the application of those accepted methods necessary to meet his needs, or which increases the ordinary risks of daily life, including the recognized risks inherent in a chosen occupation or field of service."

If audio/video taping will be used, state if it could increase potential risk to subject's confidentiality.

a)

For the following categories, include an estimate of the potential risk.

Physical well-being.

None

Psychological well-being.

None

Political well-being.

None

Economic well-being.

None

Social well-being.

None

b)

In case of overseas research, describe qualifications/preparations that enable you to estimate and minimize risks to subjects.

Although my study may involve virtual chat sessions with professors who teach abroad, I am prepared to conduct those interviews from the United States using the same medium (Second Life) for professors in the US and overseas. Because the same conditions apply to professors in the US (as noted above) and abroad, for the purposes of my study, the risks should be minimal.

c)

Discuss plans for ensuring necessary medical or professional intervention in the event of a distressed subject.

Although I do not anticipate the need for medical or professional intervention for a distressed subject during my virtual interview, participants are free to stop participating in my study at any time.

6. Benefits

a)

Describe the potential benefit(s) to be gained by the subjects or by the acquisition of important knowledge which may benefit future subjects, etc.

Participants in my study may benefit from my study because their experiences will provide insight into professors' perspectives on faculty persona in the virtual environment. The completed study will allow professors to learn from the comments of others in the study. Also, all of the participants' contributions will help other professors, researchers, students, and administrators learn more about an important aspect of professors' lived experiences in the immersive virtual world. More and more faculty are being asked to teach online and use innovative tools to deliver courses and course content. Professors' participation in my study will add to the conversation about one of those tools, the immersive virtual environment--a great benefit to higher education.

7. Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality

a)

Describe procedures protecting the privacy of the subjects and for maintaining confidentiality of data, as required by federal regulations, if applicable.

Emails and informed consent forms containing professors' identities will be kept on my personal computer and only viewed by me. I am the only person with access to my password-protected computer. I plan to give professors pseudonyms in my study, and I will not mention participants' institutions by name.

b)

If information derived from the study will be provided to the subject's personal physician, a government agency, or any other person or group, describe to whom the information will be given and the nature of the information.

I plan to use the data from the interviews in my study. Although participants will have pseudonyms, their comments will be visible to anyone who reads my study. Participants' comments will also be in Second Life, but again, participants' use of Second Life to teach classes implies that they understand the fact that their chat comments are in the private chat log listed under my username and their usernames. The Second Life terms also indicate that Linden Labs, Second Life's parent company, has access to all information sent using their servers (this includes private chat communications).

c)
Specify where and under what conditions study data will be kept, how samples will be labeled, who has access to data, and what will be available to whom.

The data will be kept on my personal computer for one year and will only be available to me. The data will also be available in my personal chat log on Second Life and the personal chat log of the participant. These logs are not accessible to the general population in Second Life, but anything in Second Life (course information, usernames, private chat logs) is visible to Linden Labs (Second Life's parent company), as all of the information is delivered via their servers. However, this stipulation is stated in the Second Life terms of use.

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FOR FACULTY PERSPECTIVES OF
FACULTY PERSONA IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

Office for Research
Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
R E S E A R C H

July 16, 2012

Stephanie Blackmon
Dept. of Higher Ed. Admin.
College of Education
Box 870231

Re: IRB#: 12-OR-241 "Faculty Perspectives of Faculty Persona in a
Virtual World"

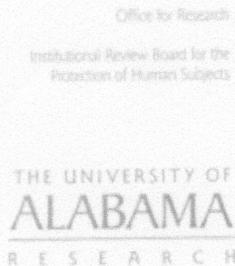
Dear Ms. Blackmon:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has reviewed the
revision to your previously approved expedited protocol. The board has
approved the change in your protocol.

Please remember that your approval period expires one year from the date
of your original approval, 7/9/2012 not the date of this revision approval.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this
proposal, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.



July 9, 2012

Stephanie Blackmon
Dept. of Higher Ed. Admin.
College of Education
Box 870231

Re: IRB#: 12-OR-241 "Faculty Perspectives of Faculty Persona in a Virtual World"

Dear Ms. Blackmon:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on July 8, 2013. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Study

Study Title: Faculty Perspectives of Faculty Persona in a Virtual World

Principal Researcher: Stephanie J. Blackmon

Institution: University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Claire Major, cmajor@bamaed.ua.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study on faculty perspectives of faculty persona in Second Life. This study is called Faculty Perspectives of Faculty Persona in a Virtual World. The study is being done by Stephanie J. Blackmon, a doctoral student at the University of Alabama. Ms. Blackmon is being supervised by Dr. Claire Major, a professor of higher education administration at the University of Alabama.

What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?

This study is being done to examine the lived experiences of faculty who teach or have taught in Second Life and their perspectives on faculty persona in the immersive virtual environment.

Why is this study important or useful?

The knowledge from my study is useful because participants will provide insight into professors' perspectives on faculty persona in the virtual environment. The completed study will allow professors to learn from the comments of others in the study. Also, participants' contributions will help other professors, researchers, students, and administrators learn more about an important aspect of professors' lived experiences in the immersive virtual world. More and more faculty are being asked to teach online and use innovative tools to deliver courses and

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA, IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 7/9/12
EXPIRATION DATE: 7/8/2013

course content. My study will add to the conversation about one of those tools, the immersive virtual environment.

Why have I been asked to be in this study?

You have been asked to be in this study because you are a higher education professor who has used Second Life to deliver a course or has used Second Life to interact with students as a part of a completely online course. [*For the purposes of this study, a completely online course is one where at least 80 percent of the course is delivered completely online and there are typically no face-to-face class meetings (Allen & Seaman, Class Differences: Online Education in the United States, 2010)]

How many people will be in this study?

About nine other people will participate in this study.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in three separate, semi-structured, individual interviews via the private chat function in Second Life.

How much time will I spend being in this study?

I will conduct three separate interviews with you, and the interviews will last for one hour each. If any clarification questions arise after the third interview, I may ask follow-up questions. Those questions should only take about five minutes, total.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

You will not be compensated for being in this study.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 7/9/12
EXPIRATION DATE: 7/8/2013

Little or no risk is foreseen for your participation in this study.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?

There are no direct benefits to you.

What are the benefits to society?

This study will help higher education professors, administrators, students, and virtual world designers understand professors' experiences with persona in the immersive virtual world.

How will my privacy be protected?

The interview data will be saved under your username in Second Life, so you can review it at any time. Second Life (parent company Linden Labs) may automatically save the text as well, as noted in their terms of use. You may choose not to answer some or all of the questions, and you may stop participating in the study at any time. Your username will be visible in the private chat portion of Second Life, which means that your responses will be associated with your username. Your participation in this interview via Second Life indicates that you understand and agree to the privacy policies and terms of use for the service. According to the 2010 terms of service for Second Life, Linden Labs has the "non-exclusive, worldwide, royalty-free, sublicenseable, and transferable license to use, reproduce, distribute, prepare derivative works of, display, and perform" content that is uploaded, published, or submitted "to or through" their servers. Because private chats are sent through the Linden Labs servers, please be aware that "you hereby automatically grant Linden Lab a non-exclusive, worldwide, royalty-free, sublicenseable, and transferable license to use, reproduce, distribute, prepare derivative works of, display, and perform" the information you submit "solely for the purposes of providing and promoting the Service" (Linden Labs, 2010). The link for the terms of use and privacy policy are as follows:

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EXPIRATION DATE: 7/8/2013

terms of use- <http://secondlife.com/corporate/tos.php?lang=en-US> and privacy policy-
<http://secondlife.com/corporate/privacy.php> .

How will my confidentiality be protected?

I will keep the interview data, consent form, and email correspondence on my password-protected computer for one year, and after one year, I will delete the data. I am the only person with access to my personal computer. I will provide you with a pseudonym in my study. Also, I will not include the name of your institution in my study.

What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?

The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary; it is your free choice. You can refuse to participate in this study. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board ("the IRB") is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Whom do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call the investigator, Stephanie J. Blackmon, at 205-908-3304, or email her at sjblackmon@crimson.ua.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

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 EXPIRATION DATE: 7/8/2013

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email the Research Compliance office at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website, or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in this study. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

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