A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE
AND SECOND LIFE

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ABSTRACT

A Brief Analysis of Presentation of Self in Everyday Life and Second Life

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As a result of the rapid advancement of internet today, millions of people are spending a considerable amount of time in virtual environments created via computer technologies. This research has tried to explore, if any, the effects of spending time in virtual environments on the personal relations of the persons in real life. Interactions of the people in the virtual environment, which is Second Life, was studied based on Goffman's Presentation of Self Theory. Within the scope of this research, the author registered in secondlife.com and contacted people who spend considerable time in this medium and conducted personal interviews with the Second Life users in real life as well as in virtual life.

Keywords: Internet, Self, Virtual Life, Second Life

ÖZ

Günlük Hayatta ve "Second Life" Adlı İnternet Platformunda Kendilik Sunumunun Kısa Bir İncelemesi

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Günümüzde internet teknolojilerinin çok hızlı bir şekilde gelişmesi sayesinde milyonlarca insan bilgisayarlar vasıtasıyla yaratılan sanal ortamlarda önemli ölçüde zaman geçirmektedir. Bu araştırma kapsamında sanal ortamlarda zaman geçirmenin gerçek hayatta kişisel ilişkiler üstündeki etkilerinin olup olmadığı araştırılmış ve incelenmiştir. Bu araştırma kapsamında, Goffman'ın kendiliğin sunumu teorisinden hareketle dünyanın en popüler sanal ortamı olan secondlife.com'daki üyeler arasındaki kişisel ilişkiler incelenmiştir. Bu çalışmanın yazarı, şahsen secondlife.com sitesine üye olmuş ve bu ortamda çok fazla zaman geçiren kişilerle hem secondlife.com üzerinden hem de ulaşabildiği avatarların gerçek hayattaki kimlikleri ile yüz yüze olmak üzere iletişime geçmiş ve görüşmeler yapmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnternet, Kendilik, Sanal Yaşam, Second Life

To My Family

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to Erving Goffman, people generally would like to create an image, which would appeal to the people they are in interaction with. Considering that people already interact with each other in everyday life, technology, which keeps developing, provides them with other stages where they might interact.

Today, millions of people establish a second life via internet, mainly at the famous internet platform, www.secondlife.com. Real people create new lives, identities, jobs, environments and even sexes in a virtual world. While creating new identities in a new world, people use avatars. By creating avatars, which might be more beautiful / handsome, younger and fitter, users of this platform try to create an image, which could totally be different than their real selves. These online platforms can also be taken as possible arenas for social research, and they provide an important knowledge outlet in terms of identity formation and social interaction dynamics. This study focuses on the presentation of self on the virtual platform Second Life, based on the framework of Erving Goffman. Creating a new identity and playing a role and the reasons are worth studying from the point of Erving Goffman's well-known theory: The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life as it provides a sound basis for the analysis of social interactions and identity formation.

The main two components of the study were the gathering of data and the analysis of this data in comparison with key concepts from Goffman's theory 'Presentation of Self in Everyday Life'. To facilitate this, a method of gathering personal experience on the platform, followed by a series of interviews with other users was employed. Erving Goffman's theory was thoroughly discussed in the chapters related to literature review, and key concepts that were deemed applicable to Secondlife.com were identified. The conclusion chapter made use of these previously identified concepts to analyze the results gathered from the in-world experience.

*Based on the dramaturgy of Goffman, the second lives established by real people in a virtual environment via avatars and their reasons behind these lives will be the focus of this paper. For this research, the "second lives" established by real people will be considered as **front stage** and their "real lives" (off-line) will be taken as the **back stage.** These two stages will be compared in terms of "physical features", "economic aspects" and "roles" and the reasons for the need to establish a second life will be sought.*

The paper begins with an overview of existing literature on virtual environments and identity formation on these platforms. Throughout this research, first of all secondary resources have been used. The literature on self-presentation, hyper-reality, cyberspace and avatar has been reviewed. As is the case in social sciences, the fundamental component of the study is the academic framework as well as the descriptions of critical notions in order to generate a healthier grasp of the subject and the deliberations on it. Hence, in the first chapter, the main focus is given to the descriptions of relevant vital concepts and academic approaches towards the incident of developing alternative lives over the Internet. In this context, the initial terms to be covered are "Hyperreality" and "Cyberspace". Although the mentioned concepts are frequently used interchangeably, they have features that strongly distinguish one from another. These are explored in detail based on literature by prominent experts in the field.

The first chapter also focused specifically on the theory 'Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' by Erving Goffman. The section provided an introduction to the work of Goffman and clarified key concepts that form the basis of this research paper. Erving Goffman's main point in his theory is the problem "how do people behave/act in their social interactions with others?" Here, in order to answer this question with a framework, he takes analogies and terminologies from the performance arts, leading to his methodology, named as dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959, p. 37). The basic hypothesis he offered is that people have an image of their self, which they would love

to convey to the other people; they like to show a self in a special way (performing) to the others, sometimes in order to have a positive first impression, or maintain a social interaction etc. Thus, they in a way act according to their role (the self they would like to present) to their audience (Goffman, 1959, p.41).

Throughout his theory, Goffman continues playing with his analogy, in order to explain the social interaction with the terminology he borrowed from the performance arts. Among these terminologies, the most important ones are related to the distinction between stages, as he had already made the assumption that individuals, mainly being a part of a team, act as performers to their audience; and in order to put this hypothesis into a context, it is important to figure out where the performing stage starts and ends (Goffman, 1959 p. 52).

The performing stage (in Goffman's terms: the front stage) is where the acting begins and the performers make a distinction between their selves and the ones who they would introduce it, to the audiences. In this study, front stage is taken as the secondlife.com. . The backstage is the opposite, where the performers are allowed to stop acting and where no audience is allowed (Goffman, 1959 p. 63). In this research, real life is taken as the back stage. This is where users of secondlife.com stop acting. However, real life i.e. back stage is vital since the reasons for acting in front stage (secondlife.com) lie here. Goffman elaborates his framework with introducing different roles from teams, the performers and the audiences. Here comes another assumption for his framework; while conveying their selves to others, people hide some information which would be incompatible with their presented selves from their audiences, which he terms as "the secrets" (Goffman, 1959 p. 74). This study also explores the secrets of secondlife.com users while trying to find out the reasons why they have established a second virtual life.

"Impression management" is one of the fundamental concepts in Goffman's theory and this concept is also important for this study since it is closely related to the interview questions. Goffman credits the possibility that the performers might feel

difficulty in staying in the role, so that they make use of "defensive" and "protective" attributes and practices, that would minimize the risk of unmeant gestures, inopportune intrusions and faux pas [gaffes, boners] (Goffman, 1959 p. 103).

For the case study, which is presented in the second chapter, the researcher started to collect empirical evidence by conducting interviews with the residents of secondlife.com via the Internet. Interviews were conducted with 15 Second Life users. The residents were asked questions aiming to reveal the reasons for establishing a second life for the purpose of a new self-presentation. The questions aimed a comparative analysis and focused on the differences between the real life and the virtual life. The questions were grouped into three.

The first group of the questions was on the physical features of the secondlife.com users. Under this group of questions, interviewees were first asked on their skin colours, heights and weights both in their real lives and virtual lives. According to Goffman, acting of people in front stage has certain limits. For instance, they might succeed in creating a happier, richer and more successful image but they cannot change their physical features and an Afro-American cannot change his/her skin colour and/or height. However, when the secondlife.com is taken as a new front stage, residents of this platform can create a totally new image, which they cannot do in their real lives. To illustrate, an overweight and short Asian user can create a taller, fitter and European looking avatar and can satisfy his desires.

Once the interviewees were asked about their skin colour, height and weight in their real lives, then they were asked questions on the physical features of their avatars. When radical differences were observed between their real and virtual physical features, they were asked questions on the reasons.

The second group of the questions were on the real and virtual economic aspects of the secondlife.com residents. The interviewees were first asked on their monthly incomes, the cities where they lived, the types of the houses they lived in and the

brands of the cars they drove in their real lives. Goffman puts forward that people, while trying to create a new image, may exaggerate their real incomes and want to create a wealthier image. To illustrate, he gives the example of middle income American housewives, who try to look as if they have better living standards while talking to their peers. Accordingly, once the interviewees were asked the questions on their economic aspects in their real lives, they then were asked their monthly incomes, the cities they lived in, the type of the house they had and their cars. If there were differences between their real and virtual economic aspects, they were asked for the reasons and the reasons were checked against the assumptions of Goffman's theory.

The last group of the comparative questions focused on the roles both in real and virtual lives of the interviewees. The first round of the questions consisted of the real sexes, ages, jobs and marital status of the users in their real lives. This group of questions was a bit different than the two previous sets of questions. That is, moving from Goffman's assumption, sex is like a racial feature, about which people cannot create different images excluding today's surgical miracles. Based on Goffman's assumptions a person can look happier or wealthier without making considerable effort but cannot change his/her racial features and sex. In this study, race and sex can be taken as features, about which a new image can be created without exerting great effort. Secondlife.com gives the users the opportunity of creating a new sex even including the opportunity of creating non-human objects like vampires. So, just as in the case of skin colour secondlife.com is a new front stage without limits passing beyond the assumptions of Goffman. Still moving from "Presentation of Self" theory, people may not tell some truth about their real ages, jobs and marital status to create an image appealing to their counterparts in real life. However, in secondlife.com, users have choices without limits to create an avatar to represent themselves with a new sex, age, job and marital status. Thus, the answers of the comparative questions were once again analysed and if there is any, the reasons of the differences between real and virtual lives were explored.

After the critical aspects are handled in the first two chapters, the third chapter focuses on the examination of www.secondlife.com, the most fashionable second life medium. The chapter begins with a literature review where important studies are presented with relation to important concepts. In the third chapter, the past and statistical context of this website is analysed. Second Life™ was introduced in the year 2003 by Linden Lab and is among the most well-liked spaces of social networking in the first place unlike others such as Sim City and Farmville. Second Life is a computer generated land area which takes in a few continents and numerous islands (Business Week, 2006). Individuals or companies can purchase land on the main lands or may prefer to buy an islands for more confidentiality or more prestige. There is a currency used in this virtual world, which is Linden Dollars. Linden Dollars can be changed into US Dollars by an exchange rate of 300 to one (Wagner, 2013). The individuals using Second Life are usually named as residents. Residents can make their own articles in the virtual world by combining several simple geometric shapes which are named as prims (short for primitives). There is a dynamic economic structure which is stimulated by the trading of these ornamented articles in several figures including garments, hair, autos, and etc (Business Week, 2006).

In the last section of the chapter, for getting a better grasp of the subject, a subscription to the website was made and the experience was tested personally and the concept of self-presentation in virtual world and real life were compared. To this end, a case study was conducted. This involved the research background, research question and research outline and methodology to be used in data gathering and analysis. Throughout the personal experience in www.secondlife.com, interviews were conducted and the users of secondlife.com were asked questions on their physical features, economic conditions and roles. The questions addressed both the real lives and virtual lives of users. Based on the answers to the questions, the presentation of self in both of the worlds was compared and the reasons were explored. In the second part of the chapter, there is a presentation of the study outcomes associating them to the addressed questions and a number of case records forming the explicit involvement of certain users. In the last part of the chapter, there is a debate on the study outcomes,

emphasises on connotations to academic models of identity and suggestions for further studies like Open Sim, which many academic Second Life users are currently exploring, an open source spin off from Second Life; and perhaps this is where the future lies. As the researcher's background as a Second Life user is taken into consideration, there is also a concise reflective journal demonstrating the consequences on the research process as well as translation of the findings.

The fourth chapter, which is also the analysis chapter of this study, deals with the comparison of virtual life (front stage) and the actual lives (backstage) of the users in terms of physical features, economic aspects and roles. Data gathered from the interviews was arranged analytically and analysed with respect to Goffman's concepts related to the presentation of self in social interactions.

The conclusion to the study builds on the literature, Goffman's theory and results gathered during the case study to discuss to what extent Goffman's framework is applicable to social interactions and avatar formation on Secondlife.com. Based on the similarities and differences among the case study results and assumptions on Goffman, a dramaturgical method is applied to virtual environments. Contributions to the field as well as limitations are also discussed.

CHAPTER II
KEY CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As is the case in social sciences, the essential element is the theoretical background for the study and the definitions of the key concepts for a better understanding of the topic and the discussions. Thus, this chapter mainly focuses on the definitions of the related key concepts and related theoretical approaches to the phenomenon of second lives in virtual worlds. Within this scope, the first concept to be dealt with will be "Hyperreality". Then, definition of "Cyberspace" and "Avatar" are elaborated. Later, the next section of the chapter is dedicated to Goffman's "Presentation of Self in Everyday Life".

A.   Definition of Key Concepts

i.   Definition of Hyperreality

Hyperreality is an expression that is employed in semiotic studies and postmodern approach in order to define a failure of being aware of the difference between reality and simulation (Baudrillard, 1994). This is particularly the case in postmodern communities with high technologies. Hyperreality is considered as a state of being that the lines between fact and imaginary is blurred and it is not possible to identify the borders between reality and imagination (Eco,1986). This state of being enables the intermixing of corporeal reality with virtual reality (VR) as well as human intelligence with artificial intelligence (AI). In such a state, people may find themselves more compatible and occupied with the virtual world than the corporeal world in reality because of a number of reasons. Jean Baudrillard, Albert Borgmann, Daniel J. Boorstin, Neil Postman and Umberto Eco are among the most acknowledged academics on hyperreality (Boorstin, 1992).

The notion of hyperreality in postmodern semiotics has been controversially invented by Jean Baudrillard in his work, Simulacra and Simulation. The scholar explains

hyperreality as the invention through mock-ups of real world or matter with no origin. In this sense, it reflects without an original source to reflect. According to Baudrillard, hyperreality is more than failing to differentiate or complicating the real fact with the replica created to reflect it (Baudrillard, 1994). Hence, it entails the generation of a sign or a group of signs that essentially symbolize a thing that is not present, as in the case of Santa Claus. In particular, the scholar argues that the real world that people live in is substituted by a virtual copy of it and people look for only fake motivation. Baudrillard gets inspired by the work of Jorge Luis Borges "On Exactitude in Science", and Borges gets inspired by Lewis Carroll in the illustration of a community of which engineers develop a map in such detail that it involves every little thing that it is intended to show. As the empire weakens, the map loses the details to show a landscape (Lisewski, 2006). There is not the real world and the illustration of it left on the map; only the hyperreal remains. The hyperreality perspective of Baudrillard was under the strong impact of semiotic studies, byphenomenology and Marshall McLuhan(Eco,1986).

Umberto Eco, who is an Italian scholar, discovers the hyperreality concept more in depth as he argues that the battle of hyperreality is longing for reality. When it tries to accomplish this longing, it aims to engineer a fake reality that will be utilised like real existence. Umberto Eco and the representatives of post-structuralist approach with a relationship with the modern Western civilization would suggest that the main principles of the existing cultures are developed upon longing and specific systems of presentation.

In this study, hyperreality is taken as the environment in the Second Life. Some residents of the Second Life or other similar virtual platforms may sometimes spend too much time in virtual environment. As a result of spending too much time in a virtual environment the border lines between the virtual world and physical world may sometimes blur.

ii.   Definition of Cyberspace

Cyberspace is a term that was first used in the 1980s in the science fiction literature. Afterwards, it has been accepted by parties including computer specialists and people after pleasurable time rapidly and extensively (Pollack, 1989). It has turned into a domestic expression by the 1990s. Throughout this time interval, the employment of the Internet, online interaction and networking have altogether continued to expand and the "cyberspace" expression has become a term to stand for a number of new concepts and events that maintained growing (Berghel, 1996).

The derivation of the word cyberspace is from cybernetics, which originates from the Ancient Greek word kybernētēs, representing expressions such as wheelman, pilot, and rudder. It was proposed by Norbert Wiener for his ground-breaking study on control science and electronic communication (Gibson, 1984).

Through this worldwide set of connections, people can do several things such as developing communication, making conversations, offering social backing, performing trade, managing activities, generating imaginative channels, getting involved with political debates, playing games and etc. These people are occasionally called as cybernauts. The cyberspace expression has turned into a traditional way of defining any substance that is related with the Internet and the varied internet culture (Strate, 1999).

Chip Morningstar and F. Randall Farmer suggest that cyberspace is described by the social communications being engaged with more than the technical functioning of it. According to the scholars, the functional means of a cyberspace is an expansion of the interaction network among people in the real world (Pollack, 1989). The main feature of cyberspace is the fact that it provides a setting which is developed by several partakers with the competence to influence and concern one another. They develop this idea based on their examination that humans are after wealth, involvedness, and strength in an unreal world. Within the perspective of this study, cyberspace is

considered directly as the www.secondlife.com, which is a platform that millions of inhabitants run a second life and interact with one another (Gibson, 1984).

iii. Definition of Avatar

The term "avatar" comes from Hinduism. In Hinduism, avatar represents the "descent" of a divine being in an earthly appearance. In India, divine beings (deities) are widely considered as free of a form. They are also believed to be competent of demonstrating themselves in which appearance they please (Vivekjivanda, 2010).

It was Chip Morningstar who first made use of the expression "avatar" for the illustration of the user on the screen in 1985 when he created "Habitat", the digital role-playing game of Lucas Film. In the same year, Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar was also introduced, yet the expression was used in a different meaning referring to the religious connotation. In this game, the player's ultimate objective is to turn into an "Avatar" (Hawley, 2006). After these, the Ultima series games made use of the expression as in the Habitat game as an illustration of the user on screen and offered modifying options for the avatars in Habitat-style. A further example for the usage of the expression is the role playing game Shadowrun (1989).

In spite of the fact that avatars have been used extensively, the internet forums that made use of them at the first place are not identified. The primitive forums did not have avatars as a standard element and avatars were used in unauthorized connectors to the computer prior to being made a given part of the forum. In internet forums, the avatars serve the aim of illustrating users and their conducts, individualizing their inputs to the discussion. They may also be used to demonstrate the varying components of the users' character, attitudes, attractions or social status within the forum platform (Lutgendorf, 2007).

Avatars may also be animated through a composition of a series of several visuals that are played over and over again. When these kinds of animated avatars are the case,

the repetition number and the time this continues is not standard and may differ remarkably. In alternative avatar systems, a pixelised illustration of an individual or a living organism, which can be changed later depending on the desires of the user, is used (Rukmani, 1970). Second Life, WeeWorld, Gaia Online, Frenzoo or Meez are among these kinds of platforms. Besides, further avatar systems, in which the illustration of a user is made by making use of the individual's face with tailored features and environments. Trutoon is an example for this kind of avatar systems. In this study avatars represent the virtual images created by the real users, which they can shape as they wish. In Second Life, real users may shape their avatars as they wish and they can even sometimes choose an object to represent themselves in this virtual environment.

iv. Erving Goffman: Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

An influential study on the subject of the illustration of individuals to other people was conducted by Goffman (1959). Goffman, following Park preceding him (1959, p.30), makes use of the linguistics of the expression "persona" to develop a foundation for a higher figure of speech to define all communication as a performance (front stage and back stage). Goffman (1959) accepts the boundaries of this figure of speech; however, he argues that individuals deliberately plan to release specific articulations during communication, which is called as impression management. They do this for the purpose of establishing special impersonations in the people they are in contact with (Goffman, 1959). Afterwards, the social platform turns into a stage where several performances get in contact with each other and other individuals act as spectators of these characters, named as personae.

There are particular rules and principles governing these performances. As an instance, in their first meeting with other users, the community has an organization based on the standard that every individual who has particular features is ethically entitled to expect from others to be valued and behaved towards in a proper manner (Goffman 1959, p. 24). This generates a description of the given state of being for all users engaged. "Definitional disruptions", which are the faults in the performances,

are to be concealed by the users who have conducted them. In this instance, they are referred to as "protective practices" or "tact" (Goffman, 1959, p.25). The definitional disruptions, which are mentioned above, are what "losing face" refers to (Goffman, 1959, p.9) and preventing from these disruptions is called as the practice of "maintaining face" (Goffman, 1959, p.5). Retrieving from them is the act called "saving face" (Goffman, 1959, p.39). "Creating a scene" is the description of the situation in which the users who should be in dramatic collaboration escape from their designated performances (Goffman, 1959, p.205).

According to Goffman (1959, p.28), despite the fact that the roles are accepted falsely and users may not have faith in them at the first place, they can adopt and integrate these roles to their personalities. In the view of the author, as long as the illustrations in the virtual world are the reflection of the impression that people design for themselves, it means that they are what the users aspire to become and the illustration represents the personalities of individuals more accurately than their real world characters. As a result, the perception of the role by individuals turns into a second character and an essential component of their identity (Goffman, 1959, p.30). This assumption put forward by Goffman totally fits with the assumption that virtual lives of real people may sometimes be an integral part of them.

The perception of Goffman regarding communications possesses both optimistic and pessimistic ideas. He is pessimistic because he considers individuals in a continuous degree of deception and adequately unsure of themselves as they are concerned about which impression they can make on others. On the other hand, he is optimistic because he thinks that individuals can endure this continuous degree of performance. Furthermore, the perception of Goffman and Park that the actual self being what individuals illustrate and strive for afterwards is likely to be less correct when compared to the idea of true self being what individuals feel secretly inside and can merely show off in such a situation that their true identities cannot be attached. In the coming parts of this chapter, this connotation is employed. The notion of using perception and formalities in order to endure a collective dramatic conduct and

people's descriptions of a state getting respect belongs to its time more and is less significant currently.

On the other hand, the notion of a persona as an intentional disguise an individual creates and wears for a particular role which is separate from character or individuality, can be a rather beneficial explanation of the separation between the way they mentally visualize themselves and the thing they devise. The allegory of social communications as performance on a stage is considered beneficial. It is something people occasionally perform in order to meet the conditions of the role they undertake. In this sense, most part of Goffman's study is still appropriate.

The role of the facade in creating personality and acting as personae is significant as well. The masks used can frequently be inferred by other individuals. Therefore, the avatars used can be customized as a means to illustrate a certain personality to others while some of them can be deliberately shaped as "body projects" for the purpose of managing this channel of symbolizing personality to the world.

Very similar to the assumptions of Goffman, virtual internet environments provide their users with the limitless opportunity to create new identities, new images. Certain challenges of real life before creating images in real life (sex, racial features etc) do not exist at all in computer generated environments. Users can create avatars of any sex, nationality and origin and shape them as they wish. In general the outlooks of the avatars are different than the real features of users.

Having thoroughly explored the central concepts that are important for the further development of the arguments, the next chapter will focus on existing literature on virtual environments. The chapter will also provide a closer look at the chosen virtual environment for the study: Second Life. Background information and previous studies on Second Life will be given to set the groundwork for the further development of the study. Lastly, the reasons behind having a virtual life will be analysed in light of the existing theoretical framework.

B. Literature Review

As is the case in conducting a research in social sciences, the literature of the related topic has been reviewed. When the literature on Goffman's "Self Presentation Theory", which is affiliated with virtual worlds it has been found out that the number of the studies is too limited. Despite the fact that the number of the studies on virtual worlds is numerous, the number of the studies directly focusing on Goffman's "Self Presentation Theory" and its reflections in Second Life is rare. And this shows that this study is an original one and that it is promising for further research. The following paragraphs will briefly reflect the findings of the literature review. Firstly, some major studies conducted in the field of virtual worlds will be touched upon and through the end of the section the studies dealing with both virtual worlds and "Self Presentation Theory" will be dealt with.

i. Educational Use of Virtual Platforms

A vast amount of existing literature on virtual platforms in general, and Second Life in particular, focus on the possible uses of these platforms as an educational tool. Even though this discussion is not directly related to the research question at hand, a selection of studies that might be of potential importance were nevertheless analyzed. The importance of these studies also lie in their discussion of the virtual environments and the experience of the individual when in such an environment. In that sense, they can indirectly be connected to the discussion of the person- avatar relationship, which is one of the key questions in this paper.

One of the studies focusing on the virtual environments was conducted by Prude (2013). He starts his research by asking "How much do online platforms really deliver, where they are promoted as providing numerous opportunities for college and university online education?" This is an evaluation of the use of Second Life in an Asian religions course, where contribution is made to the escalating trend in literature focusing on the incorporation of online virtual worlds into higher education (Prude M. A., 2013). The evaluation touches on the cons and pros of teaching in Second Life and

puts forth options for Asian-inspired Second Life locations that may be beneficial throughout the course. It is suggested that, provided the instructor commits him/herself to the unique possibilities offered by Second Life, it can provide a fresh alternative for online Asian content courses. Such possibilities include but not limited to synchronous communication, virtual world fieldtrips, animations, and the opportunity to join courses with participation of guest lecturers as well experiencing international participation (Prude, M. A., 2013)

The purpose of another study by Cook (2011) is to suggest an innovative educational strategy example for family nurse practitioner (FNP) students, where a theoretical framework for the design and evaluation of a virtual world simulation was used. The sources of data were chosen from a primary care paediatric clinic that was developed for FNP students in Second Life. The purpose for the clinic is to provide additional experiences in clinical practice sites (Cook M., J., 2011). A case-based interactive format was used in the simulation; and the constructivist learning theory and experiential learning principles comprise the grounds for the educational strategy. Report prepared for faculty and FNP students initial prototype testing was duly reported.

The results of the study show that simulations developed for virtual worlds may have the ability to provide a safe environment for students to practice clinical decision making for paediatric patients. On the other hand, it should be noted that some essentials, namely, attention to the context, pedagogy, learner, and the capabilities of the technology are required to be met in order to provide a quality educational experience (Cook M., J., 2011). In terms of practice arguments, it may be stated that quality educational experiences in a virtual world may be included in FNP students training, provided a theoretical context is drawn and students are guided by such context.

The study of Chien et al. (2013) aims to develop a virtual curriculum demonstration, with the overall purpose is to understand graduate students' perceptions, self-

reflections, self-understanding and educational growth in education with regard to teaching and learning in a virtual interdisciplinary curriculum. The study integrates Second Life and the currere approach to reach its aims and fulfil its purpose (Chien et al., 2013). Data relating to the study were obtained in 2011, from a total of 31 subjects at a central Texas public university, in two separate graduate courses. Interpretation of the collected data puts forth the benefits gained from SL exhibitions, on grounds of the four-step currere approach, where the target knowledge of the exhibition allowed the subjects to develop a self-understanding, allowing them for self-mobilization and educational reconstruction (Chien et al., 2013).

According to Girvan C. and Savage T (2011), for implementing and researching unique educational experiences, combination of features in virtual worlds seems to provide fruitful opportunities. A need to define and comprehend the ethical implications of conducting research in these newly developing environments arose with the growing interest and activity from the educational research community, as well as exploration and experimentation of online environments for teaching and learning (Girvan C. and Savage T., 2011). The main focus of this study gather around the ethical concerns with regard to educational research in virtual worlds, while identifying how new ethical debates came to being with regard to informed consent, privacy protection and identity with the advancement of technology (Girvan C. and Savage T., 2011).

The main purpose of De'tienne at al.'s study is to understand the actual uses of the data encountered in Virtual World such as in Second Life and also, the interactive frames constructed in SL meetings and their interrelation with uses of communication media, on grounds of the analysis of ''real'' Second Life meetings data in educational and professional settings (De´tienne et al., 2012). What makes this study different is the branching of the analytical framework used from the combination of two perspectives, namely a third view perspective that finds its grounds on analyses of observational data and a first view perspective that finds its grounds on reports of user with respect to their SL experience (De´tienne et al., 2012). The results of the study reveal and underline the following conclusions: The

boundaries between serious and recreational registers; avatar's expression and attribution of feelings to the person ''behind''; spatial positioning as indicators and constructors of roles and engagement; management of communication fluidity and joint focus; narrowing of communication media used for task focus content; emerging mediation role for management of fractured exchanges.

The purpose of the study BY Wang et al. (2012) is to observe how Chinese students were affected from an experimental English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program in Second Life (SL) with regard to the EFL learning. Quasi-experimental design was used in the study taking an evaluative perspective to the issue, where two students, one from a Chinese and one from an American university in the southeastern United States were included. Results show remarkable effects when the control group and the SL group on EFL measures were compared. Additionally total score showed important gains, where similar results were encountered under several subcomponents between pre-test and post-test. Analysing through use of post study survey, students' blog posting, and interview transcripts also showed that the SL_EFL Program had beneficial results on students' EFL learning (Wang et al., 2012).

In order to provide an important component to the pharmacy curriculum, an elective course at the Rangel College of Pharmacy in pharmacy case studies for second- and third-year Doctor of Pharmacy students was designed in an interactive online environment using Second Life® (SL). The intention was to introduce interactive pharmacy case studies, where the course explored the use of SL for education and training in pharmacy, taking case-based approach (Veronin et al., 2012). For pharmacy students, SL has the ability to promote inquiry-based learning and conceptual understanding, and can potentially develop problem-solving skills. Ten case scenarios were presented that primarily concentrated on drug safety and effective communication with patients, where avatars, reviewed case scenarios in a virtual classroom throughout the sessions. Active-learning activities were carried out where students both individually and in teams, modelled both the roles of pharmacist and patient. SL class participation, activities, assignments, and two formal, essay-type

online exams in Blackboard 9 were base of student performance and learning assessment. Evaluation results revealed beneficial views of content and delivery, where student comments also included an increased appreciation of practical issues in pharmacy practice, attendance flexibility, and an increased ability to concentrate on course content. Weekly active-learning activities showed excellent student participation and performance, which is interpreted into positive performance on subsequent formal assessments. Further, it was observed that students were actively engaged and exposed to topics pertinent to pharmacy practice, which was not covered entirely or sufficiently in the required pharmacy curriculum. Success is seen in the multiple active-learning assignments with respect to increasing students' knowledge, and thus provided additional practice in building the communication skills beneficial for students preparing for experiential clinical rotations (Veronin et al., 2012).

Many unique ethical problems may be born from the use of virtual worlds as platforms for learning and teaching, where some of these problems came to being due to the engagement's nature with these online platforms since the users create an avatar, basically a visual presentation of self, which may enable a sense of embodiment within the online world (Childs et al., 2012). Many of these platforms are social worlds inhabited by communities of users, not specifically assigned to learning and teaching. Thus, learning and teaching activities may resemble more of a field trip than a real classroom experience in public education, and conflict and anxiety between students and this wider community may be consequential. This study investigates various ethical debates introduced with regard to learning and teaching in virtual worlds, and refers to two case studies to portray these issues using comments of students (Childs et al., 2012). The article conveys the author's personal ideas about the mentioned ethical issues; where further reflection and consensus-building for the educational community with regard to the same is acknowledged.

Attention for Second Life (SL) has been increasing in the field of education since it was first made available in 2003, with language educators examining SL as a virtual learning environment where interaction with native speakers is enabled (Wang F. and Shao E., 2012). None of the studies conducted successfully solved or avoided the

practical issues linked to SL, despite SL's position for language learning and teaching was concluded to be positive in most studies. Such practical issues made SL based language learning conceptually applicable but difficult in terms of performance according to these studies. The goal of this research was to support language learning without tackling SL-related problems. By translating English materials from various sources, students subject to the study were selected from an English-as-foreign-language (EFL) class in China and were asked to develop a Chinese version of the Second Life manual. The results of this study suggested that SL acted as a useful platform as a language learning task and an element of motivation (Wang F. and Shao E., 2012).

In all, this category of literature was useful in providing an insight to the workings and possible uses of Second Life. Some analyses that were made in relation to the decision-making processes and experiences of individuals were also important in terms of the avatar- individual relationship that is discussed as part of this paper.

ii. Analysis of Social Behaviour and Self- Expression

Numerous studies on Second Life, focus on the social interactions among users and the way the self is expressed on the platform. This group of studies is of particular importance for this paper, as they make use of different sociological theories and employ a variety of different concepts from existing scholars to discuss and analyze these aspects. This is an excellent starting point for seeing different points of view and comparing them to the preferred framework in this study.

A study by Tawa et al. (2012) focuses on describing a method for collecting and interpreting interpersonal behavioural data in Second Life, which details for the application of a study on social distances were provided, where the concentration is on the social distances between White, Asian and Black participants in the subject Virtual World (Tawa et al., 2012). It is prepared with the aim to provide details for researches that are interested in working with this Virtual World method for collecting and interpreting interpersonal behavioural data. The data collection was performed

through the following steps; a virtual object that contains a computer scripts recording the coordinates of the participants on the Second Life grid at one-second intervals were introduced to the avatars of the participants; participants interacted in a controlled environment in Second Life for 15 minutes, where the interaction was acted out in a social event integrated within the Second Life; a computer algorithm calculated the average social distance between the participants during throughout this 15 minutes, where the computer algorithm was developed solely for this study using R, the statistical analysis program. Following the calculation, average social distance data, classified in form of scores, were aggregated into social distance towards racial groups as one complete group (Tawa et al., 2012). For instance, aggregation was constructed to see social distance towards Whites, Blacks and Asians for each participant. Concentration of the paper is on developing a controlled Second Life environment, adapting the computer script adapted from Yee &Bailenson, 2008, for Second life, calculating social distances with the computer algorithm, and methods for recruiting and conducting study trials (Tawa et al., 2012).

In Lee's (2013) research, sixty students from two fifth-grade elementary school classes were used to find, if any, differences between Second Life participant' self-expressions who show different levels of shyness. Subjects were divided into two groups of 30, where the assignment was performed according to high or low shyness; and each group, high shyness group and low shyness groups, were asked to complete pre- and post-self-expressions tests (Lee S., 2013). It was revealed at the end of the study after completing six weeks of speaking activities in Second Life, that self-expressions scores for subjects in both groups were increased. Increase varied between groups, where low shyness group indicated an increase by 1.00, high shyness group indicated an increase by 3.14 in self-expression scores after the aforementioned speaking activities in Second Life. The results of this study suggest that especially for students with high degrees of shyness, Second Life may be a beneficial environment to improve self-expression (Lee S., 2013).

Internet Revolution brought about new habits in the society, leading individuals to spend most of their time online in virtual worlds engaging in different activities.

Today, there still is a lack of research on the subject of whether virtual activities match our real-world (RW) activities, where no research can be found with regard to interrelations between virtual and RW activities among the pathological and non-pathological users (i.e. PIUs and NPIUs). This study has three aims where the first one targets to provide a step towards remedying this absence and examines the correlations between virtual world (VW) and RW activities among PIUs and NPIUs (Bayraktar F. and Amca H., 2012). The secondary aim looks into the motivations for PIUs and NPIUs with respect to going online and their comparative perceptions of the Internet. The last aim intends to compare virtual and RW activities across gender and age groups. As conclusion of the results obtained from the study, it is observed that correlations between majority of RW and VW activities were high among men and women, among age groups, and among PIUs and NPUs as well. On the other hand, a difference between PIUs and NPIUs revealed itself with regard to perceptions of the Internet and motivations to engage in VW, where the PIUs, in contrast to NPIUs, were observed to go online for gratified functions (Bayraktar F. and Amca H., 2012).

The desire to comprehend how the Habbo Hotel, a company in the virtual World utilize its influence and power through the different agents programmed to take decisions on the behaviour of the users laid the groundwork for this research study, where the aim is to analyse the development of power relations in a virtual world with special focus at the child and teenage market, as well as questioning the main arguments in the field of new forms of communication proposed by other researchers (Buckingham D. and Rodríguez C., 2013). The research also analysed what the users learnt with regard to the type of citizenship emerged from the behaviour rules imposed by Habbo Hotel. The systems of rules that govern the users' capacity to carry out certain actions and prohibit them from others were analysed to observe what young users were learning with respect to utilization of power and the prototype model citizen within the online environment. Following this step, contents of environments where users talk about the reasons why the company had expelled them from Habbo Hotel were analysed. The results show that rules set and performed by the company

leads the online experience to not always be pleasant or fun, democratic, creative, participative or entirely satisfying (Buckingham D. and Rodríguez C., 2013).

The study by Hardey (2008) mainly focuses on how relationships between individuals are established in the online World and how they move to the offline World while examining the online and offline identities of individuals. Internet dating sites experiences of users were examined in order to conduct the subject research (Hardey M., 2008). It has been argued that online interactions may have their roots in the social, bodily and cultural experiences of users, while such interactions are shaped according to the same, taking into consideration the analysis conducted in the context of the individualized sociability of late modernity. It is observed that the building of trust is founded on the very anonymity offered by the online world, establishing offline relationships in contrary to formation of fantasized individuals. It is argued and concluded that comprehending embodied identities and interactions and the effect of cyber space on off-line sociability may be easier if the wider importance of the subject is examined (Hardey M., 2008).

A virtual reality support centre was established in 2009 in Second Life for people with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome. The purpose was to identify whether a virtual reality setting could help diminish the social isolation experienced, although technology presents difficulty to such individuals (Best K., 2013). The results of the study show that the relationship between the organic human body, psychoanalytic projections of the idealized or socially constructed body and technology should be revised taking into account the physiological effects experienced by participants while navigating their Second Life. This study investigates the avatars role' as extensions of users' bodies, in terms of both the social and physiological bodies, by combining phenomenological, cyber feminist and psychoanalytic theory with recent findings in neuroscience (Best K. 2013).

The work by Morgan (2013) shows how the author utilized "Second Life" - the online virtual reality program in a university history class. The ways in which "Second Life"

is used as a student meeting space and for the research of public history-related studies are specifically pointed out. In the article, how the students were expected to use "Second Life" for projects related to a U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum exhibit were described (Morgan E. J., 2013).

A competition between the individual propensity for social interactions in affiliation to sexual appeal and interpersonal touch against climatic, environmental, physical, and cultural constraints have affected the tendency to reveal or cover naked skin, where however, it has not been possible to isolate the human tendency to reveal naked skin on a larger scale on grounds of common nature of these limitations (Lomanowsk A. M. and Guitton M. J., 2012).The study examines spontaneous human skin-covering behaviour not limited by real-world climatic, environmental, and physical variables by using Second Life.

It is revealed by prior studies that participants of virtual environments engage in impression management. This is valid for both in social networking context and when creating and using avatars. However, the subject studies often choose to ask the participants about what leads them to create and use such avatars, their preferences in creation of the same or their priorities in a defined social framework. It may be argued that these direct processes and methodologies may result in biases that avert a possibility to reach an accurate conclusion about creating ideal characteristics embodied in avatars (Thomas A. G., and Johanse M. K., 2012). In light of the above, this study tests the expression of ideal body image during avatar creation using less direct means with reference to Goffman's "Presentation of Self Theory". In this context, female participants were asked to create two different avatars in the Second Life, where the first avatars were creating following the instructions to make the avatar look like the subject herself. For the creation of the second avatars however, restrictions were removed to identify which traits the subjects tend to change in their avatars. Characteristics of the first avatars were used as control, thus to define the participants' focus in changing specific attributes as well the order of creation. Where order of creation was observed to be counterbalance, it was found that the participants

tend to create thinner avatars with lower body mass. The tendency was measured by using a standard body image scale after collection of data, where the generalizability of the results was discussed to provide suggestions for future research (Thomas A. G., and Johanse M. K., 2012).

The ideas of Goffman (1956,1973), which described how people negotiate and validate identities in face-to-face encounters and how 'frames ' within which to evaluate the meaning of encounters are established, have been influential in perception of sociologists and psychologists in terms of person-to-person encounters, Kendon (1988) being one of the said individuals, providing a useful summary of Goffman's ideas on social interaction (Miller H., 1995). Electronic communication (EC) has formed a new range of interaction with a developing etiquette, where despite being limited and less rich compared to interactions with physical encounters, the concept introduces new problems and new opportunities in the presentation of self as well. Possible nature of 'electronic selves ' has been subject to heated discussions for a while now, Stone, 1991 being one of the representatives. The study explores how the presentation of self takes place in personal homepages on the World Wide Web, defined as a technically limited, but rapidly spreading feature of EC. Erving Goffman engaged with studies between the 50s and the early 80s to describe the face-to-face interaction structure and to account for how people's interactions got effected by this structure (Miller H., 1995).

This particular group of literature was especially useful in getting a picture of some other theoretical frameworks and concepts that are frequently used when discussing social aspects of Second Life or other virtual environments. Some studies in particular, which focused on body image, identity formation and the like, were also important for some organising themes that were identified in this study.

iii. Presentation of Self and Identity Formation

Under this group of literature, a variety of research that theoretically discusses identity, the subject and the self were examined with a view to understanding the existing state of literature when it comes to the presentation of self. Some papers, which were loosely connected to this central theme, were also read with a view to understanfing their approach to Second Life.

In a research conducted by Gonzalez et al. (2013) deals with the concept of virtual worlds from the point of Lacan's theory. Lacan proposed a divided subject, contrary to introducing a totalized one. The structure of his presentation is in the interaction with its peers using the argumentative language of Saussure, where this structure of presentation labels what is real, what is imaginary and what is symbolic using the signs (a), (a') and (A) (Gonzalez et al., 2013). Moving from this point, this study suggests while discussing, that establishing virtual issues is currently possible by bearing in mind the virtual worlds' social and psychological effects as well the possibility for the same to decide and execute actions. The interaction between the virtual presentation of, for example Avatar labelled as (A') evolved from the Other (A), is performed with the use of language establishing signified and signifiers. These two terms belong in different worlds, signified in the virtual worlds and signifiers in the real world, where signifiers are said to allow the signified to materialize the Other (A) in the Avatar (A'). Second Life, being a multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORG) with immense traffic, is accepted as a meta verse where 3D virtual worlds are constructed for the participants to create their Avatars by granting traits in their own discretion, providing the virtual character a separate identity (Gonzalez et al., 2013).

The purpose of the study by Parka (2013) is identified as analysing collaborative activities' effects on group identity in a virtual world like Second Life, and in order to fulfil this purpose, events promoting interaction of participants with tools integrated in Second Life were used (Parka H., 2013). A control group was formed for accurate study of results, where the control group received interactive tools such as permissions to 'move, copy, edit', 'give item', 'chat', and 'send instant message', where special tools were received by the experimental group. Special tools include 'give item for

praise' and 'pollster'. Under nine subcategories, two groups were compared by comparison of group identity scores. As result of the study, it has been observed that under five subcategories, the experimental group demonstrated higher scores, and it was concluded that tools used for facilitating the interactions between participants is effective for the process of establishing a group identity (Parka H., 2013).

Very few studies focus on the factors that relieve user aggression in online environments, where the weight was given to the causes of aggressive behaviour. Thus, this study concentrated on identifying the causes of aggression relaxation and aggravation in online worlds, where a different approach from other studies was used. Mechanisms that affect aggravation and relaxation of virtual aggression were investigated, and several ways that suggest resolving aggression problems were introduced (GunLee et al., 2013) 112 Second Life users were asked to participate a survey to investigate how commitment, belief, avatar attachment, desensitization, and addiction relate to self-control and control disorder. How self-control and control disorder affected virtual aggression was also examined in the study, as well as the influence of virtual aggression on the intention for attacking behaviour in the offline environment. The conclusions drawn from the study were, namely; belief is a positive predictor of self-control, having a negative effect on virtual aggression; addiction is a positive predictor of control disorder; and connection between anger in virtual worlds and aggression in the offline environments is present (GunLee et al., 2013).

Self-presence in a mediated environment has not become the subject of many research compared to spatial and social presence of the same. The role of self-presence in a social online world on individuals' offline health, appearance, and well-being is taken at hand empirically in this study. Users of the virtual world environment, Second Life, were asked to take an online questionnaire regarding their experiences of presence in the online world, how their avatar effect and influence their offline appearance and health behaviours, and level of satisfaction with relationships they formed and established online (Behm-Morawitz E., 2013). The hypothesis was indicating that avatar influence on health and appearance would positively affiliate with self-presence

and that self-presence would render the influence of spatial and social presence statistically non-significant. Furthermore, another hypothesis was pointing that self-presence would be positively affiliated with satisfaction based on relationships formed in the online world, where findings supported such hypotheses. Results of the study reveal that self-presence is linked to the influence of the virtual self on offline health and appearance in a significant way and at the same time is a remarkable predictor of satisfying online relationships, where a discussion on individual differences and potential pro-social effects of online environments was also included in the study (Behm-Morawitz E., 2013).

Introduction of Internet and mobile devices have changed the way society perceives itself, yet the idea of a literary character has remained the same since they have came to being. This study concentrates on investigating how the contemporary avatar has evolved from the early modern concept of character, by examining the early modern literary sphere. Thomas Over bury, Ben Jonson and Shakespeare as well as others were used as examples for the study at hand, where the notion of character and the self are examined in the literary, legal, and medical discourses. The study follows by analysing the practical application of characters in theatrical environments, and investigates dramatic texts following such findings, thus argues the importance of face in the character creation (Shimizu A., 2012). An interesting correlation between this argument to the indispensable use of avatars on the Internet is revealed. The conclusion of the study points that concept of characters is vital to the early modern literary experience along with being fundamental to the contemporary virtual life. The study also offers an alternative view to Simon Evans's study examining the continuities of selves in the virtual and the physical worlds, and in the present and the past (Shimizu A., 2012).

The research by Jeter (2012) focuses at a small sampling of groups formed in Second Life (Linden Labs, Inc.), in order to develop a series of typologies for further study on the subject. Contemporary anti-terrorist agency key terms lists were used to determine the search terms used to select the groups. Each group's choice of words was reviewed

manually, using their self-definitions to derive a series of five general categories (Jeter S., 2012).These general categories were based upon word intensity and emotion. The small number of groups that are in the more "intense" categories amongst 100 groups were noted, and further, these same groups seemed to have a closed versus open status to automatic membership (Jeter S., 2012).

The study by Pickard et al. (2013) tests the persuasive power of avatars, which take similar physical and facial features with the users and that are visually imbued with authority (Pickard et al., 2013). The study tries to establish common ground with the users in these respects. Further, effect of the users' self-esteem and tendency to self-monitor on such attempts is examined. The results of the study puts forth that remedying aversion to authority in high self-esteem and high self-monitoring individuals may be possible by morphing facial features of the individuals in to the avatar created. It is argued that avatars have multiple positive impacts over the user and that investigating the use of avatar as persuasive sources such be subject to further research (Pickard et al., 2013).

It has been observed by analysing hundreds of avatars that virtual females tend to show more naked skin compared to virtual males, where such result was not related to avatar hyper-sexualisation as evaluated by measurement of sexually dimorphic body proportions. Additionally, when behaviour of a population of culturally homogeneous avatars are analysed in terms of skin-covering, it is suggested that the tendency of female avatars to show naked skin continued to persist against explicit cultural norms promoting more covered clothing. The results suggest for further comprehension regarding how sex-specific aspects of skin disclosure affect social interactions in both online and real environments (Lomanowsk A. M. and Guitton M. J., 2012).

Research on social identity contingencies shows that the ability to trigger identity-associated threat for individuals whose social identity is marginalized may be caused by situational cues, where numerical presentation of social identities in a given social environment can be provided as an example to this situation (Lee C. E. and Park S.G.,

2011). Dominance of white avatar or white bias has been a subject for criticism for online environments like Second Life. By conducting two experiments where participants read fictitious profiles of SL avatars, the study aims to examine the psychological effects of the alleged White dominance in virtual worlds. As methodology, a set of White dominant avatar profiles or a set of racially diverse profiles were asked to be viewed by White and non-White participants in a random fashion. Following the participants reading the profiles, participants were asked to customize avatars using the SL interface and tools. Experiment 1 (n = 59) results showed that non- White participants reading the White-dominant avatar profiles showed significantly lower levels of sense of belonging and intention to participate in SL, when compared with those reading the racially diverse profiles. Results of Experiment 2 (n = 64) on the other hand, suggested that non-White participants reading the White-dominant avatar profiles gave significantly higher estimation of the White user population within SL. The same data also revealed that reading the White-dominant avatar profiles caused a greater sense of limitation on skin customization for non-White participants compared to White participants. It is concluded that ethno-racial minorities may perceive the virtual world as identity threatening when exposed to avatar-based cues that indicate White dominance, thus feeling psychologically disconnected and detached from the concepts introduced by the virtual environment itself (Lee C. E. and Park S.G., 2011). The study also discusses implications regarding racial/ethnic diversity in online environments.

A study took in hand the prevalence, practices and identity formation of role players within a virtual online game world, where the same study was divided into quantitative and qualitative parts. The study reached the conclusion that role players tend to both negotiate identity and utilize their time spent online as a moratorium for their real, offline lives. The study focused on the unobtrusive behavioural data captured by the game, which also included a large survey and traditional ethnographic methods (Williams et. al, 2011).

It was revealed by descriptive results that role players are a relatively small yet psychologically burdened subgroup. It has been observed that players using virtual environments mainly for creative outlets and for socialization when Goffman's Self Presentation theory, as well as Huizenga's Magic Circle theoretical perspectives and Turkle's early work on online identity formation were used. The virtual worlds had another function for the subjects; that being a coping mechanism for players with inability to gain acceptance, social connectivity or social support in their real, offline lives mainly on grounds of on their personal situation, psychological profile or their minority status in their respectful societies (Williams et. al, 2011).

Another research concentrates on how people used personal home pages to present themselves online from the point of Goffman's "Presentation of Self" theory, where examination, recording, and analysis was conducted by content analysis for the characteristics of personal home pages. Data interpretation in the research suggested popular tools for self-presentation, a desire for virtual homesteaders to associate one with virtual homestead communities, and remarkable relationships among characteristics of home pages .The tools supplied by space providers for the web page affected web page design. Personality characteristics, design templates, and Web author input should be subject to further studies, in order to identify elements affecting self-presentation through personal home pages (Papacharissi Z., 2002).

The conceptualisation of the Self has undergone remarkable change with the evolution in digital communication technologies and virtual spaces. The disruptions between the versions of the Self in virtual as opposed to non-virtual settings, as well as contemporary and historical backgrounds are analysed in this paper. In that sense, the Symbolic Interaction and Activity Theory focus on the emergence of the Self in any given context, and highlight the daily life interactions through the relationship between the Self and the other and the Self and the environment (Evans S., 2012). These theories are centred on physical interactions as opposed to virtual ones. "Embodiment" and "presence" are two important concepts in the understanding of virtual interactions. The avatars provide embodiment in these environments and make

it possible to interact with others outside the physical world. It should be noted that interaction with others is important in the determination of presence. Characteristics of communications and relationships are limiting factors defining the interaction between the Self and the other in virtual platforms. One inhibition arises from the lack of social indications but the introduction of new technologies that facilitate social interaction overcomes this obstacle to some extent. The role played by symbolic mediation during the emergence of the Self in virtual platforms is the focus of this paper. The thesis is that as opposed to the interactive dynamic behind the emergence of the Self in the nature, virtual environments are particular sites in terms of the central role of social interactions (Evans S., 2012).

The paper by Bullingham and Vasconselos (2013) exemplifies and discusses the contemporaneity of Erving Goffman's work and the applicability of the same to the analysis of identity and presentation of self in blogging and Second Life (SL) contexts. Expressions given; embellishment as a minor form of persona adoption; dividing the self; conforming and 'fitting in'; and masking, anonymity and pseudonimity were identified as grounds for the analysis of online identity and interaction practices in 10 cases of bloggers and SL users and of their online spaces. The major suggestion presented by the findings of the study reveal that users were willing and enthusiastic to re-create their offline self in the online world, contrary to engaging with the process of whole persona adoption (Bullingham L. and Vasconcelos A. C., 2013). However users mostly were inclined to edit facets of self through this process. These acts as a support to the key idea in Goffman's work suggesting that when in 'front stage', people deliberately chose to portray and develop a given identity. The study also concludes that for comprehending identity through interaction and the presentation of self in the virtual environment, Goffman's original context is of great use. Additionally, it was concluded that the virtual worlds can present opportunities to contribute to the further development of the Goffman framework, where enhanced potential for editing the selfish offered in a growing scale (Bullingham L. and Vasconcelos A. C., 2013).

Literature that was examined under this theme provided an important source for similar studies, and yet also indicated that there were no previous studies that used a purely Goffman-based approach for the whole process of the representation of self. Some studies focusing specifically on body image, self-representation and certain concepts from Goffman were very useful.

iv. Economic and Financial Aspects

Literature related to the economic and financial dimensions of Second Life was examined with a view to collecting necessary knowledge to analyse the organising concept of 'economic aspects'. As part of the case study, avatar formation was also discussed in terms of the economic aspects. It was therefore important to understand the commercial side to the platform and see how this affects the user experience.

The purpose of the study by Cheon (2013) is to examine and explain how three categories of factors influencing purchasing behaviour in the virtual world, namely, the platform context explained as technical characteristics such as interactivity and vividness and social characteristics such as involvement, product context explained as product value, and virtual experience explained as flow and satisfaction gained from the virtual world, affect consumer behaviour in terms of purchase of virtual products (Cheon E., 2013). The underlying factors of the study is the argument suggesting that although virtual marketplaces for products and services have become significant profit sources in virtual worlds, and that this transformation pushed many to understand consumer purchasing behaviour in virtual worlds due to large quantity and growth of virtual product transactions and platform providers' profits, the essential mechanisms of consumers' e-commerce behaviour may not explain their behaviour in the virtual world, despite environments in open-ended virtual worlds such as Second Life differing from other virtual communities. The results of the study show significance in terms of flow experience. With this respect, it is found that especially involvement has remarkable influence on flow, among interactivity and vividness. Additionally, flow and involvement is observed to have effect on the product value, where flow has a more powerful influence compared to involvement in terms of product value. It is

concluded that consumer's willingness to purchase is directly affected by flow and products, whereas no connection was found between satisfaction from the experience and willingness to purchase. Further, it was revealed that flow has smaller effect on willingness to purchase compared to product value (Cheon E., 2013). The paper is concluded with suggestions on future research locations, following a description of the contribution of the study on research and practice.

Two sets of purposes were proposed for the study by Eun – Lee and Domina (2013). The first one is to analyze the tendency and intention to shop of users' in Second Life (SL) based on user experiences with their avatar; and the second one is to identify specific user motivations that influence the same intention.119 Midwest USA college students were asked to complete a survey after completing a course assignment that introduced them to SL, as well as online world shopping. The results show that the intention to shop was largely effected by the users' satisfaction with the look of their avatar in SL, yet no importance was attached to whether the avatar looked similar to the actual look of the user (Eun – Lee S. and Domina T., 2013). It was observed that users were more likely buy products that were different than similar products purchased in the real world. The highest motivation that influenced the intention to shop was recorded to be the ability to play and interact with other online members, along various other motivations. In the study, retailers that operate in a virtual world environment addressed regarding these implications as well (Eun – Lee S. and Domina T., 2013).Two sets of purposes were proposed for this study. The first one is to analyze the tendency and intention to shop of users' in Second Life (SL) based on user experiences with their avatar; and the second one is to identify specific user motivations that influence the same intention. 119 Midwest USA college students were asked to complete a survey after completing a course assignment that introduced them to SL, as well as online world shopping. The results show that the intention to shop was largely effected by the users' satisfaction with the look of their avatar in SL, yet no importance was attached to whether the avatar looked similar to the actual look of the user (Eun – Lee S. and Domina T., 2013). It was observed that users were more likely buy products that were different than similar products purchased in the real world. The highest motivation that influenced the intention to shop was recorded to

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It has become crucial to research and comprehend social virtual worlds (SVW) users' post adoption behaviors toward digital items, considering the significant profits gained through digital items in SVWs like SecondLife, Cyworld, and Habbo Hotel. The study by Kim (2012) draws one theoretical framework investigating key antecedents to repurchase and recommend digital items intentions of users (Kim B., 2012). Data collected from 256 users were tested empirically against the research model, where the results of analysis suggest that user satisfaction and a perceived value act as a significant element in establishing users' post adoption intentions about digital items. Further, the results reveal which of the roles perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, and perceived fee play in SVW platforms (Kim B., 2012).

v. Technology Related and Other Aspects

Under this section, miscellaneous studies that focus on technological advancements related to Second Life, as well as some that tie the platform with artistic expression were examined. These were helpful in general for the understanding of different approaches to the platform.

Ranathung et al. (2012) say that one of the most popular online environments of our time is the Second Life, where participants are enabled to utilize applications in different fields that resemble and relate to real-life activities. Creating intelligent virtual agents also allow testing Artificial Intelligence theories (Ranathunga et al., 2012) . Accurate identification of events performed in Second Life is important in terms of successful adaptation of the aforementioned applications, where extracting low-level spatio-temporal data and identifying the embedded high-level domain-specific information is included in this context. The paper focuses on the overlooked aspects of Second Life in other studies, where the paper introduces a framework with

high accuracy and high frequency that pulls and collects relevant data from Second Life, and identifies the high-level domain-specific events and other contextual information embedded in these low-level data. Formalism of virtual environment adopted by the researchers guide the study, where events and states in the online world are defined. With a larger scope, the study demonstrates use of multi agent development platforms with respect to Artificial Intelligence (Ranathunga et al., 2012).

The research by Hasler et al. (2013) was conducted to evaluate the use of embodied survey bots (i.e., software-controlled avatars) in 3D online environments as a method for automated data collection (Hasler et al., 2013). A bot and a human-controlled avatar completed a survey interview within Second Life, where participants were asked about their religion. In addition participants' virtual age, which is the time passed since the person controlling the avatar joined Second Life, was tested as a response rate and quality predictor. Overall, the human interviewer scored a higher response rate compared to the bot, where it was observed that subjects with younger avatars were more enthusiastic about disclosing information with respect to their real life compared those with older avatars. It was observed that the human interviewer received more negative responses compared to the responses received by the bot, where it was also seen that the affective reactions of older avatars were more negative compared to younger avatars. The results pose support for the utility of bots as virtual research assistants; however ethical questions that need to be addresses carefully are also experienced (Hasler et al., 2013).

Theoretical framework and concept of face-work introduced by Ervin Goffman bring a significant chance for increasing our comprehension of inter personal dynamics in computer – mediated communication realms. Ethnography of communication approach and face – work concept were used in this research to observe, obtain data and analyse the transcript of an interaction between a librarian and library user in a Web – based virtual reference service environment. This interaction that is referred as

"highly goal – oriented" was found to be a fructuous source of face – work, despite the non-existence of immediacy of face – to – face interaction (Radford et al., 2011).

The work by Ayiter and Dahslveen (2013) takes on a project performed in 2009, where a storyteller and a visual artist were to create a storytelling space in the met averse of Second Life. The space is to be used by Second Life visitors to create their own unique narratives, and their own original performances as well. It is aimed to take the trajectories of the users by being placed in a virtual architecture/landscape (Ayiter E. and Dahslveen H., 2013). This was to be performed through avatar costumes and a substantial library of dramatic poses and animations, which were introduced to their disposal at the location of the event by the authors of the project. The project took on several concepts together, namely tenets of 'distributed authorship' and 'participatory poesies' by Roy Ascott, which combined a term that was coined by Axel Bruns describing novel collaborative electronic forms of creative output, where user's and producer's roles are merged to manifest as a novel type of online behaviour defined by the author as 'Prod usage'. Research combining the fields of performance art, storytelling, memory arts and the usage of mnemonic devices, including the Renaissance notion of the 'memory theatre' with Cyber psychology, these concepts were substantiated with respect to avatar studies (Ayiter E. and Dahslveen H., 2013).

Users of multi-player online role-playing games (MMORPGs) are enabled to the ability to create or customize their personal avatars with different visual characteristics (Ochoa T. T., 2012).This study suggests that users utilizing this ability exercise remarkable creative choices, where it is discussed that they should be accepted as the "authors" and thus the copyright owners of their personal avatars. Several types of collaborative authorship, including joint authorship, works made for hire, and collective works are regulated under The Copyright Act, however these models do not provide an accurate ground for user-created avatars. This is because avatars meet only some of the conditions set for each model. The study suggests that the two theories underlying copyright law are in conflict with each other: game providers are best situated to license games (including avatars) for other uses according to the incentive theory, while the natural right theory claims that players are entitled for compensation

for their original contributions to the game, which in this case is creating their personal avatars. The study proposes to consider avatars as a joint work between the game provider and the user, where collective work may be the best notion to label each avatar as a contribution to the game as a whole (Ochoa T. T., 2012).

A general overview of existing literature on Second Life has been provided based on categories that were identified. For each overarching theme, a simple explanation of why the theme was chosen and how this has contributed to the study has also been provided.

Goffman's theory on the presentation of self in everyday life and key concepts that have been identified for the purpose of this study have already been provided in the first chapter, along with some other key concepts.

Having thoroughly explored the central concepts that are important for the further development of the arguments, the next chapter will focus on the method that has been employed in this study. The first section of this chapter will focus on the case study, while the next sections will provide information on the rationale of research. A thematic analysis derived from the case study results will also be presented.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

A. CASE STUDY

In this chapter, I conducted a social analysis by means of acting as a virtual being in virtual worlds and developing new identities. Agger (2003) employs the expression of "virtual self" in order to define the occurrence of living in today's postmodern community which includes virtual relations through computer mediated communication (CMC). This chapter specifically evaluates how the virtual self and true self are influenced by the incidents gone through in virtual worlds, by means of taking Second Life experience as case study.

There are a number of purposes followed in this chapter. Firstly, it aims to discuss how the experience of virtual environments change the ways individuals are in their real lives. In doing this, the chapter delineates the study that demonstrates the way individuals employ these kinds of virtual worlds in order to discover and adjust their true identities dynamically. Besides, it offers contribution to the establishment of proper ways in studying virtual environments by offering a thorough validation for a study schedule as well as a framework of it. In developing the study methods in virtual worlds, the chapter provides an analysis of the ways research may be enhanced. Lastly, it produces an understanding in regards to the way particularly Second Life is being employed in order to discover the characteristics of oneself through other residents in the environment. The standpoint of the chapter is especially to indicate that virtual environments are spheres in which individuals develop new identities and new lives, establish friendships and discover the meaning of being a self.

In order to provide the above contributions, the chapter is structured in three major parts. In the first part, the case study is introduced along with all its details taking into account the study background, research question and design, research methodology of

collecting and analysing data. The second part provides a summary of the research results and links these results to the addressed research questions as well as to a number of case stories demonstrating the specific incidents of particular habitants. The third and last part offers a discussion on the study results, stresses the inferences for hypothetical models of illustrating oneself and offers recommendations for further studies. As the researcher has experienced the Second Life environment and its impacts through joining this world, a short reflective evaluation of the effects on the research process and analysis is also provided in the last part.

B. A Brief Analysis of the Second Life Community

a. The Rationale of the Research

As scholars focusing on the virtual worlds have started to discover the experience of living in these environments as a person, the prospect of seeing this from a social angle and from the insiders' point of view has risen. In this chapter, it is intended to conduct this by means of a case study focusing on the habitants of Second Life. It is aimed at discovering the strains, correspondences and discrepancies between the identities in the Second Life environment and in the corporeal world. As there is a wide array of models and hypotheses in the literature concerning the illustration of oneself while there is only limited research taking into account the social aspect as well, inductive research method is assumed for the case study. This study discovers the span of incidents concerned with being a resident in the Second Life and afterwards, evaluates whether or not the theory of Goffman on Presentation of Self may be pertinent to it.

The history and function of the Second Life has been provided in detail by Boellstorff (2008). Currently, the number of transactions which have been conducted on a daily basis in 2013 is 2.1 million while the active number of accounts at a time varying from 40.000 to 80.000 conditional on the time in the day, in the week or in the year. For the purpose of this study, Secondlife.com was chosen as the preferred virtual environment. The first reason for this was the high number of users on the platform. As mentioned above, Second Life has achieved a remarkable growth in the number of

users, and is one of the most highly populated virtual platforms. Another important reason for this choice was the diversity on the platform. At one hand, Second Life benefits from the lack of a common theme. Due to the fact that it was created to be a realistic virtual environment that provides the user with a 'second life' (as the name suggests) the development of the environment has been very diverse. It is possible to explore many different themes from historical to urban to fantastic by choosing different destinations. This is particularly attractive for the purpose of social sciences as this means that the user body of the platform is also diverse in its preferences. Another important reason why Secondlife.com was selected is the global outreach of the environment. It has become widely popular in the Middle East and Turkey as well, and this has proved to be an important advantage in the collection of data. Lastly, the user interface and the design of the platform makes it rather easy to acquire a considerable amount of experience and relationships in a reasonable timeframe, once again making it a good choice for the purpose of this study.

Apart from some rather practical concerns and concerns related to the research sample that were mentioned above, this platform was also preferred because of the amount of existing literature in the field. As the literature review has demonstrated, various authors have studied Second Life in terms of identity formation, educational use and representation of self. Building on this existing framework, it was easier to identify key approaches and see the avenue for contribution to the field. It is also important to note that one important point of Second Life is that it is possible to travel to different destinations and take part in different activities regardless of game performance. This makes it an ideal starting place for many amateur enthusiasts of virtual worlds. This lack of a requirement of a gaming background makes it an important avenue where social interactions and identity formation can be observed with a sample of very different people. Other virtual environments that require more experience with gaming and online platforms in turn usually have smaller communities that are comparably more homogeneous.

The users on the platform are called 'residents' and the platform itself is termed as 'grid' by the community. Any newcomer to the platform is referred to as a 'newbie'. There are some specific destinations that are 'newbie-friendly' meaning that newcomers are encouraged to prefer these destinations to adapt to the environment. There are also some volunteer experienced residents who set up all sort of different mechanism to aid newbies during their initial phase.

For the purpose of this study, diverse destinations on Second Life were toured and many conversations were initiated with other avatars using the in-built chat function. In order to get a diverse range of interviewees for the case study, destinations with specific themes such as 'historical' or 'fantastic', as well as some popular destinations like the in world London were selected with the purpose of accommodating diverse types of users. As detaily explained in the limitations section, one important disadvantage was that the experience level of the user was visible for others. This meant that the character that was used to conduct the interviews was easily identified as n 'newbie', which in many cases prevented some more experienced users to have conversations. There were, however, still some experienced users in the sample.

After having explained the choice of Second Life as opposed to other virtual environments, the rationale behind the design of the method will also be discussed. As the first major idea, it can be suggested that there is segregation between the lives and identities in the real world and the Second Life for most users. Although it is allowed to expose the identities of the real world in the Second Life, the majority of users prefer to keep this confidential and reveal this information to those they really have faith in. Simultaneously, users carry on their Second Life experiences and virtual identities and keep this confidential from those they know in the real world. The information kept confidential includes occurrences, associations, appeals and occupation out of the virtual world.

A further major idea is the experience that the researcher has in generally virtual world and in particular, in the Second Life. The reason for this is that it can respond to the

research questions addressed and the suitability of using the methodologies of the real world into virtual environments in addition to enabling probable understanding of the experiences of others.

The research outlined here focuses particularly on the relationship and differences between the Second Life (front stage) and the physical world (back stage), with respect to the experience of the self. The questions it seeks to address are:

Table 1. Back Stage Interview Questions

BACK STAGE QUESTIONS	
Physical Features	
Your Skin Colour in Real Life	
• Your Height in Real Life	
• Your Weight in Real Life	
Economic Aspects	
• Your Monthly Income in Real Life	
• The City You Live in in Real Life	
• The Type Of The House You Live in Real Life	
• The Car You Use in Real Life	
Roles	
• Your Sex in Real Life	
• Your Age in Real Life	
• Your Job in Real Life	
• Your Marital Status in Real Life	

Table II. Front Stage Interview Questions

FRONT STAGE QUESTIONS	
Physical Features	
• Your Skin Colour in Second Life • *State your reason if your skin colour in second life is different from your skin colour in real life.* • *State your reason if your skin colour in second life is the same as your skin colour in real life.*	
• Your Height in Second Life • *State your reason if your height in second life is different from your height in real life.* • *State your reason if your height in second life is the same as your height in real life.*	
• Your Weight in Second Life • *State your reason if your weight in second life is different from your weight in real life.* • *State your reason if your weight in second life is the same as your weight in real life.*	
Economic Aspects	
• Your Monthly Income in Second Life • *State your reason if your monthly income in second life is different from your monthly income in real life.*	

Table continues

State your reason if your monthly income in second life is the same as your monthly income in real life.	
• The City You Live in in Second Life • *State your reason if the city you live in in second life is different from the city you live in in real life.* • *State your reason if the city you live in in second life is the same as the city you live in in real life.*	
• The Type Of The House You Live in in Second Life • *State your reason if the type of the house you live in in second life is different from the type of the house you live in in real life.* • *State your reason if the type of the house you live in in second life is the same as the type of the house you live in in real life.*	
• The Car You Use in Second Life • *State your reason if the car you use in second life is different from the car you use in real life.* • *State your reason if the car you use in second life is the same as the car you use in real life.*	
Roles	

Table continues

• Your Sex in Second Life • *State your reason if your sex in second life is different from your sex in real life.* • *State your reason if your sex in second life is the same as your sex in real life.*	
• Your Age in Second Life • *State your reason if your age in second life is different from your age in real life.* • *State your reason if your age in second life is the same as your age in real life.*	
• Your Job in Second Life • *State your reason if your job in second life is different from your job in real life.* • *State your reason if your job in second life is the same as your job in real life.*	
• Your Marital Status in Second Life • *State your reason if your marital status in second life is different from your marital status in real life.* • *State your reason if your marital status in second life is the same as your marital status in real life.*	

b. Design of the Research

As the study was conducted on a virtual environment, it created a number of new difficulties which are not usually encountered with in the real world. These difficulties, which were existent in every element of the research course, formed the research design, methodology and the processes. Some aspects were affective in relation with the design of the research. The Second Life is an environment that has characteristic routines, customs and surroundings and the lives are lived in the confidentiality of the homes of the habitants. They are possibly kept secret from people in the real world. Besides, habitants are positioned all around the world with the inclination to maintain their real life identities confidential from the Second Life residents. When considering that the virtual identities probably are private, highest level of secrecy and understanding would be required when encountering with other residents. As a result, the main purpose of the study was not to become a standard or customary identity in the virtual world; rather, it was to discover the variety of experiences going on between the residents of the Second Life and their perspectives from within the virtual world.

In order to tackle with these difficulties and find an answer to the research question, a series of personal interviews was deliberated. The format as well as the questions was inspired from the experiences of the researcher in the Second Life. The interviews were designed to generate the data required to answer the research questions. On the other hand, it was paid attention not to have the results of the research being affected by the researcher's own experience. In this sense, a semi-structured interview was created in order to enable resilience during the discussion depending on the own experiences of the participants.

The entire set of the interviews have been performed in the virtual world. This had a number of special advantages. This enabled the participants of the research to be free of cultural history or location, which may not be valid in interviews conducted in the physical world. Moreover, this possibly defeated probable apprehensions that the participants could have in terms of segregating the real life from the Second Life.

c. Collection of Data

Despite the fact that the Second Life offers an audio service, the entire set of the interviews were performed in writing and in Turkish language. The reason for this was making the participants feel more comfortable through writing rather than talking. In addition to this, a number of habitants particularly selected interaction in writing only for a number of reasons. For instance, there are residents that introduce themselves as another gender than their true genders. In such a case, their gender would be revealed through their voices. Likewise, the person may have hearing difficulties in the real world and this is a privacy issue that they would wish to keep confidential.

It was considered regarding this research that the data generated in a particular interview in writing at equivalent times with a verbal interview would generate less data. The reason for this is that typing in a sentence usually lasts more than articulating it. Besides, according to the experience, the written interaction in the Second Life had a shortened structure; therefore, it was considered that written answers could be curtailed when compared to verbal articulation. Thus, the interview design was made to last for two hours per interview in order to collect data as much as possible.

Morality was a concern that created specific difficulties due to the fact that the interviews were performed between avatars in a virtual environment. One of these difficulties was related to the informed permission which was demonstrated in the real world through the signatures of the participants to show that they were informed about the interview and approved to be a part of it. A further difficulty was the case of privacy and secrecy of the users. Although all avatars are illustrated with assumed names which cannot be followed to the real world, the writings on the virtual environment are recorded in Linden Lab register. It was observed by the researcher that participants preferred to maintain their confidentiality. Therefore, it was guaranteed by the researcher that the identities of the participants would be anonymous in the research report and their real world identities would not be asked for at any case and besides, the avatars' names would only be kept on the personal computer of the researcher. Another difficulty was the unawareness of the status of

the participants in the real world which had an effect on the usual processes of validation. Lastly, while beginning the interviews, participants were requested to confirm by articulation that they were regarded as adults in the context of their real life countries. Participants of the interviews were selected on a random basis from the virtual world. A total of fifteen interviews were executed. These interviews were performed at occasions that were convenient to the interviewee and the interviewer based on the location of the participant. The interviewees were advised that they were free to reject questions or to cease the interview.

d. Thematic Analysis

This study aims to comprehend the variety of experiences of joining as a virtual identity in the Second Life and evaluate the results of the interviews in relation with the Presentation of Self Theory of Goffman. In this sense, a thematic evaluation system was employed. In the view of Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a means for determining, evaluating and describing patterns, called as themes, in data. It is argued by the scholars that it arranges and defined the data thoroughly (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). It is suggested that thematic analysis is a method of qualitative analysis that is liberated from model and the study of knowledge.

Based on the exploratory research feature, an inductive thematic analysis was performed while the themes were drawn from the data entirely without practicing any structures identified earlier. Attride-Stirling's (2001) process was adopted as a directive. The data is categorised methodically into "basic themes" according to their word meanings and this is employed afterwards to build "organising themes" hierarchies through combining basic patterns together according to their theoretical shared philosophies. Besides, they are used to build "global themes" which stand for the standard fundamental patterns. Linkages can be determined between the hierarchies in order to theorise a "thematic network".

Basic themes arising from the case study were determined by the content of individual questions in the interview. As all of the characteristics that were chosen under the

three categories had a different area of application and dynamic, the reactions of the interviewees could also be grouped under these characteristics. In that sense, the basic concepts that were identified were 'skin colour, race, age, height, weight, richness vs. poorness, job, marital status' and such characteristics related to a person's identity. For a more detailed explanation of how these emerged in the design of the study questions, and their applications in Erving Goffman's theory, please refer to the relevant sections.

The three organising themes arising from the basic themes that have been explained below were: Physical features, economic aspects and roles both in the real life and the Second Life. These were the organising themes under which the data was arranged and analyzed. As the basic themes, that correspond to each characteristic that was discussed has some thematic similarities with certain other ones in terms of how they relate to identity formation, they were focal points that could be used as organising themes for the analysis of data. They also corresponded well with concepts taken from Goffman's theory as they related to different components of front stage character formation.

The global theme that emerges from the analysis of data is the representation of self. It is the starting point of the study, and it is at the same time the core concept tying together the different tools that were employed during the case study. Below is an overview of the three organising themes that were identified. The last chapter and the conclusion also provide a more in-depth discussion of the global theme.

i. Physical features

Under this group of questions, interviewees were asked questions on their skin colours, heights and weights both in their real lives and virtual lives. According to Goffman, acting of people in front stage has certain limits. For instance, they might succeed in creating a happier, richer and more successful image but they cannot change their racial features and an Afro-American cannot change his/her skin colour and/or height. However, when the secondlife.com is taken as a new front stage

residents of this platform can create a totally new image, which they cannot in their real lives. To illustrate, an overweight and short Asian user can create a taller, fitter and European looking avatar and can satisfy his desires.

Once the interviewees were asked about their skin colour, height and weight in their real lives, then they have been asked questions on the physical features of their avatars. Then, they were asked for their reasons.

ii. Economic Aspects

The second group of the questions were on the real and virtual economic aspects of the secondlife.com residents. The interviewees were first asked questions on their monthly incomes, the cities where they live, the types of the houses they live in and the brands of the cars they drive in their real lives. Goffman puts forward that people, while trying to create a new image, may exaggerate their real incomes and want to create a wealthier image. To illustrate, he gives the example of middle income American housewives, who try to look as if they have better living standards while talking to their peers. Accordingly, once the interviewees were asked the questions on their economic aspects in their real lives, they then were asked their monthly incomes, the cities they live in, the type of the house they have and their cars. Afterwards, they were asked for the reasons and the reasons were checked against the assumptions of Goffman's theory.

iii. Roles

The last group of the comparative questions were on the roles both in real and virtual lives of the interviewees. The first round of the questions consisted of the real sexes, ages, jobs and marital status of the users in their real lives. This group of questions was a bit different than the two previous sets of questions. That's to say that moving from Goffman's assumption sex is like a racial feature, about which people cannot create different images excluding today's surgical miracles. Based on Goffman's assumptions a person can look happier or wealthier without making considerable

effort but cannot change his/her racial features and sex, in this study, can be taken as a feature, about which a new image can be created without exerting great effort. However, secondlife.com gives the users the opportunity of creating a new sex even including the opportunity of creating non-human objects like vampires.

So, just as in the case of skin colour secondlife.com is a new front stage without limits passing beyond the assumptions of Goffman. Still moving from "Presentation of Self" theory, people may not tell some truth about their real ages, jobs and marital status to create an image appealing to their counterparts in real life. However, in secondlife.com users have choices without limits to create an avatar to represent themselves with a new sex, age, job and marital status. Thus, the answers of the comparative questions were analysed and the reasons of the differences between real and virtual lives have been explored.

Having explored the method that was used in the study , the next chapter will provide the discussion of the existing literature on Second Life and examine the platform more closely.

e. Sampling

The method for this study is based on the distinction between the front stage and the back stage. This section provides a brief overview of how these concepts appear in Goffman's theory and how they have been applied to Second Life for the purpose of this study. Moving from the case study results, and the personal experience phase it can be stated that there are not significant differences in how these concepts apply to Goffman and Second Life.

 The performing stage (in Goffman's terms: the front stage) is where the acting begins and the performers make a distinction between their selves and the ones who they would introduce it, to the audiences. The front stage also includes other kinds of preparations for acting, i.e. personal front and the manners; meaning when the performer starts to play his role (acting to present his ideal self to the audience), his

costume and make-up (personal front meaning physical appearance including the clothes he had chosen for the occasion or his age, sex and race as his unchangeable features) and the way he acts (manners, meaning his interpretation of the role in accordance with his personal front and the role) (Goffman, 1959 p. 55).

In this study, front stage was taken as the secondlife.com. This is the environment where people create new images and new lives, which they cannot have in their real lives. In secondlife.com, people become new people who they always want to be and try to create the images they wish, which they cannot create in their real lives.

The backstage is the opposite, where the performers are allowed to stop acting and where no audience is allowed (Goffman, 1959 p. 63). In this research, real life was taken as the back stage. This is where users of secondlife.com stop acting. However, real life i.e. back stage is vital since the reasons for acting in front stage (secondlife.com) lie here.

Goffman elaborates his framework with introducing different roles from teams, the performers and the audiences. Here comes another assumption for his framework; while conveying their selves to others, people hide some information which would be incompatible with their presented selves from their audiences, which he terms as "the secrets" (Goffman, 1959 p. 74). The whole acting process in fact turns into a game of keeping secrets from the audience and maintain these secrets within the team. These secrets do not necessarily be "the dark secrets", they may be of other kinds, as strategic secrets to manipulate the audience to reach a goal, inside secrets such as the ones belonging to one team, or social group which the group members does not like the performers to know, as it is a kind of in-group identity builder, i.e. used for enhancing team coherence, or similar to the inside secrets, entrusted secrets who serve to test the loyalty to group, or free secrets which are not really important for performance itself and can be revealed easily (Goffman, 1959 p. 76-79).

This study also explores the secrets of secondlife.com users while trying to find out the reasons why they have established a second virtual life. To this end, secondlife.com residents were interviewed and asked comparative questions. To illustrate, they were first asked questions about their physical features in real life. Then, they were asked whether there are any differences between their real physical features and physical features of their avatars. If there were any differences, they were asked to indicate the reasons. The reasons were generally expected to be their secrets, which did not necessarily have to be dark secrets.

"Impression management" is one of the fundamental concepts in Goffman's theory and this concept is also important for this study since it is closely related to the interview questions. Goffman credits the possibility that the performers might feel difficulty in staying in the role, so that they make use of "defensive" and "protective" attributes and practices, that would minimize the risk of unmeant gestures, inopportune intrusions and faux pas [gaffes, boners] (Goffman, 1959 p. 103). Defensive ones are dramaturgical loyalty, i.e. members being loyal to group and keep its secrets and maintain the performance; dramaturgical discipline is his discipline in this role playing and his being unlikely to commit faux pas etc, dramaturgical circumspection is being prepared for the performance in order to minimize the risks of failure, in Goffman's words, "...preparing in advance for likely contingencies and exploiting the opportunities that remain" (Goffman, 1959 p. 108). Protective practices are related to the audience's help to team members' in maintaining their performance, basically by being polite in a way that despite knowing that the performers did not stay in the role, pretending as if the faux pas were not present. These tacts, and tactfully not seeing the mistakes are one of the key points that the people maintain their social interaction despite being aware of this sociological framework that Goffman suggests. Despite knowing that there are front stage and backstage and they are being represented to a performance, the audience tactfully choose to enable the performers to continue (Goffman, 1959 p. 114-120).

In this paper, the concept of impression management developed by Goffman refers to all three categories of questionnaire. The questions to be asked to the residents of secondlife.com consist of three sections, which are "physical features, economic aspects and roles". The basic assumption is that users of this platform generally try to create a new person, who is different from the real beings in terms of physical features, economic aspects and roles. The reason for the difference is to create a new impression in the eyes of the other avatars and the users of those avatars, which is in fact to manage a new impression.

For the purpose of this study, the interviews and the subsequent analysis of the results have been done under the categories of physical aspects, economic aspects and roles. The rationales behind this choice and the exact wording of the questions have been explained in the chapter focusing on the method. As Second Life is a virtual platform that mimics real life, all the sub-categories that are discussed in the interviews are directly reflected in the virtual platform. All the properties related to physical appearance are transposed to the appearance of the avatar. The information given about the avatar, and the possessions of the avatar determine the economic aspects. The marital status, job and age are also customized on the avatar. All of the categories under which the samples have been examined have corresponding existence both in real life (the back stage) and the virtual environment (the front stage).

f. Limitations

Two major limitations were encountered during the course of the study. While the initial sources of both limitations were separate, they became interlinked to the nature of study and the inherent structure of the Second Life.

As already stated in sections above, the study was restricted due to the major limitation of being unable to verify the truth of the interview information. As all of the interviews were conducted on the Second Life, the accuracy of the information regarding the back stage real lives of the subjects was based solely on the words of the interview

subject. Additionally, due to the nature of the Second Life community and the related issues of ethics and privacy, the real names of the interviewed Second Life users were not recorded. This further limited any opportunity of external verification of the information provided during the interviews.

This limitation was particularly prevalent in relation to the second and third category of questions. These categories involved more personal questions, particularly relating to societal and marital status. For these areas of more personal questions, a subject may have been more inclined to embellish, exaggerate or distort the facts.

This consequence of this particular limitation was also reflected in some of the answers recorded. While most of the interview subjects that agreed to participate in the study were quite open about their real life information, varying degrees of shyness was encountered regarding the questions regarding personal income.

Some subjects were quite upfront and straightforward about the amount they earned and provided an exact figure, whereas some of the other subjects only provided very vague ranges. This was most probably due to the fact that the subjects interviewed did not really know the interviewer, as they had not spent a significant amount of in-game time together.

The issue of time spent engaging on the Second Life was the second limitation, and as stated above also enhanced the limitations caused by the anonymous nature of the internet. The Second Life remains quite a discernible community, with some regular users having been active for years. Thus, the regular users have created their own community rules, with some unique linguistic capabilities, unique features and community solutions to different in-game bugs and problems.

Any newcomer to such a community does initially stand out, before they can integrate by grasping the rules of the community. Not being able to spend enough time on the Second Life meant that a high level of integration was not achieved. This in turn

resulted in the fact that the users who were interviewed did not represent the larger entirety of the Second Life community. Especially a lot of older users, more active in the community were wary of participating in the study. While they were very helpful in welcoming a new member of the community and explaining the different concepts and interface issues, many of them seemed unwilling to share information about their real lives. This lack of information was apparent to them due to not having fully grasped the Second Life lingo, and due to the option that the age of avatars can be viewed during the chat option. Due to this particular limitation in the scope of Second Life users engaging in the study, the cross-section of answers became slightly more restricted. In the light of the existing prospects and limitations the next chapter will focus on the ethnography of the research.

CHAPTER IV

ETNOGRAPHY of SECOND LIFE

A. Second Life™; the Most Popular Virtual Medium to Have an On – Line Identity

Second Life™ was introduced in 2003 by Linden Lab and has become one of the most liked virtual worlds which is used mainly for the purpose of social network development, something contrary to the purpose of game playing like the sites of EVE Online and World of Warcraft. It is a virtual territory that is made up with a few continents along with several small islands (McKenna, 2012). The acquisition of land can be through purchasing of land on continents or by the purchase of an island by a person or an institution for further confidentiality and reputation. There is a currency valid in the virtual world, which the Linden Dollars which can be exchanged with US Dollars. The exchange rate is approximately 300 Linden Dollars for one US Dollar. The residents of Second Life are usually characterized and they can build their own things in the virtual environment through adding several basic geometric shapes together. These are known as prims, short of primitives. There is a dynamic economy going on in the virtual space which is run by trading in and out these ornamented things in several modes such as vehicles, garments, furniture or hair, etc (Hawley,2012).

Second life has been home to approximately 36 million users during the last decade. Users consumed around US$3.6 billion in the virtual world on assets while the aggregate time spent on the website has reached 217,266 years. Now, the virtual world is being visited by over 1 million people every month. In the destination guide, the largest part is constituted by games, events and adventure/fantasy (Hawley, 2012). Around 400 thousand new account creations are realized per month while 1.2 million deals were performed for assets in the virtual world. In Second Life, there are 2.1 million virtual assets for sale while the most traded items are hairstyles of women.

The land area of the virtual world is around 700 square miles, which corresponds to somewhat more than 1810 square kilometres (Boellstraff, 2013).

Second Life offers a persuasive background to perform study on as it is developing as the most complicated virtual world for socialising. Starting from the year 2006, the virtual world activity demonstrated a swift rise all through the developed countries in order to fulfil varying goals including entertainment, relaxing and working. Every day, millions of people access their virtual environment that they selected and demonstrate actions by means of their avatars (Lawrence, 2012). The true selves of the people using the avatar is generally are kept private by the users depending on their choice while the avatar is utterly flexible, a phase lower than their true selves. This suppleness of illustrating oneself through an avatar and the users' being able to select how to demonstrate themselves result in the virtual environments' transformation into social workshops for identity revisions (Peachey 2010, p. 37). The next section will focus on the rationale behind constructing these types of virtual identities and lives, taking into account the existing theoretical framework on the subject.

B. Reasons for Having a Second Life in Virtual Worlds

These virtual worlds make communication among online people possible; therefore, the lack of direct image and generally auditory interaction and the resilience that is offered by the advanced technology to develop illustrative images creates an occasion for users to take on newly formed identifications dependent on no physical limits, turning the state into a task of idealized body.

In due course, online images of the users illustrate the outer world information about the user. They function as a shared presentation of the true self. Besides, they act in forming and realizing the visualizations of users about themselves (Taylor, 2002, p. 51).

Alternative captivating virtual environments may be dissimilar to Second Life in the extent of the resilience provided to the users in terms of their images. It is explored in a study on an intervened environment (Microsoft V-Chat) that in Second Life, users can customize their avatars which can be in male or female forms by means of over 150 diverse parameters. The avatars can be personalized by using more stylish hair and skin or changing and adding new garments in order to develop a more unique appearance. This also functions to indicate the users' experience in the virtual world suggesting their level of willingness to make monetary consumptions in this virtual world. Besides, the images of the avatars can be further amended through using additional objects to the avatar's body parts, modifying the core silhouette in order to develop outlooks that vary from basic lifeless substances like cardboard boxes to sophisticated reformations of characters from the popular culture or legends. On the other hand, according to the predictions, merely 6 per cent of the users prefer to adopt a non-human image of the identity (Au, 2007).

According to the observations of Dumitrica and Gaden (2009, p. 13), in case of non-human avatar formations are selected, the user has to choose from male or female in the process of entering Second Life for the first time. The two-option structure of the gender selection can be challenged through the attainment of androgynous features like the hermaphroditic sex organs by including metrics for this while the main outward appearances still continue to be male or female. In addition to this, the inclination in this environment is to replicate the perfect forms of female or male bodies, which can be compelling (Dumitrica and Gaden, 2009, p. 11). Notwithstanding that it is a virtual environment, refusing to accept these demands may result in absence of incorporation. As analysed by Dumitrica and Gaden (2009), appearances and in specific the body outlooks function as important instruments for incorporating in a social environment. They explain this by suggesting that people are arranged as female or male depending on their corporeal attributes that can be observed and they are considered either masculine or feminine based on their competences to demonstrate and undertake features that are pertinent to them. People

bring these measures and standards to their Second Life adventures in order to develop effective feminine or masculine performance (2009, p. 12).

As mentioned above, the identities people create for themselves are subject to the characters and social environments that they discover themselves in. It is argued by a number of scholars that the personalities taken on in the virtual environments are in fact more familiar presentations of the true selves when compared to the personalities present in the material world. According to McKenna et al. (2001, p. 304), people are usually inclined to demonstrate more features reflecting their true identities in their communications with other individuals within the virtual environments.

In the definition made by McKenna et al. (2001, p. 304), true self is constituted of the features that a person thinks that he or she has and wished others to think of him/her while this usually cannot be articulated due to some drives and is realized by the person. In this sense, Taylor (2002, p. 54-55) argues that avatars may illustrate the correct personalities of individuals more than their actual identities in the real world.

In the new outlook people create through their avatars, the physical body and attributes cannot "corrupt" the reality concerning their real identities. Besides, people usually indicate that they have discovered their true selves which fits to them better through the formation if their avatars.

In this sense, the individuals expressing these ideas do not feel that their real world personalities fit to their inner characteristics well. In fact, pressing the users to expose their true identities in the material world may cause them lose their willingness to enter a virtual environment. These individuals are those having avatars which are utterly different themselves. Essentially, they form a completely new identity; in this sense, one of the innate elements of their experience in Second Life is role playing. Alternatively, some other people prefer to stick to their true identities of real life to the highest level possible. These people may be more frank than their life in the physical world due to the fact that in the virtual world, lives are less confined than the

physical world which allows people to act more daringly in illustrating their true identities (Bailey 2007, p. 20).

Then again, the differences between the identities in the real world and in the virtual world may be based on the fact that these individuals' corporeal bodies may be clashing with their personalities. In the virtual environment, they get the chance to demonstrate their body identity and illustrate the way they actually consider of themselves. This kind of a difference between the real body and the identity of the body takes place due to the fact that while the verification of an identity creation is made by the corporeal body (Phoenix, 2007, p. 49), it is not limited by it.

Hence, it is possible that people can perceive their identities rather different than their corporeal bodies. This situation is usually called body-identity dysmorphia disorder (BDD) while the expression dichotomy may be more precise because dichotomy is somewhat experienced by all people. Slighter versions of this dichotomy between body and identity materialize by perceiving the true self in trivially different features such as being taller, thinner, more beautiful, or with another but similar eye colour. Occasionally, individuals may possess a sexual identity that is contrary to their physical gender or at times, they may have a genderless identity, too. In the end, some people may prefer to alter their corporeal body in order to correspond to the way they perceive themselves (Roberts et al., 2008).

Further cases of such identity clashes are experienced by people who consider themselves in a diverse species or are dead, or at times, both dead and from a different species (Nejad and Toofani, 2005, p.250). Alternatively, they may feel that some of their body parts have been amputated although no such incident has ever happened and there is no amputation within the body (Lawrence, 2006). Such instances exemplify severe identity and body clashes happening between what is felt and what is actually existing. Nevertheless, they act in showing the awkward characteristic of identity in relation with the material fact and indicate that the approaches of

individuals in perceiving their own identities may lose bond with the corporeal outlook.

In the virtual environments, though, individuals get the chance of demonstrating the identity that they actually feel about themselves. On the other hand, they offer an occasion for people to experience a diverse identity and examine the level that this corresponds to their conception of their true identities. Taylor (2002, p. 58) suggests that trying out new identities through experiencing communication in the form of an individual at a different age, gender or ethnicity is referred to as "identity tourism" (Taylor 2002, p. 58) or "avibending" (Amdahl, 2007). In the view of Lee and Hoadley (2007), this activity of trying out may function as a component of discovering probable identities which is a course that is used to experiment the features of identities prior to being assumed into the self-perception of identity or being refused.

This can also be a component of a process through which the identity is separated from any particular corporeal structure. The convenience of developing and changing identities in the virtual world provokes people to consider themselves as adaptable, developing, dispersed, accommodating with a variety of features and continuously dynamic (Turkle 1995, pp. 263-264).

Naturally, the prospect of experimenting varying outlooks and manners for discovering different features of oneself as well as finding out the actual identity of oneself as well is present, while it is only to perform a role. Particular spheres in these captivating virtual environments are annulled deliberately for role-playing purposes and they are exposed in these worlds. The spheres of role-play are usually founded on television programmes, books or films on science fiction and imagination. Individuals make use of avatars inside these particular spheres in order to create stories and perform roles. Although the main point of virtual environments is encountering with new people and creating social networks (Becker and Mark 2002, p. 29), in the spheres particular to performing roles, the drive may be a diverse one.

According to Newman (2007, p.27), online performance of roles and extemporization theatres have a number of common points. In both online performance and extemporization theatres, the individuals get in cooperation in order to create a story spontaneously. Sdderberg, Waern et al. (2004, p. 1) point out these common points while they also highlight that role performance in the virtual world is executed for serving the good of partakers whereas in extemporization theatres roles are played for a group of spectators. When performing a role within a virtual society, this discrepancy loses its importance as the partakers can also be spectators.

C. A Personal Second Life Experience

In this part, I present my own experience of the Second Life involvement as a case study which I undertook for understanding the development of an image or identity in the virtual world. Some parts will mostly focus on my experience in relation to the existence of the avatar, and rely on theoretical frameworks on this relationship. Later experiences related to the customization of the avatar and the social life on Second Life will be analysed with references to Goffman's theory.

My initial encounter with the Second Life society was in July 2013 when I met the habitants of the platform for study objectives. This has been the initial time of my life that I have developed and become familiar with an avatar with the name Nicole Madden. Throughout my study in the Second Life, the boundaries between I-Nil and Nicole Madden have often become unclear.

After going through these kinds of in-world instances, I started to enquire the issue of who I – as a particular personality – had turned into. Before my experience in the Second Life, , I used to be a person called "Nil" and I was aware of the way I became a part of a society, what I considered my personality to be and how others in the society considered my personality. The emergence of "Nicole Madden" disturbed this state and made me reconsider myself from different perspectives. The meeting of my real life self and Nicole Madden functioned as a mechanism affecting my identity. Accordingly, the writing intertwines theoretical and deviating debates related to the

notion of developing an in-world personality. The individual sequence of events pertaining to Nicole Madden and I were obtained as a result of the fieldwork recordings that I gathered during the process of approximately 2 months of ethnographic study in the Second Life. I analysed the creation of characters in a virtual world environment through the employment of personification as an exemplary method and approach.

As Turkle (1997) proposes, studies on creating personalities in virtual world environments have been present since the primary periods of the internet's emergence. The study at hand frequently considers digital worlds as a case of a growing communal system in which innovative ways of forming, sustaining and interacting personalities are generated (Boellstorff, 2008; Boon and Sinclair, 2009; Schroeder, 2002). Present alternative study looks into the users in the material world through examining the profiles of them (Cooper et al., 2007) or the overlaps between the material and the virtual worlds (Taylor, 2006). This part moves the attention on examining the way the users in the real world form their experiences in the virtual world for the purpose of understanding more precisely the reasons for the differences between digital identities and the material courses of the real world.

The corporeal plays an important role in the formation of identities. The entire experiences of humans are personified. The corporeal body what makes people feel alive. The perception of the outer world and the living experiences are done through the body. Besides, feelings and wishes are also lived through and originate from the physical body. The physical body essentially functions as a base in the world. It delivers the individuals the verification that we, our conducts, and the outer world are present. People are personified life forms in essence. Therefore, it is perfectly understandable that the course of creating a personality is a personified action and the body has a critical and determining role. On the other hand, the way that the body is outlined and the way it thereupon forms the experience in the virtual world environments are distinct from what is actually happening in the real world. As an instance, the body is not capable of touching or sensing the odour of the virtual

environment by itself. In spite of the fact that personality is formed in a diverse way in virtual world environments; still, it is the corporeal body that forms, endures and performs the virtual identity. In this sense, a comprehension of the personification in online worlds results in a superior understanding of the environment that the virtual identity is created in.

A dialogue of separation from the body has been prevalent in the debates on virtual worlds. Disembodiment does not stand for the opposite of personification; however, it symbolizes a particular way of personified experience that the body is transferred to the outside edge in and by this means; it is not regarded as a dynamic or critical aspect of the alleged experience. This manner generally maintains a Cartesian custom in which the mind is regarded as a distinct part from the body and is honoured over it.

The idea of disembodiment has been accepted for a long period and it continues to be persistent in the prevalent current culture. The mind's being honoured over the body throughout the experience in the cyberspace in science fiction is clearly identifiable. Neuromancer (1984), the significant novel of William Gibson in the virtual worlds' sphere, outlines the narrative of a hacker that desires to set himself free of the confinement of his material body through moving into the virtual environment. In a more recent time, Avatar (2010) of James Cameron continues this custom of disembodiment in a virtual environment experience when the avatar acquired life and dynamics and as a result, becomes competent to join the spiritual and astonishing world of Pandora when he accomplishes a state free of cognizance.

This kind of an understanding of cyberspace as an action that involves disembodiment roots from the idea that a spectator from the outer world has as he/she examines an individual that is engaged with virtual environments or other resembling actions to a certain extent.

When we take into account first discussions on cyberspace and use this to analyse the modern virtual environment that we are in, it is understandable that a dialogue of

disembodiment continues to be prevalent in discussions today. For a spectator from the outside world, the in-world disorder is comprised of being seated and appearing to be motionless and stationary. For them, it consists of looking at a computer screen and leaving behind the consciousness of the material world around. When the person loses consciousness of the material impulses, it is considered that he or she constructs a link between his/her mind and the virtual environment through looking at and concentrating highly on the digital world on the screen. Consequently, the person looks like he/she is missing, preoccupied in another world which is virtually present on the screen. This is a state where his/her body is physically present in the real world without the spirit or the mind. These kinds of examinations are to blame for dialogues of obvious and hidden effects of disembodiment in the study of virtual environments.

These are shown in studies addressing the conducts in the virtual world as a practice of psychological bonds, which do not focus significantly on the body as a result.

Rather than this, I propose that the physical body maintains its activeness and is occupied during the user's experience in the virtual world, yet in a diverse mode from the way we are accustomed to in the real world.

Depending on my experiences, I can express that my entire physical body responded to the incidents I went through in the Second Life through emotions such as an overjoyed state or sadness because of something took place in the virtual environment. Therefore, my body functioned as a base for my in-world experiences as well, verifying my existence in the incident and what actually is going on, similar to what it does in the real world. As a result of this verification from the body, the person is allowed to form a new body presentation and personality for his/her time in the virtual world. Therefore, cracking down the kind of personification throughout the experience in the virtual world provides an opening for interpreting the way identities are developed in virtual environments.

In this part, a solid attention is put on understanding the way the physical body serves its function as the base of the experience. In addition to this, when we specifically think about the experience in the virtual environment, we come to understand that the corporeal body does not vanish. The body is rather illustrated with a new form in the appearance of an avatar. In other words, one person operates two bodies instead of one body. This demonstrates the way in which a physical body is formed again, clarifying a number of methods by which personality is understood in virtual environments including the Second Life.

Here, it should also be noted that different dimensions of interplay between the front stage character and the back stage character is discussed in Goffman's work as well. Even though, his theory solely discusses the interaction between two different identities of a real person, some observations are still relevant to the user-avatar relationship. Building on personal experiences, I have already described how the experiences of the avatar (front stage character) are adopted and integrated to the real life person (back stage character). Increased interaction with or through the avatar has a lot of effects on the personality and behaviour of users. According to Goffman, front stage character influences the back stage character and certain roles are adopted to be part of the back stage character. (Goffman, 1959, p.28) In time, this adoption might even result in the front stage character becoming an essential part of the identity. (Goffman, 1959, p.30) This explains how increased use of Nicole Madden also affected my experience and personality as Nil. Having the chance to take part in social interactions while assuming a role with different characteristics, results in a lot of self-reflection and adoption of certain traits. Keeping in mind that the front stage character is usually defined as a 'superior version' of the self, and constitutes the desired impression of the creator, it is only natural that this interaction between the two identities is so strong. (Goffman, 1959, p.41)

To begin my experience with the Second Life, I first visited www.secondlife.com in order to create an account. Subsequent to entering in all the necessary information concerning my personal details, I tried to select a name for my avatar. I felt trapped

and had no stimulation at all. According to me, it was such a critical issue that I could not select a wrong user name. It was never my intention to use my real name. According to what I had learned about the Second Life; using real names was not popular. I was incapable of finding an appropriate avatar name. When I was blankly looking into the computer screen, Nicole Madden name struck my mind all of a sudden. I thought it was a good name at the first instance as it was both unusual and nice, evoking my own name. After selecting a good avatar name, the following stage was to select an avatar out of the standard offers, which was not simple, either. It took me a considerable time again to devise it in my mind. I was thinking of my visual illustration that others would see as me. I was careful not to look poorly dressed as I wanted to appear professional and reputable.

In my initial sessions, I employed another version of the avatar I selected from the standard offerings with little amendments. I recall that I felt really anxious about myself, which was among the very few instances in my life. I was automatically evaluating my avatar, representing myself, against other avatars that were greatly amended and good-looking whenever I entered a space where they were present. Consequently, I felt unpleasant with my avatar's deficiency in elegance. Therefore, I acted apprehensively and reluctantly throughout the initial few weeks I spent in the Second Life, which was a character attribute that I do not possess in the real life.

This earlier focus on physical appearance reflects the importance of the personal front in Goffman's theory. According to Goffman, one of the building elements of the front stage character is physical appearance. It is essential to focus on the impression created on other through physical outlook to get into the role. This is especially valid on Second Life, where the avatar's appearance is customized upon entry to the platform and continues to be the major point of recognition throughout the interactions on the platform. As virtual environments have less opportunities for interaction through body language or voice, the look of avatar ends up being an important point of communication. It should also be reminded that Goffman cites 'creating a better first impression' as one of the major motivations behind the creation of the front stage

character. (Goffman, 1959, p.63) That is why the previously unknown feelings of discomfort and self-awareness reflect the dynamics behind the creation of the front stage character.

This process of customization and initial contact also has certain reflections on the interplay between personality and identity. Although I was not conscious of it at that time, these initial contact instances with the Second Life had started a dynamic bond with the apprehensions related to personality. Moreover, I started to shape a new identity in rather particular manners for the virtual world that I would reside in at regular intervals. Starting from the instance I took an account in the Second Life, ideas of the way I should symbolize myself to other residents of the virtual world affected the majority of my decisions regarding the formation of my avatar. Expressed differently, I kept on contemplating concerning the way others might see me, the way I could change my image in their eyes and the person I wished to be. The features that the avatar possesses are typical in developing a personality in the virtual world due to the fact that the avatar is the sole instrument that the user may employ in contacting other individuals in the Second Life. According to Goffman, maintaining face is an important concern in the creation of the front stage character. While the front stage character is customized to fit the tastes of the audience, one of the strongest motivations is to maintain a desired expression in the view of others. (Goffman, 1959, p.5) My personal experience confirmed this assumption, and the initial impulse behind further customization of my Avatar often resulted from societal concerns.

Initially, I made use of varying facets of my own physical world personality measures in order to help myself in forming my avatar. Some aspects I worked on were selecting a name for my avatar with resembling features with my real name and selecting the avatar in female sex, sustaining my actual and sex in the physical world. This is a pattern that fits the theory of Goffman. According to Goffman's theory, the front stage character is a more special version of the self. It still retains ties with back stage character (the self). It is a result of modification of certain characteristics and retaining of the core. (Goffman, 1959, p.41) It should also be reminded that the interviews also

revealed this pattern, with the majority of the interviewees re-creating an improved version of their offline selves. I also personally felt this during the customization of my avatar, and felt more comfortable the more the avatar resembled some key characteristics of my offline self. This conduct indicates that there is an outline in which an individual shifts from the recognized towards to anonymous in a new environment. Therefore, having an avatar name with resembling characteristics to my real name comforted me in getting familiar with the virtual world in Second Life.

Subsequently, I abided by the rules and principles of the group for fulfilling the purpose of being accepted into it, which was the Second Life society. The course I followed during the selection of the avatar name demonstrates my desire to be accepted into the group through applying their indicative ways of conduct. In general, avatar names were different than the users' real names and they did not possess any fanciful features like in the virtual worlds of game such as World of War Craft. In this sense, I continued to apply the principles and rules of the society and chose not to name my avatar with my own name. Rather than that, I selected another name that did not have any fanciful suggestions. Only after I was sure that I was a member of the society, I declared my distinction from the other residents. From a dramaturgical perspective, this shows that the front stage role is built to appear more meaningful to the society. In other words, Goffman's theory put forwards the idea that when presented with an opportunity, people have a tendency to create a role that is superior in the societal norm system. (Goffman, 1959, p.52. In this sense, it should be emphasised the existence of the audience, 'the Second Life community in this case' is fundamental for the dynamics to play out. The norms and values of this audience have a direct effect on the properties of the front stage character.

The audience, in Goffman's terms, is defined as a community that has an organization based on some standards. In other words, there is a standard value system accepted in the unit. The expectation of one member from the other is also roughly defined in accordance with these standards. (Goffman, 1959, p.24) My consciousness of group tendencies and the clear understanding about group preferences indicates that the

Second Life community fits Goffman's idea of an audience. Later experiences in event organization on Second Life and the development of relationships with other users also made me clearly feel the presence of certain norms. The audience of Second Life was very clear about its values and standards, making itself a chief influence in the characterization of the front stage role.

Thirdly, as a result of me spending more time in the Second Life and encountering other avatars, my efforts for impression management reached another level. At first, I compared my avatar against other residents. Notwithstanding anybody expressing anything concerning my visual appearance, I went through a feeling that I was criticised. As a result, the behavioural patterns of my avatar in a social environment turned out to be distinct from how my own personality would allow. For such a result to be derived, the real personality needs to be under the impact of the avatar. This constant preoccupation with staying in role (in other words, assuming the role I created for my avatar) resulted in the unconscious adoption of many impression management tools. Goffman terms the sum of all the different instruments that are employed for the continuation of the role as 'impression management'. This means that the person adopts certain safety mechanisms to minimize the risk of slipping out of the role. (Goffman, 1959, p.103) These are all protective practices, aiming to ensure that there is no disruption to the created impression. My personal attitude change and the tendency to resort to certain practices that seemed protective are clear indicators of impression management. (Goffman, 1959, p.108).

As a result of the experience I went through in the Second Life during my initial weeks, I concluded that the bodies of the real person and his/her illustrative body, the avatar, are interdependently present for forming an in-world experience. They also develop a characteristic combined image throughout the interval of the experience in the virtual world. These are also verified by my subsequent in-world instances. The formed identity is filled with mental strains between the person's personality in the physical world, the in-world identity and a blend identity. I refer to this situation that this occurs in as the state of symbembodiment representing symbiotic embodiment.

Besides, I argue that symbembodiment is a unique feature of being in the virtual world as the system of Second Life and the person's corporeal conduct of staring maintain the state of symbembodiment as well as enabling it to expand.

The Second Life's formation allows the development and sustainment of such a symbembodiment experience by means of its structure that heartens the user in the real world continuously to combine with his/her avatar. In the course of registering to the system, the expression on the website indicates the newcomer the way he/she will appear in the Second Life.

The user of the Second Life does not see the avatar's face. He/she can see the world through a camera angle that is situated a little behind and above the head of the avatar. As such a visual configuration is selected in the Second Life, the user is persuaded to overlook that the avatar is actually not their own self. If the camera angle was not selected this way and the user could see the face of the avatar instead of looking from the angle of the avatar, then the user could consider it separate from the body system.

In addition to this, the image arrangement reconstructs the body acts and understands the material world. Initially, the perspective that I see the world in the Second Life is rather similar to the perspective I perceive the world in the reality, leaving out a moderated vision of periphery. Besides, I can see the figure of some of my body parts such as my nose or hands etc. within the boundaries of my visual sight and therefore, all the substances surrounding me have a bond with me. The avatar accepts this function since I can see the back of the avatar's head at all times and it functions as the base for the Second Life environment. The avatar combines with the users' personality and physical body through adopting this function. Thirdly, the precise configuration of staring is expressed by Merleau-Ponty (1958, p.78) as "to see an object is either to have it on the fringe of the visual field or actually (be) concentrating on it". In the Second Life environment, despite the fact that the avatar is situated in a rather principal arrangement on the screen, it can move away into the periphery of the user even as functioning as a point of indication against what the Second Life

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environment is understood (Veerapen 2010, p. 110-111). Put another way, the avatar gets itself combined with the actual person's body presentation and turns into the personal stance through which the user sees and understands the world, generating a symbembodied situation.

What is more, the configuration of the chat in writing, which is the most prevalent channel of interacting with others in the Second Life, contributes to the blending of the user with his/her avatar throughout the virtual world experience. The written chats in the virtual world Second Life abides by the rules of Internet Relay Chat, according to which the username of the individual comes before the writing of the person. When I write "hello", it is seen as typed by Nicole Madden. When this instance of seeing my own writings by Nicole Madden over and over again, the boundaries between me and Nicole Madden get blurred. In this sense, it turns out to be simpler to blend the avatar and the user in time. Furthermore, in the case that the avatar receives a material in the virtual world of the Second Life, the platform devises it in such a way that it announces that a resident 'has given you' something. In such a situation, the avatar is again unified with the physical body of the user through generating a state of symbembodiment.

The bond present between the person using the virtual environment and the avatar is seldom a basic link; rather, both the user and the avatar unify in one being. An analysis of the way the relationship between the user and the avatar exposes a number of complications of the given bond while at the same time showing the consequences of this link pertaining to the formation of an identity in the virtual environment.

When considering the first instance I joined the Second Life, I recall that Nicole Madden was a thing that I could apply actions on and was completely distinct from me. Our bond was in fact a subject and object association. The avatar displayed itself as an object that I could apply a series of actions on. My recordings of the fieldwork following my initial visit to the Second World demonstrate this notion regarding the avatar in the framework of its bond with its user.

I considered my avatar, Nicole Madden as a separate entity out of me whose activities, conducts and image I could manipulate. Nicole Madden was nothing without me as the real user and our association with my avatar was based on the subject outline, who was me, managing an avatar as the object. In this perspective, the avatar did not have any effect on me. As a result, my personality as the user did not show any modifications. I, as the user, had utter management of the avatar and continued my characteristics the same as the real world. Throughout this initial encounter with the avatar and the Second Life, the avatar had no influence on me such as testing, developing or modifying my personality. Rather than that, I, as the user, created a treatment link with my avatar that behaved as a matter that was in my possession.

To be more precise, the avatar needs to be considered as a being that fulfils a certain goal in the course of image formation. The avatar performs actions like a clothing garment, which is a matter that enables me to show off my personality and as a result, as a means that I use to demonstrate myself to others. Several elements of a garment such as the brand, appearance and alternative details reflect the factors of the personality of the person wearing it like the occupation, social status, or likings, etc. In line with this, the avatar does not change the personality of the user; yet, it allows the user to reflect their personality in the virtual environment to the other habitants to understand.

At this point, I would like to recall the initial visits I made to Second Life. I realized that throughout my initial few visits in the virtual world, I acted shyly and unfriendly due to the feeling of being substandard when evaluated against other avatars that have been strongly amended. Since it is supposed that the avatar is a part of me, the manners I performed changed and I turned being introverted. On the other hand, I was also conscious of the fictitious feature of the avatar as it was only a means for me to get in contact with the other residents of the virtual environment I was in. despite the fact that my manners became more unfriendly than my usual attitudes, I was conscious that this avatar was actually something separate than me. In addition to this, I could

recover my normal manners and attitudes in my relationships in the material world as they were not under the impact of the experiences I went through in the virtual world.

As per impression management, it is necessary to take a look at the social interactions I experienced on Second Life. In a few weeks' time following my first encounter with the virtual world, I got inside an event society of which records to be kept in the Second Life. All through the introduction term, I made interactions with presenters and performers both in the virtual world and by making use of electronic mails. When I made contacts with the Second Life users outside the virtual world's environment, I found it difficult to make my mind on selecting the name I would use, Nil or Nicole Madden in the course of signing off electronic mails. I came to understand that Nicole Madden had a separate personality than Nil. She had turned into a person investigating the virtual world by getting involved with the system by herself and liked to make lengthy chats at the same time with drinking wine in the virtual world. Besides, she had made new friends who all recognized her as so. On the other hand, Nil was an utter outsider to these people. However, my name was still registered as Nil in all the seminar recordings. Nicole Madden had created a new way of life, customs, preferences and annoyances while she also developed a status, benevolence and a group of friends which Nil did not possess. Therefore, Nicole Madden had turned into a valid personality and for the other habitants of the Second Life, she did not depend on Nil to survive. This formation and progress in the identity of Nicole Madden is conditional on her communication with other residents of the virtual world. All these social experiences reveal that another key concept from Goffman's theory 'impression management' is employed at different levels of social interactions on Second Life. This concept will be further discussed at the end of this section focusing on social interactions on Second Life.

It is once again important to emphasize how crucial appearance becomes when the interaction takes place in the virtual world. Goffman's understanding of community puts forward the idea that there is an organization based on certain standards. (Goffman, 1959, p.24) In Second Life, the standards for personality formation and

social interaction are very dependent on the physical appearance of the avatar. This kind of an understanding of personality assumes new extents within the virtual world environment. The minute points of body language, which are generally an essential part of every environment of performance, are shaken off. The body appearance of the avatar grows into a perfect example of its personality including all its aspects such as the hair, clothes that it is wearing and the colour and size of the body. At one stage, it is usually simple to understand if a user has been spending little time in the virtual world or he/she is new in the system by looking at the image of the avatar. This situation fits my initial weeks in the Second Life as my avatar was not altered much and looked very much like the standard offerings of the virtual environment. Notwithstanding the fact that other residents did not make any remarks on the way my avatar looked, I was feeling that others were seeing me as a complete "newbie". This situation caused me to feel uneasy since I thought I was not as respected by other residents as I should have been.

Goffman uses a dramaturgical approach in his theory and draws parallels between the performance of plays and social interactions. This can also be likened to the interactions in virtual environments. The actions and illustrations of personality in the virtual environments possess characteristics similar to the performances on theatre stages. When a play is performed on the theatre stage, the spectators know that they are seeing a made-up character performed by an actor/actress unlike their real characters. On the other hand, they act keen to postpone their awareness of the truth and assume the reality of the characters played on stage. In resemblance with this, the residents of virtual worlds are actually aware that the avatars that they encounter are not true identities and perform virtual roles through the user of the avatar. However, it differs from theatre plays in that the users are not familiar with the lines between the real user (performer) and the avatar (the character) are. On the other hand, they continue to accept the truth of the performance they encounter with. The users in the virtual worlds should be cautious in performing consistent manners pertaining to the identity in order to establish and endure the validity of the identity. These are all related to the key concept of 'impression management' according to Goffman. This is

the sum of different tools the players and the audience make use of in order to ensure the continuation of the game. (Goffman, 1959, p.103) For the actors themselves, this is mainly done through coming up with certain precautions against possible errors. The customization is also left at a certain minimal level so as to ensure that the actor does not go too far from his/her comfort zone. (This tendency was revealed for me when I opted out for the same sex and a similar name for my avatar.) Impression management also applies to the behaviour of the audience. The audience is willing to ignore certain slips of the actors in order to make the performance continue. (Goffman, 1959, p.114-120) This is the dynamic on Second Life as well. While the users are aware of the duality between the user and the avatar, there is seldom any conversation on the real self. Even the organization of inworld events that requires interaction with the outer world is done with the avatar's identity. When there are certain remarks or comments that do not follow the avatar's identity, this is usually ignored. Thus, different manifestations of impression managements are felt strongly on Second Life.

It is probable that in the Second Life, the front stage of the avatar is composed of numerous characteristics of personality that are particular to virtual environments which involve avatar's profile and the group label. The profile is capable of exposing the character features of the avatar as well as the user without being noticed. Aspects including the groups that the avatar joined, the most preferred places of them in the virtual world, the picture of the avatar, the abridged biography of the avatar are capable of offering informative notes regarding the personality of the resident in the Second Life. What is anticipated from the avatar is him/her acting in line with these indicators of personality. In that sense, the extent of the customization of the personal front is different from the premises of Goffman's theory. While the properties that can be altered for a real world experience lie in the physical, economic and social there are a lot of new and virtual types of indicators on Second Life and other virtual environments. Given that Goffman sees the customization of the personal front as an initial entry point to the front stage role, all these virtual characteristics should also be kept in mind when discussing the interplay between the non-virtual self and the avatar. (Goffman, 1959, p.41).

During my first encounter with the virtual world in the Second Life and considered my avatar as a means, I tried different hair types, skin colours, and garments for visual purposes. Nonetheless, this passed in a little while. In a short period of time, Nicole Madden has turned into an entity that would permit me perform essential ethnographic study through stretching my body organization into the virtual environment. As I considered as an ethnographer going into a distant clan, I selected a pair of jeans, a top, and short cut hair for her. I thought this appearance was appropriate for such a character. In my profile biography, the study that I was undertaking was noted for ethical considerations.

Even then, my avatar has turned more dynamic and occasionally lost her focus on acting as an ethnographer, which was among the factors that I had taken into consideration when I was forming and amending my identity in the virtual world. My main apprehension was on the way other residents of the virtual world would think of me and criticise me. In fact, this may resemble the real world environment. Nevertheless, in virtual environments, the relation I have with other residents is not that easy to comprehend. Therefore, I cannot help to think that other residents of the virtual world are criticizing Nil according to the conducts of Nicole Madden whenever I enter the site. On the other hand, when I interact with other residents, I do not think of their user but think of the avatars themselves. Whenever I think of the other avatars' users, I consider the relation between them as "the avatar's user" rather than "the user's avatar". I understand that I have too little information about the real user of the avatar. An asymmetrical state is formed as the users think that their real personalities will be condemned based on the conducts of their avatars while they do not condemn other avatars' users for the deeds of the avatars. This is parallel to the relationship between the front stage and back stage characters. While the back stage character (the offline self in this case) can traditionally be seen as the main identity in question, the front stage character is often more present in social interactions. As the front stage role is assumed with the presence of the audience, this becomes the version that is seen by and interacted with the society. As the main motivation behind the creation of the front

stage character, or the avatar, is social, this constructed identity becomes internalized overtime and is more present to the outside perspective. (Goffman, 1959, p.63).

Personal meetings and interactions are an important source for understanding the other users. When considering other avatars, it should be noted that their faces are visible to the other user. The face displays itself by means of the other avatar, while it is known that a real person manages it. The user permits the face to fascinate them in a way that resembles the real world practices. The appearing face is of the avatar that is present in the virtual world instead of the user of the avatar. The association with another avatar is instigated through the meeting with the avatar's face. In case that an avatar meets another avatar and builds an association with them by means of the face, a remarkable state takes place in the virtual environment. The user of an avatar comes across with the face of the other resident's avatar, not of the other user. As a result of this, the user thinks about a moral relationship with the avatar rather than the user of the avatar. This situation clarifies the reason for which I consider the other resident as the user of the avatar rather than the avatar of the user. In fact, I regard, connect with and situate the avatar more important than the user. Likewise, the other resident considers my avatar Nicole Madden over Nil. In this sense, through accepting two different points of views, a symmetrical state comes to appearance in the association between avatars. On the other hand, I cannot help thinking that Nil is evaluated by other avatars through their criticism of Nicole Madden. Thus, there is an imbalance in the relationship of users and other habitants, in which a user merits other avatars more important than their users while he/she thinks that he/she may be conceived by other habitants by means of his/her avatar.

Virtual worlds constitute a new type of experience that has lead to a modification in the manner individuals are and have turned into. This effect can be sensed highly on numerous elements of human experience in virtual worlds. The crucial factor in understanding this dynamic lies in analysing the relationships, which include relationships between users and their avatars, the relationship of the users with other avatars through their own avatars, the felt relationships of the users by means of two

avatars. It is argued that the courses of image formation in the newly found experience generated through virtual environments resemble the ones practiced in the material world while the former includes higher number of complication grades and increased consciousness by the users. The characteristics of personification in the virtual world by means of the relationship between the user and his/her avatar indicates the way the user builds his/her own image in the real world. This is also a replication of the interplay between the front stage character and the back stage character in Goffman's terms. While the front stage character is seen as the embodiment of a desired impression, the back stage character is the source of 'secrets', which determines how the front stage role will be customized. (Goffman, 1959, p.74)The interesting dynamic between these two manifestations of identity is parallel to the relationship between the non-virtual self and the avatar. Goffman stipulates that certain traits of the front stage character are adopted and integrated to one's personality overtime. (Goffman, 1959, p. 28) This process might take place to such an extent that the constructed identity of the front stage character becomes an essential part of identity. (Goffman, 1959, p.30) This has been the case for me personally, and this section has provided an in-depth analysis of the various facets of the user- avatar relationship, with comparisons drawn to Goffman when necessary.

Further concepts from Goffman's theory can also be found in social interactions with other residents on the platform. While this process also affects personality formation, further refinement of appearance and behaviour takes place through the encounter with members of the audience. Personal experience on the platform has revealed that Second Life is a community in line with Goffman's definition, the organization of the community is constructed on certain standards and values. (Goffman, 1959, p.24) It is interesting to note that the impression I gathered in my personal experience was that the value system had an extraordinary emphasis on the appearance of the avatar. During social interactions on Second Life, various forms of impression management are utilized frequently. While I personally made use of certain tools (such as choosing some strong traits from my non-virtual self) to minimize the risk of becoming unconvincing, this was found to be a common practice for many others. Goffman puts

forward the idea that impression management is the sum of all these practices that aim to minimize faults in the role play. (Goffman, 1959, 103) The audience, in other words the opposite party in social interactions, is also part of this impression management effort, ignoring certain mistakes knowingly for the continuation of the game. (Goffman, 1959, p.114-120).

In conclusion, personal experiences on the platform enabled the application of numerous concepts from Goffman's theory. Findings on the front stage character-back stage character relationship fit in with the analysis derived from the interviews at one level. At the same time, the emotional and personal aspect of the experience also permitted further analysis, and application of other in-depth theories on the user-avatar relationship.

The next chapter will provide the analysis of data gathered from interviews. Conclusions derived from the analysis will be presented under the respective question groups, and the overarching trend stemming from these will also be elaborated upon.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS

A. Analysis of the Case Study in Terms of the Theoretical Context

In this section, the content of interviews made with the secondlife.com users are to be analysed in relation to the key concepts that have been explained in the previous chapters. Firstly, the answers to each group of questions are explained comparatively. Other key concepts such as "secrets" and "impression management "are also discussed when necessary. It should be emphasized that the answers of the users to questions on their real lives might not be accurate, as it is not possible to find any information on the real life of users, which is one of the biggest limitations of the research.

a. First Group of Questions: Physical Features

The first group of questions focus on the physical features of the avatar and the physical features of the owner in real life. The users have also been asked to explain why they have made such choices and why they have preferred an avatar that was similar to/different from their real life characteristics. In Goffman's theory, the characteristics that correspond to these questions are presented as limitations to the front stage character. In other words, when they are acting at the front stage, real people do not have the power to alter certain characteristics of their appearance, like their skin colour. The endless possibilities in the Second Life are therefore an interesting opportunity to test the theory in a medium where there are no objective limitations to the customization of the front stage character.

Giving a quantitative overview of the interviews, none of the interviewees indicated that they changed their skin colour. One interviewee, who had an animal avatar, did not have relevant information. For the second question, the majority of the interviewees had changed their height compared to their real life value. For the users

who had average height in the real life, the preference was to choose an avatar that was taller than them. It was observed that users who were male in real life were the ones who made the most radical changes in their height. Lastly, the answers to the third question under this group indicated that the majority of the users made a change in their weight. This was especially the case for users who indicated that they had average or above average weight in real life.

All of the interviewees who indicated their preferences were also asked about their motivations. The majority of the reasons that were explained were related to dissatisfaction about their current physical appearance in the real life. The users whose avatars had similar characteristics to their real life, who constitute a minority, indicated their satisfaction with real life characteristics explicitly.

One good example of characters whose avatars had opposing characteristics was **5**, who indicated that she was working in the fashion industry in real life.

I work with tall models at my work, and I usually envy them.

She said, to explain why her avatar is nearly 20 centimetres taller than her. This clearly indicates the tendency of residents to create characters that are different from their real life roles. However, what is interesting with this interviewee is that she has real role models. She all the time sees real people around who are taller and fitter. Since it is not possible to be 20 centimetres taller in real life she prefers to satisfy her wishes in a virtual environment. However, having a look at the interview with her it is noted that she is not totally satisfied with her experience in a virtual world. She says that she is fed up the insincere avatars and she is planning to quit Second Life.

Another interesting point with her is that she prefers to be a nature photographer is Second Life. She says that she prefers to do something different in Second Life. Because she is always in communication and interaction with people around in her real life, she wants to be a bit far from people and alone in the Second Life. For this

reason she prefers to be a nature photographer. She seems to be an indecisive and unstable person. She joins the Second Life to create an avatar who is rather tall just like the real people around in her back stage. But she prefers to be a nature photographer to be left alone. When she is alone, she cannot have enough of communication with other avatars and cannot show her beautiful and fit avatar to the others. Additionally, she is already bored with the attitudes of the other avatars and plans to quit the Second Life. This case shows that people can easily be bored even when they fulfil their aims. It would be interesting to have a longer conversation with this user but she preferred to keep the interview short. This also shows that she is not a patient and relatively stable person. She seems to display similar characteristics both in her front stage and back stage. Thus, it may be concluded that even when Second Life users have new avatars who are in good shape, their personal traits affect their relations and attitudes in the Second Life.

Another interesting example was "**9**" who said that his motivation was to attract the opposite sex avatars in the game, therefore indicating that he felt he would need to look different from his real life self to be attractive. There were also a few users (one such example being **7**) who simply said that their motivation was to explore the options in the Second Life. For them, changing their appearance was a means of creating an experience that would be different from their own self. This is also an example of how the game brings forward the tendency of creating a different "front stage" character. When provided with a medium where alterations are possible, users tend to go for characteristics that are different from their real life versions. The general tendency is towards creating an avatar whose appearance is at least slightly different than the real life appearance. It is interesting to note that this difference is always for a taller height and a lower weight, which reflects the obvious impact of widely accepted beauty criteria.

The first group of questions can be approached as the initial stage of front stage character creation. The creation of the avatar is the first step in Second Life, and it directly reflects the "performing stage" (front stage) concept in Goffman's theory. The appearance of the avatar is the first step of separation between the front and back

stages. Thus, the answers to the first group of questions also give an insight to the first preparations for acting, indicating how the shaping of appearance reveals the tendency of the user to create a different "self" when provided with a new medium. (Goffman, 1959, p.52) In Goffman's theory, the front stage character is defined based on two different concepts: the setting and the personal front. In other words,the creation of such an impression relies on the existence of a specific setting, and the customization of the role. As studied in the previous chapters, Second Life, as a virtual environment, is a typical 'setting' in this sense. As a cyberspace, it is clearly detached from the daily reality of the users and provides an ideal 'setting' for the initiation of a front stage character. The other key concept is the customization of the personal front. While this stage in real life usually does not have clear cut borders, the customization of the avatar is the first stage in Second Life. Unlike non-virtual social interactions, this is presented as a necessary step to enter the world of Second Life. Thus, the first group of questions that focuses on physical aspects reveals the tendencies of users in their initial customization of the personal front. Based on Goffman's theory, the assumption is that an improved version of the self will be created. (Goffman, 1959, p.41).

The answers to this group of questions tie in with Goffman's assumption that people would like to show a special version of themselves to others, creating an image of their self. (Goffman, 1959 p.41) According to Goffman's theory, social interactions are characterized by the creation of a 'desired impression' by people, and this role is a superior version of the self. Through compliance with conventions that are meaningful to the audience, the person gets a desirable reaction from his/her audience. In that sense, the slimmer and taller avatars of the interviewees are a prime example of this front stage character in possession of more desirable characteristics. Goffman argues that the creation of this character is aimed at a better first expression or more interaction with others. The aforementioned reasons cited by users also fit examples that Goffman puts forward: Many interviewees openly admitted that they would like to create a positive first impression in the platform, or would like to attract opposite-sex avatars. In all, the specific answers to the questions were parallel to the assumption

that the pattern in social interactions includes the creation of a character that has improved characteristics compared to the real life self.

Lastly, a brief analysis of the opportunities provided by Second Life and the observations from the interviews will be provided. As explained, virtual environments, through enabling users to endlessly customize the physical appearance of their avatars, differ from non-virtual environments. While it is seemingly impossible to change one's height and skin colour, and quite difficult to change one's weight in Second Life all these alterations require a few clicks. Goffman's theory is based on the limitations of non-virtual environments where the changes to the physical appearance of the avatar are limited. Despite this difference in the mechanics of the two environments, the alterations mirrored desired changes in real life. It is interesting to note that nearly no users choose to go for animal avatars or such avatars that have unworldly appearances. The majority of the interviewees simply opted for being taller or slimmer, which are common desires in real life. In other words, the users prefer to create a front stage character that is a special version of their real life self, just like Goffman stipulates, without fully departing from their existence in the non-virtual world.

b. Second Group of Questions: Economic Aspects

The second group of questions in the survey related to the economic aspects. The interviewees were given questions on their average income, the city where they live, their cars and their houses. The same questions were then asked about their avatars, and the reasons behind any similarities and differences were also explored.

According to Goffman's theory, people have a tendency to exaggerate their real incomes when given an opportunity to create a new image. The general tendency to build an impression that has superior traits compared to the real self of the person (Goffman, 1959, p.41) Even though the economic aspects are not as directly related to the personal front as physical features, they still have an important effect on it. The economic status of the person shapes the outfit and accessories of the person, which are an important part of the outer appearance. Other factors such as one's car and

house also affect the personal front, as they are an important part of the impression created on others. Thus, these factors are also an important step in the creation of the front stage character. As highlighted before, the creation of the personal front on the front stage is a key concept in Goffman's theory. This is especially important in Second Life, where the appearance of the avatar is the only indicator for others. Most of the daily interaction on the platform is shaped by the appearance of avatars. It should also be noted that body parts, outfits and accessories are the most traded goods on the platform, where the user is frequently encouraged to spend currency on customizing the avatar. In terms of the opportunities for customization, the areas relating to these questions are more flexible than the previous ones in real life, as it is easier to alter indicators of one's wealth, compared to one's height/ weight. The situation on the Second Life is quite particular in that sense, as there is a currency that is used in the platform. Therefore, creating a different economic outlook in the Second Life is not as easy as changing one's appearance. Unlike other platforms that enable the creation of avatars, like Sims, the Second Life requires spending money for full ownership of certain items. That is why the users' answers to the questions on their avatars might just be aspirations and not their real situation in the platform.

For the first question (income), the majority of users answered that they had chosen a higher income for their avatar. The only exceptions were a few users whose answers to real life questions indicated that they did not have any economic difficulties. This was parallel to the user's choices of occupation, which will be explained in the third section. For the second question, a lot of users refrained from giving a concrete answer to the question, as the players on the game often do not have set homes. The ones who answered, however, all replied saying that they had chosen a different place for their avatar.

As for the third and fourth questions, which were often answered jointly, the general tendency was towards choosing cars or houses that would be associated with higher income. One of the interviewees, **3**, indicated that he was a student with an average

income of around 500 TL of pocket money, living in a dormitory and not owning a car. About his avatar he said:

> I chose a nice house and car and I made the situation look cooler.

This is a prime example of the general tendency to create avatars that have cooler lives than the users. Another user, **8**, similarly said that he had chosen a higher income lifestyle because

> It looked more prestigious, it looked better.

The minority, whose answers on real life indicated an average or above-average income, did not really concentrate on changing the economic aspects of the avatar. For example, **6**, who is a graphic designer living in Utrecht, said that he did not really bother to customize these characteristics.

> I often say that I am a designer, just like in real life.

he said, stating that he preferred his avatar to have economic characteristics similar to his own. One stark contrast was from **10**, who had an income of about 800 TL a month and took up temporary house cleaning jobs to survive. When asked if her avatar was similar to her she said:

> NOOO:D I am rich here. I live in a house, own a company and my car is a Mercedes.

This can be explained with a dramaturgical approach, where according to Goffman, the formation of the front stage character is closely tied with one's points of weakness and dissatisfaction. Similarly, the interviewees who prefer to make the biggest change to their economic persona on Second Life are the ones who are most affected by low income.

The first group of people, who actually form the majority of the users who were interviewed, confirm Goffman's prediction that people have a tendency to create a wealthier image (Goffman, 1959, p.52). According to Goffman, people often shape their front stage character according to their experiences in the back stage. In other words, the back stage is the source of motivation behind certain characteristics of the front stage character (Goffman, 1959 p. 63). The second group of questions were a good example of this relationship between the front and back stages. All of the users, who were not satisfied with their level of income and lifestyle in reality, chose to create avatars who had a higher income than themselves. This highlights the importance of the experiences in the backstage, demonstrating how the back stage should be inspected closely to analyse the traits of the front stage character. The front stage character, the avatar in this case, mirrors the desired impression that the interviewees would like to create in the eyes of the Second Life community. Consequently, the interviewees stated that their motivation was that it would look "cooler", thus confirming Goffman's theory that people create front stage characters to be more attractive, or create a better first impression. (Goffman, 1959 p. 41).

c. Third Group of Questions: Sex, Age, Job and Marital Status

The third group of questions were about the sex, age, job and marital status of the interviewees and their avatars. Motivations behind creating a similar or different avatar were also discussed. The first topic, which is sex, bears the characteristics of the properties discussed under the first group of questions. Just like racial features and height, it is a characteristic that is nearly impossible to change. That is why it is an objective limitation to the front stage character in the real world. The Second Life, in this aspect, as there is the option of choosing a different sex, or a vampire, or an animal/creature. It is still interesting to note that the users are forced to pick a sex when they are first entering the Second Life, showing that the dichotomy in the real life is mirrored in the platform. Thus, when it comes to the analysis of the answers to this question, it should be kept in mind that the variables in the Second Life are

different from the real life. The second question, age is a similar characteristic, though it is not nearly as difficult to change in terms of appearance. (Women frequently give misleading information about their age for a different first impression.) The third aspect, job, has some characteristics that is similar to the previous group that was explored. Like in real life, people tend to group together their job, income and lifestyle. That is why, the previous assumption that people have a tendency to create a wealthier or more prestigious character when provided with an opportunity will apply. The last question, marital status, is another interesting aspect as well. It can be stated that this is one of the aspects that can be frequently manipulated to look more attractive to counterparts. Based on Goffman's theory, the expectation was that all of these different aspects will be manipulated to appear more attractive in societal terms. The users were expected to emphasise certain characteristics, or to conceal others in order to reach a constructed impression that they feel they would feel better in.

The majority of the users who were interviewed indicated that they had chosen their real life sex. Many male users had humorous replies to the questions, often stating that "their avatars were male, of course". This shows how gender roles are deeply rooted in individuals; therefore making a characteristic that is different to alter, even in an online world. Only a few preferred to change their sex and they had varying reasons behind this. One particular example was **6**, who was male in real life but had a red-haired women avatar. He said that one of his motivations was to avoid people feeling uncomfortable when they talked to him, as many female users on the Second Life feel under constant threat of being hit on. He also said that choosing a different sex made things "more interesting" and enabled him to "talk differently to different people." His affirmation that changing his sex created the possibility of engaging in different conversations is significant. This creates the basis for the front stage role, providing a good example of similarities to role-playing and dramaturgy.

For this question, results indicated that the users often prefer to go with their sex in the real life. This can be explained with the concept of "impression management" in Goffman's theory. According to Goffman, people make use of certain tools to "stay"

in their role. These practices would minimize the risk of different mistakes like remarks or attitudes that do not fall under the created role (Goffman, 1959 p. 103). Choosing a same sex avatar can be seen as a "defensive" or "protective" measure that ensures that the users can keep up their coherent front stage "role". Given the strong role of sex and gender in the society, altering one's gender online might be seen as a radical step compared to the alteration of the other characteristics. It should also be noted that the reasons presented by the users who chose a different sex were often practical and did not show similarities to the motivations in other groups. In those cases, the reasons explained often resulted from a lack of confidence or dissatisfaction about a particular characteristic, whereas there were not any users who openly complained about their sex in real life. On the contrary, there was emphasis on the intention to attract the opposite sex. This was already explained as a possible motivation behind the creation of a front stage character.

The answers to the second question indicated a nearly even split. While there were many users who were single both in real life and the game, there were some others who were engaged/married in real life, but preferred creating avatars that were single. The only example who was single in the real life but had a married period on the Second Life was**7**. When questioned about their motivations, many users indicated that one of the primary reasons they started playing the Second Life was to communicate with opposite-sex players. One of the interviewees, **3**, for example said that he was single because

It was the reason to enter the Second Life, wasn't it?

Another example, **9**, who was a 42 year old married man, said that he had chosen a young and single avatar because he felt that

This would make him more interesting when talking to someone else for the first time.

In accordance with Goffman's theory, the majority of the users showed a tendency to choose their marital status in order to seem more interesting or special. This reflects the trend to create a special version of oneself to present to others (Goffman, 1959 p. 41).

For the third question, the results were similar to the second group answers, with the majority of users saying that they had chosen a "more interesting" or "more prestigious" job for their avatar. There were also some answers that indicated deeply rooted personal reasons. One such interviewee was **8**, who is an event organizer in the real life. He said:

I have always wanted to be a pilot as a child but could not do so later in life.

Another example was the user **4** who explained:

I have always wanted to be a model but I couldn't do so because of my height.

These results confirm Goffman's assumption that people prefer to create images that appear wealthier. As explained, income and job is has an important indirect effect on the personal front. That is why it is a key step in the modification of the front stage character to look more desirable.

For the fourth question, answers showed that users who were past their youth preferred to choose younger avatars. "The desire to stay young" or "trying to be more attractive to the opposite sex" were two reasons that were given repeatedly. One of the users who had chosen a younger avatar, **5**, replied:

Which woman likes aging, even if it is virtual?

This clearly demonstrates that Goffman is right in assuming that people have a tendency to create a different front stage character with more attractive qualities, in order to impress others. (Goffman, 1959 p. 41) The only user who had chosen an older

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avatar was 3, who was 19 years old in real life but chosen a 23-year-old avatar. Even though this seems to be the opposite of the previous trend, the motivation behind doing so was the same as in the first group. He believed that being in your 20s increased the chance of attracting opposite sex avatars. In all, it is clear that Goffman's assumption fits the general trend of creating a young front stage character.

Goffman's theory is based on the dichotomy between the front stage and the back stage. While the front stage is characterized by the presence of the audience, back stage is where members of audience do not have access to enter. The 'role', in other words the constructed impression, is assumed on the front stage. This is where the necessary setting to the front stage role is provided. Even though the two spheres are seemingly distant, there is actually an important tie between the personas in these different settings. Goffman puts forward the idea that certain conditions in the back stage affect the features of the front stage character. These conditions are termed as "secrets" and they are pieces of information that would be seen as incompatible with the version they present to others (Goffman, 1959, p.74).Secrets are at the core of the customization of the front stage character. They create the motivation behind the altering of certain characteristics for the creation of the front stage character. When explaining the motivations behind their avatar creation, many interviewees gave away certain information that would qualify as 'a secret' in this sense. For example, **9**, who was a middle-aged and married man with a low income in real life, created an avatar who was a young, single, businessman. He explained that he hoped this would help him meet many different people saying that he thought he would tell them the reality once they talked for a while. This is clearly information he has to keep away in order to act coherently when he is in the game. Moving from this, it should be noted that the back stage, where no members of the audience is allowed, is an important starting point when analysing the formation of the front stage character.

d. Conclusions Derived from the Analysis

This section will involve a brief look at the conclusions derived from the analysis of each group of questions, followed by a discussion on general trends and arguments that were identified.

The first group of questions focused on physical aspects, which were by nature considerably easier to change virtually. The interviews revealed that the general trend was to customize an avatar to look slimmer and taller than the real life self. As per skin colour, only the minority of the interviewees preferred to alter this towards a skin colour they deemed more attractive. This trend towards a body image that fits the current beauty criteria in the society reveals once again that the customization of the front stage character is done in line with the values of the audience. In Goffman's framework, the personal front is a very important milestone in the creation of the front stage character (Goffman, 1959, p.41). The apparent difference between the appearance of the avatars and the real life look of the interviewees once again showed that some degree of customization of the physical aspects is an important step in the creation of the front stage character. Lastly, the assumption that people tend to create a more special and attractive version of themselves was confirmed in two different ways. The avatars that were described were customized to look more attractive and had characteristics that would generally be looked upon as attractive. From a different point of view, the created front stage characters were still 'version of the self', and the endless possibilities for customization provided by the virtual environment were rarely used.

The second group of questions were related to the economic aspects of identity, with questions on income, house/car and city of residence. The majority of the interviewees indicated that they had preferred to create an avatar that had a higher income then themselves, usually accompanying this higher income with a better house and car then what they have in real life. The difference in income was especially evident for interviewees who indicated that they had economic problems in real life. This firstly

demonstrates that the formation of the front stage characters, which is highly affected by societal values, is done with the aim to create a more superior role. In that sense, the obvious trend towards a richer avatar, and the interviewees' ways of justifying this choice ('it is cooler', 'it is more attractive' etc.) are a good example of this tendency. Another important concept from Goffman that was applicable to this group of questions was 'secrets'. The gap between the income of the avatar and the user was especially high for those with the lowest income, who openly expressed their displeasure with this. This is a good example of the concept of 'secrets'. People have a tendency to hide certain pieces of information that they deem incompatible with the identity they build. For the ones with economic problems, the low income is one of the primary things they choose to alter when creating a desired impression. It is at the same time one thing that they choose to hide from their audience.

For the third group of questions, focusing on roles, all of the sub groups were diverse and important. The questions focused on the age, sex, marital status and job of the interviewee. The age and marital status were often altered to be younger and single. The majority of the users chose a job which they believe was more desirable, and there were some examples where the 'dream job' they couldn't have in life was the preferred choice for the avatar. Lastly, nearly all of the users preferred to have the same sex they had in real life. Like the questions in the first group, many of these characteristics were easier to alter virtually then in real life. Despite this, the alterations that were made were not too dramatic. This trend to moderately alter characteristics, and the obvious preference for the same sex is an application of the concept of 'impression management'. While the front stage character is different from the back stage character, there is still an important tie between the two. People often make use of certain tools to ensure that they stay in character in front of the audience. This is also to ensure that the front stage role is realistic and does not give away that it is essentially, a performance. Choosing the same sex can be seen as a tool of impression management. It can also be highlighted that the only interviewee who preferred change his sex, decided to keep everything else about the avatar (economic aspects, job etc.) identical to his real life self to be able to focus on the change of sex during the game.

This can also be seen as a tool minimizing the risk of slipping out of the role. As per the other characteristics, the tendency to have a younger and single avatar can be associated with the general trend to have a front stage character that is more desirable and attractive.

Moving from the results, it can be said that the overall trend confirmed the assumption that users generally tried to create a new person, who differs from their characteristics in real life. The strongest motivations behind this were the desire to attract other avatars and the desire to look more interesting, which shows that "impression management" is a key concept in this sort of behaviour. The relationship between the back and front stages was also confirmed, with "secrets" being revealed by users when trying to explain their choice of having a different character (Goffman, 1959 p. 74). One interesting aspect of the game, which is the opportunity to alter characteristics like sex and racial features, did not result in a significant difference from Goffman's assumptions. Even though the users had endless possibilities, nearly none of the interviewees preferred to make dramatic changes. While confirming the general trend that was identified above, this also gives a good example of "impression management". It can once again be observed that users make use of certain tools and safety mechanisms to decrease their risk of going out of their role (Goffman, 1959 p. 103).They make sure that the modifications to their real life self stays at a level where they can still control and feel associated to it.

The analysis of the interviews reveals that the users preferred to re-create their offline selves with minor adaptations on certain characteristics. This once again shows that the relationship between the avatar and the user can be likened to the relationship between the front and back stage characters. While the latter is not a completely different identity from the former, they are two different reflections of a shared core. The experiences from the back stage constitute the source for the customization of the front stage. The front stage is the embodiment of an impression that the person feels would fit him/her better. According to Goffman, the front stage character is a 'more special' self, and it is still part of the self. (Goffman, 1959, p.41) In all, the interviews

revealed that the majority users preferred to create an avatar that contained the main characteristics of their real-life self (like sex and skin colour) who had certain characteristics that were modified to be more meaningful to the audience (height, weight, higher income, younger age etc.)

Lastly, the limitations to the interviews are to be briefly explained. The first obvious limitation to such interviews is the impossibility of checking the accuracy of information provided by users. Therefore, the information presented on the real lives of users might not be accurate. Secondly, the residents of Second Life have a tendency to get irritated when asked about their real lives. As the sole purpose of the game is to provide a medium where people can detach themselves from their real life, many users refused to take part in the interview. Lastly, it was not possible to have a choice of new users and highly experienced users and there was not a great geographical or cultural variation to interviewees. Further studies with a larger number and scope of users will surely yield important results.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The development of technologies in the last decade and the wider use of online platforms have made these platforms a new interest for social research. These virtual spaces, which mimic real life social interactions, provide an opportunity to analyse identity formation from a theoretical perspective (Peachey 2010, p. 37). This study has set out to explore the creation of avatars in the online platform Second Life, in light of Erving Goffman's theory "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life". As previously existing literature on the platform is still in the phase of development, and there are few applications of Goffman's theory, which actually has a great potential of applicability to online platforms, this study sought to focus on this topic. The literature review conducted on virtual worlds shows that the number of the research focusing on Second Life from the point of Goffman's "Presentation of Self Theory" is too limited, which once again proved that this study is original in this sense. The main two questions that were discussed were the theoretical analysis of the user experience in real life and the comparison of results reached in the Second Life with Goffman's theory. To this end, a method of personally experiencing the Second Life, followed by in-world interviews with the Second Life users was employed.

This section begins with an overview of the main concepts that were presented and gives concluding views on how they can be applied to a Second-Life based framework. Later on, the hypotheses from Goffman's theory are re-visited in light of results gathered from the personal experience and interviews. Limitations of the study and arenas for further research are also explained.

Erving Goffman's main argument is that during their social interactions, people behave according to a self-image they create. His framework, that is based on concepts borrowed from performance arts, puts forward the idea that this image that is created aims to present a special version of the self, in order to impress others or maintain interactions (Goffman, 1959, p. 37). Literature indicates that there are some

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similarities between online role-playing and improvisational theatre. According to Newman, both of these activities are characterized by the creation of a real-time story through the collaboration of participants (2007, p. 27). In addition to this, the users in the virtual world are aware that they are in contact with a "role" that is created by the user. In turn, they suppress their disbelief in the role, and accept the existence of the platform. The same mechanism exists for theatre as well. As such, Goffman's re-use of concepts from performance arts can be applied to virtual platforms, as there are some mechanical similarities between the two fields. Therefore, basing assumptions on Goffman's theory is a valid starting point for analysing behavioural patterns on the Second Life.

For the purpose of this study, the Second Life was also taken as a hyperreality and cyberspace. Second Life clearly fits the definition of "hyperreality" as discussed by Eco, who argues that the factual and the illusive are blended together without any clear borders in this state (Eco, 2013). All of the interviews also contributed to this understanding, for the interviewees' style of answering the questions was clearly personal. Even the questions on the avatar alone were answered in the first person singular, showing the clear amalgamation of the two identities in the minds of users. The experiences in-world also confirmed the definition of the Second Life as a cyberspace. The community in the Second Life, with its own rituals, habits and events, clearly formed a social background where interaction and presentation was experienced in a pattern that is very similar to everyday life. This confirms Slater's understanding of cyberspace, as this computer-generated platform serves as a social background for social interactions, which are actually representative (Slater, 2002). During the personal experience, peer pressure generated by other users was strongly felt, and the specific experience of event planning (that was explained in detail in the relevant section) revealed the dynamics of a social background.

The study is based on the premise that the Second Life can be taken as a "front stage" in Goffman's terms. Goffman distinguishes the front stage as the platform where the acting begins. Personal front and manners, clothes and other characteristics

differentiate the front stage (Goffman, 1959 p. 55). The Second Life is an ideal platform to be compared to a front stage, as the entry into the platform requires the formation of a character 'the Avatar". The first step in the process is choosing the sex and appearance of the avatar, and from this moment on, the existence of the individual is differentiated from the self in real life. The manners are also different in the Second Life, as the game has certain borders to human interaction and behaviour. In other words, the user has to adapt to the modes of communication and behaviour offered by the platform, and cannot directly transfer his/her manners from real life.

This was also strongly felt during the personal experience phase. The sudden emergence of Nicole Madden as a separate being from Nil Mit was a process where the emergence of the front stage character was clearly felt. On the platform, the customization of the physical look of the avatar was seen as very important. Most of the shopping on Second Life focused on the choice of skins, body parts and outfits. Similarly, the one obvious point that usually distinguished a 'newbie' from a well-established, older avatar was the look of the avatar. In that sense, starting from the initiation of the game with a customization of the avatar, the pressure to have a customized personal front was felt throughout the time in the game. From Goffman's perspective this emphasis on the personal front can be seen as an indicator of the formation of the front stage character. The creation of the avatar, from the beginning, is the creation of a front stage character in Goffman's terms. The customization of the avatar marks an importance step in getting into a different 'role' on the front stage. The interviews also revealed the same pattern. Most of the interviewees had strong feelings about the physical appearance of their avatar. That was the area where most of them had made the most conscious decisions, and the explanation behind their choices often came easily. Most of the users also said that the creation of their avatar in their first moment on the platform, made them more curious about the virtual environment, and helped them adapt to the new setting. In light of all this, it can be argued that the formation of the front stage character is felt perhaps more strongly than in real life.

Having clarified that the Second Life shows the characteristics of a "front stage" in Goffman's terms, the relationship between the avatar and the user was also explored. Taylor argues that avatars represent "the way people feel about themselves from within" (Taylor, 2002, p.51). In other words, avatars should not be thought of as completely separate beings. These digital bodies are used as a means to express oneself, and they constitute a public sign of how the users internally experience their own identity. As previously explained, I prefer to define this relationship as a "symbiosis". This implies that during the in-world experience, the avatar and the user form a unified image. This is firstly enhanced by the setup of the game, where the viewpoint is from the back of the avatar's head. In that sense, the avatar becomes an object that is owned by the user, and that serves the formation of an image.

This assumption was further developed with the content provided by interviews. The users' manner of speaking about their avatars indicated that the real-life self and avatar had become unified. Even though the avatar was still perceived as a tool to experience new things, the questions about avatars were still answered in a way that indicated direct involvement. None of the users referred to their avatar in third person, and they maintained their role as the avatar during the whole conversation. In all of the interviews, the word 'I' curiously referred to both the avatar and the real life self of the user. This demonstrated how the two identities were intertwined. Some of the more experienced avatars explained how they had become so used to their virtual life on Second Life, emphasising the existence of routines, social groups and 'friends' on the platform. My personal experience was also an important step in understanding this complex relationship. With regular engagement on the platform, my avatar Nicole Madden, became a different skin which was different from me yet, very representative of myself. With greater social interaction on the platform and volunteering in the organization of an in-world event, I felt the borders between the two blur more than ever. In time my real identity and the avatar Nicole Madden came to be different reflections of myself. This resulted in an interesting plurality of the self, verifying the classification of the relationship as a "symbiosis".

Goffman's basic assumption that the front stage characters is a more special version of the back stage character matched with the pattern provided by interviews. (Goffman, 1959, p. 37) There were three main groups of questions in the interview. The first one referred to physical appearance of the real self and the avatar. The second group was on the economic aspects, namely the income, place of residence, type of house and car. The last group of questions was on the sex, job, marital status and age of participants.

The results from all three groups of questions were in line with assumptions derived from Goffman's theory. For the first group, the majority of the interviewees preferred to create a taller and slimmer avatar compared to their real life self. For the second group, the majority of interviewees preferred to create a richer avatar, who had a better car and house compared to their lifestyle in the non-virtual world. For the last group, all of the users who were past the beginning of their twenties, made their avatar younger than themselves when presented with the opportunity. Married users preferred single avatars. The general picture was the creation of a projection that had superior qualities to that of the real life self. Goffman argues that the front stage character is a superior version the self, and it reflects a more 'special' self that the person would like to present to others (the audience). (Goffman, 1959, p.41) In all the three sub-groups, this important assumption that sets the groundwork for the rest of the analysis was strongly observed. The alterations that were made clearly reflected what would be regarded as 'superior' by the society. It should also be noted how important the existence of the audience is, for the formation of the front stage character. The characterization of the front stage character is often done so that the end product is meaningful according to the values of the audience. In that sense, it is important to highlight that 'the more special version' which was represented by the avatar, represented widely accepted values of our society today. Being thinner, taller, younger and single are all reflections of the widely accepted norms in the society, which form the values of the audience.

For each of the questions in all three groups, the interviewees were asked to explain why they had made that choice. They were especially asked to explain why they preferred the characteristic to be similar to/ different from their non-virtual self. For these questions, the most frequently named motivations for the choices were "wanting to look more attractive", "wanting to look more interesting", "befriending more users" and "attracting the opposite sex". All of these points are direct applications of Goffman's theory, where the front stage character is formed with the aim of improving the first impression or social interactions (Goffman, 1959, p. 37). Goffman's theory primarily explains the dynamic between social interactions, and that is why it is important to understand the effects of the alterations on the social interactions that take place. Referring to the interviews, users frequently openly admitted that they cared about how they appeared to the other avatars. Most of them believed that their choices for their avatar would be more representative of their self and improve the quality of social interactions they would have on the platform. This strong social nature of the front stage character formation was also evident in the personal experience phase. I personally felt that I would have to alter certain characteristics of my avatar to be more socially active on the platform. A good example of this is the previously explained pressure to create an avatar that has an impressive appearance. Most of the friends I made on Second Life frankly said that they would often go for avatars 'that seemed to have a more complete look' as they assumed that they wouldn't be newcomers. In that sense, all of the choices that are made on the platform when customizing the avatar, are to some extent shaped by social motivations.

The front stage is only meaningful in relation to the back stage. Backstage is defined as the platform where the performers stop acting and there is no audience presence (Goffman, 1959, p. 63). For the purpose of this study, the real life as opposed to the Second Life was taken as a backstage. This is where the user can act freely without any need to coordinate his/her actions with the avatar. Other users on the platform do not have access to this reality. This was strongly felt during the personal experience phase of the study. There was an evident culture of not making any references to the real life self in the Second Life. (This is also discussed as a limitation to the study.)

This is an expected reaction from the users, one that serves to protect their back stage as a personal and intimate area. The importance of the back stage lies in "the secrets" as Goffman refers to them. According to Goffman, the formation of the front stage character is shaped by certain pieces of information from the backstage that are trying to be concealed (Goffman, 1959, p. 74). The questions on why the users had chosen to shape their avatars in a similar or different manner to their real self was specifically targeted to reveal ties with this concept. The interviews clearly showed that this framework from Goffman's theory is applicable to the Second Life. From the general trend to select a richer or more attractive avatar, the cases that stood out were the ones where the interviewee revealed information that can be classified as a "secret". A particular example was the user who aspired to be a model, but couldn't do so because of her height, who later on chose a tall avatar with a model's physique. A similar example was the low-income user who had a rich and successful avatar driving an expensive car. The same trend could also be seen for age and marital status. All of the users past their 20s jokingly noted that they hated aging in real life, and therefore chose a younger avatar. Another user, who was married in real life, purposefully chose a young and single avatar, claiming that he would only tell the truth after the communication with another avatar progresses. In conclusion, interviews revealed that the assumption that the secrets are the connecting points between the front stage character and the back stage character holds true for the Second Life.

The last important concept from Goffman's theory that was discussed in the study was "impression management". According to Goffman, people make use of certain defensive and protective mechanisms to minimize the risk of getting out of the role (Goffman, 1959 p. 103). This is further enhanced with the audience considerately enabling the performers to continue their role. In other words, certain bits of knowledge or behaviour may purposefully be ignored by the audience to let the performance continue (Goffman, 1959 p. 114-120). From the interviews, it was gathered that the users made use of "impression management" when shaping their in-world existence. For example, taking a risk such as changing the sex of the avatar or choosing a non-human avatar is usually not taken, as this would make it harder to stay

in the role. For those who choose to do so, they have a tendency to keep all other characteristics of the avatar similar to their real life self, which is a move to minimize the risk of slipping out of the role. This was especially evident in the first and third group of questions. Even though some characteristics like skin colour and sex were easier to alter virtually then in real life, they were rarely changed. This can be linked to the fact that race, skin colour and sex are very important and primary building stones of identity. When building an avatar, which is to a certain extent representative of the self, altering these characteristics is often seen as too 'radical'. This would from a certain perspective, cut the tie between the self and the avatar, and from another perspective make it considerably more difficult to stay in the role/ make the role convincing. It is also important to note that even though avatars typically differ from the real life self, there is still some connection that is maintained. Other such mechanisms were also identified during the personal experience phase. Firstly, the general pressure in Second Life to pay attention to the appearance of the avatar, in order to not be labelled as a "newbie", is very strong. This pushed me to customize my avatar to blend in with the other users, clearly an act of impression management. The general culture of not referring to the real life self is also a tool of impression management, this is a typical example of the audience tactfully choosing to ignore that this is a performance. In all, the concept of 'impression management' is also directly applicable to the Second Life.

Goffman argues that the front stage character is representative of the conception of self. In other words, this mask represents the self that one would like to be. The end result of this process is that the role becomes second nature to the person, forming an integral part of personality (Goffman, 1959, p.30). In light of the direct applicability of core concepts from Goffman's theory to Second Life, it can be argued that such a relation is formed between the avatar and the user. In other words, the avatar is a reflection of the self that the user strives to be and in turn, experiences in-world affect the character of the user in the real world. This is represented by the symbiotic relationship between the avatar and the user. In conclusion, the mechanism of shaping

a front stage character, which is a special reflection of the self, is applicable to the behavioural patterns of Second Life users.

This study is intended to be a humble contribution to the existing literature on the presentation of self in virtual environments. Even though there are some studies that are concerned with Second Life and the work of Erving Goffman, this study is rare in being solely focused on the framework presented by Goffman. The specific focus on avatar creation, and the method of the case study is also significantly different from some other studies in the field. This study has also attempted to address an apparent lack of primary sources and comprehensive literature on this specific area. Based on the work of Erving Goffman, not a lot of other primary literature or secondary sources exist that would further our understanding of the presentation of self in virtual environments. The study has tried to undertake the analysis of this presentation of self in virtual environments by applying the framework presented by Goffman, and in doing so extend the coverage of literature in this area. However, an apparent need for such sources should be noted and further areas of research and study might be considered in order to broaden the scope of current literature.

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Username	First Group: Physical Features					
	Back Stage Answers			Front Stage Answers		
	Skin Colour	Height	Weight	Skin Colour	Height	Weight
1	Brunette	1.87	72	Same	Taller	Skinnier
2	Light	1.87	75	Light	1.87	75
3	Brunette	1.74-1.75	N/A	Brunette	N/A	N/A
4	Light	1.68	57	Light	Taller	Thinner
5	Light	1.65	57	Light	1.75-80	60
6	Light	1.80	Curvy	Light/Ginger Hair	Different	Different
7	Light	1.83	82	Light	Taller	Skinnier
8	Light	1.90	75	Brunette	1.90	75-80
9	Brunette	1.70	85	Light	1.85	70
10	Blond	1.65	55	Blond	1.75	55

Username	Second Group: Economic Aspects							
	Back Stage Answers				Front Stage Answers			
	Monthly Income	City	Type of House	Type of Car	Monthly Income	City	Type of House	Type of Car
1	2000-3000 TL	Ankara	Doesn't own one.	Doesn't own one.	Up to 10 000 TL	N/A	Doesn't own one.	Racing Motorcycle
2	9000 TL	Ankara	Villa	Sirocco	Same	Ankara	Same	Same
3	500 TL pocket money	Bursa	Dormitory	Doesn't own one.	More than real life.	N/A	Has a nicer flat.	Has a nicer car.
4	1500 TL	İstanbul	Flat	Opel Astra	Higher	Milano	N/A	Mini Cooper

Table continues

5	3000 TL	Denizli	Has a flat.	Doesn't own one.	Irregular	N/A	Doesn't own one.	Has a car.
6	18000-30000 EUR	Utrecht	Rent.	Doesn't own one.	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
7	Average	İstanbul	Has a flat.	Volkswagen Golf	More than real life.	N/A	Has a nicer flat.	Doesn't own one.
8	3000 TL	Ankara	Flat	Toyota Auris	Higher	N/A	Has a nicer flat	Has a nicer car.
9	2000-2500 TL	Sivas	House	Toros	1000 TL	Ankara	Doesn't own one.	Doesn't own one.
10	800 TL	Kütahya	House	Doesn't own one.	Higher income.	N/A	Villa.	Mercedes.

Username	Third Group: Roles							
	Back Stage Answers				Front Stage Answers			
	Sex	Age	Job	Marital Status	Sex	Age	Job	Marital Status
1	Male	22	Translator	Single	Male	26	Pilot	Single
2	Male	30	Civil engineer	Single	Male	25	Theatre Player	Single
3	Male	19	Student	Single	Male	22-23	Lawyer	Single
4	Female	24	English Teacher	Single	Female	24	Model	Single
5	Female	24	Stylist	Single	Female	23	Nature Photographer	Single

Table continues

6	Male	29	Graphic Designer	Engaged	Female	22-24	Same.	Single
7	Male	32	HR Personnel	Single	Male	Younger	N/A	Used to be Married.
8	Male	25	Event planner	Divorced	Male	22	Pilot	Single
9	Male	42	Shop owner	Married	Male	20	Student	Single
10	Female	20	Temporary jobs like house cleaning.	Single	Female	20	Business woman	Single

Günlük Hayatta ve "Second Life" Adlı İnternet Platformunda Kendilik Sunumunun Kısa Bir İncelemesi

Son dönemlerde teknolojinin hızla gelişmesi ve sanal ortamların daha yaygın bir şekilde kullanılması ile beraber, bu platformlar sosyal bilimler açısından bir ilgi odağı haline gelmiştir. Gerçek hayattaki sosyal ilişkilerin benzerlerinin yaşandığı bu sanal ortamlar, özellikle kimlik oluşumunun teorik açıdan ele alınmasında önemli bir imkân sunmaktadır. Bu araştırma kapsamında, seçilen sanal ortam olan secondlife.com'daki avatarların oluşturulma süreci ve kullanıcılar ile yarattıkları avatar arasındaki ilişki Goffman'ın kendiliğin sunumu teorisinden hareketle incelenmiştir. Bu bağlamda kişilerin secondlife.com üzerinden yarattıkları ikincil hayatları Goffman'ın teorisindeki 'sahne önü' kavramıyla ve sanal ortamın dışındaki gerçek hayatları 'sahne arkası' kavramıyla ilişkilendirilmiştir. Bu iki sahnedeki benlikler 'dış görünüm, 'ekonomik durum ve 'roller' açısından ele alınmış, ikincil rolün oluşumundaki tercihlerin sebebi sorgulanmıştır. Çalışma kapsamında hem çalışmanın yazarı tarafından secondlife.com üzerinden bir avatar yaratılarak birincil elden sanal ortamdaki ilişkiler incelenmiş, hem de ortamdaki kullanıcılar ile görüşmeler yapılmıştır.

İlk olarak Second Life platformunun teorik açıdan incelemesi yapılmıştır. Bu bağlamda ele alınan temel kavramlar açıklanacaktır. Çalışma kapsamında Second Life aynı zamanda bir 'hipergerçeklik' (hyperreality) ve 'sanal gerçeklik' (cyberspace) olarak alınmıştır. Eco'nun tanımına göre hipergerçeklik, gerçeklik ve ilüzyonun kesin

sınırlar olmaksızın bir araya geldiği ve karıştığı durumdur. (Eco, 2013) Kullanıcı ile avatar arasındaki sınırın görülebilir olmadığı ve özellikle sosyal ilişkiler sırasında yaşananlar açısından bir sınır çizmenin imkansız olduğu Second Life gibi sanal ortamlar da bu anlamda bir hipergerçeklik olarak tanımlanabilir. Bunun çalışma sırasında rastlanan bir örneği, görüşme yapılanların tamamının hem kendi hayatlarından hem avatarlarının hayatından bahsederken birinci tekil şahısta konuşmayı tercih etmiş olmasıdır. Burada da görüldüğü gibi kullanıcıların kafasında, gerçeklik ile sanallığın sınırının yok olmaya yakın olduğu bir durum söz konusudur. Sanal gerçeklik ise temsil ve etkileşimin gündelik hayata benzer bir örüntüye göre gerçekleştiği bir ortama işaret etmektedir. Slater'a göre sanal gerçeklik, sosyal etkileşimler için bir sosyal arka plan işlevi gören ve bilgisayar tarafından oluşturulan bir platformdur. (Slater, 2002) Second Life'taki insan topluluğunun alışkanlık, etkinlik ve ritüellerinin varlığı göz önünde alındığında, Second Life bu anlamda bir sosyal arka plan olarak görülebilir. Çalışma kapsamında özellikle kişisel deneyim evresinde, çevre baskısı güçlü olarak hissedilmiştir, burada yapılan gözlemler de sanal gerçeklik olarak nitelenebilecek bir oluşumun olduğunu teyit etmektedir.

İkinci olarak, çalışmadaki değerlendirmelerin temelini oluşturan Goffman'ın kendiliğin sunumu teorisindeki temel kavramlar kısaca ele alınacaktır. Goffman'ın 'Günlük Yaşamda Benliğin Sunumu' kitabında sosyal ilişkiler açısından sunduğu çerçeve, sahne sanatlarından alınan bir takım örnekseme ve kavramlar üzerine kurulmuştur. Bu yönteme 'dramaturji' denmektedir. Goffman'a göre insanlar sosyal etkileşimleri sırasında genellikle karşılarındaki kişiyi etkilemek amacıyla bir 'imaj' yaratırlar. Kendiliğin bu görünümü, kişinin diğerlerine karşı kendisini sunmak istediği

şekli yansıtmaktadır. Bu imajın yaratılmasının arkasındaki sebepler çoğu zaman daha iyi bir ilk izlenim bırakmak ya da sosyal ilişkileri sürdürmektir. Goffman'ın teorisine göre sosyal etkileşimler sırasında kişiler, izleyicileri için yarattıkları role göre hareket ederler. Sosyal etkileşimler için önemli bir platform sunan sanal ortamlar da bu anlamda rollerin yaratıldığı bir 'sahne önü' olarak görülebilir.

Sahne önü, diğer bir deyişle performansın gerçekleştiği sahne, Goffman'a göre temsilin başladığı ve kişilerin kendi benlikleriyle izleyiciye sunacakları benlik arasında ayrım yaptığı yerdir. Sahne önü role girilmesi için yapılan çeşitli hazırlıkları da bünyesinde bulundurmaktadır. Bunlara örnek olarak kişisel görünüm ve tavırlar verilebilir. Diğer bir deyişle, oyuncu rolünü oynamaya (izleyiciye kendisinin yarattığı imajı sunmaya) başladığında, oyuncunun kostümü ve makyajı (kişinin dış görünümü) ve davranış şekli (kişinin dış görünümü ve rolü ışığında rolü yorumlama şekli) rolün inandırıcılığı için önemli iki araç olacaktır. (Goffman, 1959 s. 55). Bu bağlamda, çalışmada kullanılan birinci grup sorular özellikle bu sahne rolünün oluşumu süreci hedeflenerek oluşturulmuştur.

Sahne arkası ise sahne önünün tam tersi özelliklere sahiptir. Buraya izleyici erişimi mümkün değildir ve oyuncular sahne arkasında rol yapmayı bırakırlar. Bu çalışma kapsamında, açıklandığı üzere kullanıcıların gerçek yaşamları sahne arkası olarak alınmıştır. Gerçek hayat, Second Life kullanıcılarının platformda sosyal olarak etkileşimde bulundukları avatarların erişim olmayan ve rol yapmaları gerekmeyen bir alandır. Bu bağlamda yapılan görüşmeler sırasında, belirlenen temel özelliklerin kişinin gerçek hayatındaki yansımaları hakkında da sorular sorulmuştur.

Sahne arkası ile sahne önü arasındaki ilişkinin önemi, sahne arkasındaki bazı olguların, sahne önü rolünün oluşumuna olan katkısında kendini gösterir. Bu nedenle sahne önündeki kendiliğin anlaşılabilmesi için sahne arkasının da incelenmesi gereklidir. Goffman'ın sunduğu çerçeveye göre, kişiler kendiliklerini diğer kişilere sunarken sundukları imajla uyuşmayan bir takım bilgileri gizlerler. Bu bilgileri Goffman 'sırlar' olarak kavramlaştırmaktadır. Buna göre yaratılan kimlikle uyuşmayan bir takım bilgiler, sistemli bir şekilde rolün oynanması sırasında saklanacaktır. Bu çalışma kapsamında sırların anlaşılabilmesi amacıyla, yapılan görüşmeler sırasında kişilerin avatarlarını oluştururken yaptıkları tercihlerin arkasındaki nedenler sorgulanmıştır. Bu şekilde, Goffman'ın teorisindeki 'sırlar'ı karşılayacak bir takım bilgilere ulaşılması amaçlanmıştır.

 "İzlenim yönetimi" Goffman'ın teorisindeki temel kavramlardan biridir. Bu çalışmada da görüşme sorularıyla yakından ilgili olduğu için bu kavram önem taşımaktadır. Goffman'a göre, oyuncuların rollerini devam ederken çeşitli zorluklarla karşılaşması mümkündür ve bu nedenle çeşitli 'savunmacı' ve 'koruyucu' araçlardan yararlanırlar. Bu araçların amacı, role uyumlu olmayan davranışların, gafların ya da sözlerin engellemesidir. (Goffman, 1959 s. 103). İzlenim yönetiminin bir başka yansıması ise seyircilerin, sahnede olan bazı hataları bilinçli bir şekilde görmezden gelerek oyunun devamını sağlamaları durumunda karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu anlamda, çalışmada tercih edilen platform olan Second Life, ve genel anlamda sanal ortamlar, oyuncuların çoğu zaman gerçek hayatı görmezden gelmeyi bilinçli bir şekilde seçmeleri nedeniyle bir 'izlenim yönetimi' teşkil etmektedir. Second Life'ta da avatarların sahipleri hakkında soruların çoğu zaman olumsuz tepkilerle karşılandığı

ve avatar dışında bir kişinin varlığının bilinçli olarak görmezden gelindiği bilinmektedir.

Çalışmanın metodu çerçevesinde Second Life'ta bir dizi görüşme yapılmış ve platformda kişisel deneyimler yaşanmıştır. Yukarıda açıklanan kavramlar, bu iki kısım açısından değerlendirilecekir. Çalışma kapsamında öncelikle on beş Second Life kullanıcısıyla görüşme yapılmıştır. Kullanıcılara, yeni bir kendilik sunumu amacıyla ikinci bir sanal hayat yaratmalarının nedenlerini anlamaya yönelik çeşitli sorular sorulmuştur. Karşılaştırmalı bir değerlendirmeyi mümkün kılacak şekilde hazırlanan sorularda kişilerin gerçek ve sanal hayatları arasındaki farklılıklara, ve bu farklılıkların sebeplerine dair bir içerik vardır. Sorular, 'dış görünüm', 'ekonomik durum' ve 'roller' olmak üzere üç gruba ayrılmıştır. Her bir grup altında toplanan özelliklerle, kendiliğin oluşumu açısından öneme sahip çeşitli kavramlar açısından inceleme yapılması sağlanmıştır.

Görüşmelerden alınan sonuçlara göre, ilk olarak göze çarpan tüm kullanıcıların gerçek hayatlarındaki özelliklerinden daha farklı özelliklere sahip bir sanal kimlik yaratma eğilimidir. Bu, Gofmann'ın teorisinin temelini oluşturan sahne önü- sahne arkası ayrımının doğrudan bir yansımasıdır. Kullanıcılar, avatarlarıyla ilgili olarak yaptıkları seçimlerin arkasındaki motivasyonu açıklamaları istendiğinde 'diğer avatarları etkilemek', 'daha ilginç görünmek' ve 'daha iyi bir ilk izlenim bırakmak' gibi nedenleri ilk sırada saymışlardır. Bu, Goffman'ın sahne önü rolünü yaratmanın çoğu zaman sosyal kaygılara bağlı olduğu yönündeki gözlemini doğrulamaktadır. Goffman'ın teorisindeki önemli kavramlardan biri olan 'sırlar'ın varlığı da çalışma

sırasında birçok farklı kullanıcı açısından gözlemlenmiştir. Birçok kullanıcı, avatarlarının kendilerinden farklı olan özelliklerini açıklarken gerçek hayatına ait bir takım bilgileri gizlemek istediğini belirtmiştir. Somut bir örnek olarak, ekonomik durumu açısından büyük sorunlar yaşayan kullanıcıların yarattıkları avatar için çok lüks ve zengin bir hayat seçmelerini göstermek mümkündür. Second Life platformuyla gerçek hayat arasındaki temel farklılıklardan biri cinsiyet ve ırk gibi bir takım gerçek hayatta değiştirilmesi zor özelliklerin sanal olarak kolayca değiştirilebilmesidir. Bu açıdan Goffman'ın teorisinden farklı sonuçlar alınması mümkündür, zira kullanıcıların rollerini yaratırken gerçek hayattakine göre çok daha büyük bir serbestisi vardır. Bu açıdan sanal ortamın sağladığı imkanlara rağmen, yapılan görüşmelerin sonuçlarında Goffman'ın savlarından büyük bir farklılaşma söz konusu olmamıştır. Kullanıcıların neredeyse hiçbiri ten renklerine ya da cinsiyetlerine dair bir değişiklik yapmayı tercih etmediklerini belirtmiştir. Bu durumu Goffman'ın 'izlenim yönetimi' kavramıyla açıklamak mümkündür. Kullanıcıların, yarattıkları rolün inandırıcılığı sağlamak için çeşitli koruyucu mekanizmalardan yararlandığı görülmektedir. Diğer bir deyişle, kişiler gerçek hayat kimliklerinden çok uzaklaşmamayı seçerek, rollerinin inandırıcılığı arttırmaktadır. Yine bunun bir örneği olarak cinsiyetini değiştirmeyi tercih eden tek kullanıcının da, avatarıyla ilgili diğer tüm özellikleri gerçek hayatıyla aynı tuttuğu ve bu şekilde izlenim yönetimi yapmayı tercih ettiği görülmüştür. Bu tip temel özelliklerin aynı tutulması sayesinde kullanıcılar yarattıkları kendilikle olan bağlarını güçlü tutmakta ve rollerini daha kolay ve inandırıcı bir şekilde oynamaktadır.

Görüşmeler değerlendirildiğinde kullanıcıların kendilerinin çevrimdışı kendiliklerini belli özellikler açısından yaptıkları küçük değişiklerle sanal olarak yeniden yaratmayı seçtikleri görülmektedir. Bu durum, Goffman'ın teorisindeki sahne önü ve sahne arkası kendilikleri arasındaki ilişkiyle özdeşleştirilebilir. Buna göre, sahne önü ve sahne arkasındaki kendilikler tamamen birbirinden farklı değildir, ikisi de paylaşılan bir özün iki farklı görünümüdür. Görüşmelerde kullanıcıların yaptığı açıklamaların da gösterdiği üzere, sahne arkasındaki deneyimler sahne önündeki kendiliğin şekillenmesindeki birincil kaynağı oluşturmaktadır. Sahne önündeki rol, kişinin kendisine daha çok yakıştırdığı bir izlenimin vücuda gelmiş halidir. Goffman'a göre sahne önü karakteri kendiliğin 'daha özel' bir biçimidir, ancak hala kendiliğin bir parçasıdır. (Goffman, 1959, s.41) Buna göre sahne önü rolü (Second Life açısından avatarlar) kişinin kendiliğinin, izleyiciler (toplum) açısından daha anlamlı ve üstün hale getirilmiş bir görünümü olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Çalışmanın kişisel deneyim bölümü, gerek avatar yaratımı sürecinin birinci elden deneyimlenmesi, gerek platformda sosyal ilişkilerin gözlemlenmesi açısından önemli bir kaynak olmuştur. Avatar yaratma süreci boyunca kullanıcı ile avatar arasında adeta 'simbiyoz (ortakyaşarlık)' ilişkisini çağrıştıran bir durum söz konusudur. Second Life'ta yaşanan deneyim boyunca özellikle deneyimli kullanıcılar tarafından empoze edilen normların varlığı dikkat çekmiştir. Bu, özellikle avatarın dış görünümünün özelleştirilmesi konusundaki açık baskı ile kendini göstermiştir. Buna ek olarak bir arkadaş grubu edinilmesi ve buna bağlı olarak Second Life bünyesinde bir etkinlik düzenlenmesi süreçleri sırasında Nil Mit ve Nicole Madden kendiliklerinin birbirine karıştığı ve sanal ortamda geçirilen süre arttıkça avatarla daha derin bir bağ sağlandığı

gözlemlenmiştir. Kişisel deneyim boyunca yaşananlar en başta Goffman'ın teorisindeki 'izleyici' kavramı ile bağdaştırılabilir. Goffman'a göre bir topluluğun düzeni, belirli standartlar ve değerler olmasına bağlıdır. (Goffman, 1959, s.24) Kişisel deneyim süreci boyunca da en başta avatarların dış görünümü hakkında olmak üzere bir değer sisteminin varlığı açıkça deneyimlenmiştir. Ayrıca bu süreçte hem kişisel olarak çeşitli izlenim yönetimi kullanılmış, hem de diğer kullanıcıların da benzer mekanizmaları tercih ettiği görülmüştür. Ayrıca, Goffman'a göre izlenim yönetimi sürecinin bir parçasının da izleyiciler olduğu hatırlatılmalıdır. Buna göre izleyiciler de bazı durumlarda izlediklerinin bir rol olduğunun farkında olmalarına rağmen bu hataları bilerek görmezden gelir ve bu şekilde oyunun devam etmesini sağlarlar. (Goffman, 1959, s.114-120) Second Life ortamında da kullanıcıların gerçek hayatları konusunda konuşmamak konusunda bir eğilimleri olduğu ve belli durumlarda gerçek hayattaki durumu ele veren davranışları görmezden gelmeyi tercih ettikleri görülmüştür.

Görüşmeler ve kişisel deneyim sürecinin değerlendirilmesi sonucunda Second Life platformunda avatar oluşturulmasının ve kullanıcılarla avatarlar arasındaki ilişkinin anlaşılmasında Goffman tarafından sunulan çerçevenin kullanılabileceği görülmüştür. Gerek sahne önü ve sahne arkasındaki önemli ayrımların avatar- kullanıcı ilişkisine uygulanabilirliği, gerek yapılan değişikliklerin arkasındaki nedenler incelendiğinde Goffman'ın tezinde yer alan birçok savın Second Life kullanıcılarının avatar yaratma sürecine uygulanabilir nitelikte olduğu görülmektedir. Goffman'ın öngördüğü üzere kişilerin, yeni bir ortama (Second Life) girerken kendilerinin özel bir yansımasını dışa göstermeyi tercih ettikleri, ve bu yansımayı yaratırken kendi hayatlarındaki önemli

deneyim ve duygulardan hareket ettikleri görülmektedir. Bu mekanizmanın arkasında çoğu zaman daha iyi bir ilk izlenim bırakmak ya da sosyal olarak daha etkin olmak gibi amaçlar yer almaktadır. Goffman'a göre, sahne önü karakteri kişinin kendiliğini algılama şeklinin bir yansımasıdır. Diğer bir deyişle, bu görünüm kişinin olmak istediği kendiliği yansıtmaktadır. Bu sürecin sonunda rol kişi tarafından benimsenmekte ve kişiliğinin ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelmektedir. (Goffman, 1959, s.30). Goffman'ın teorisindeki temel kavramların Second Life'a uygulanılırlığı göz önüne alındığında, bu ilişkinin kullanıcı ile avatar arasında da oluştuğu söylenebilir. Buna göre, avatar kişinin olmak istediği kendiliğin bir yansımasıdır ve buna bağlı olarak sanal ortamdaki deneyimler kullanıcının gerçek hayattaki kişiliğini de etkilemektedir. Sonuç olarak, sahne önü karakteri oluşturma sürecinin Second Life kullanıcılarının davranış şekillerine benzerlik taşıdığı ve Goffman'ın teorisinin doğrudan bu ortama uygulanabileceği anlaşılmıştır.

Konu hakkında varolan literatüre bakıldığında, Goffman'ın dramaturji tekniği ile sanal ortamları birlikte inceleyen çok fazla çalışma olmadığı görülmüştür. Bu, özellikle bu çalışma için seçilen sanal ortam olan Second Life açısından da görülmektedir. Ayrıca, yapılan birçok çalışmada metodun sadece Goffman'ın teorileri üzerine kurulmadığı ve diğer bir takım teorilerin yanısıra Goffman'ın savlarına yer verildiği görülmüştür. Tüm bunlar göz önüne alındığında, hem sanal ortamlarda benliğin oluşumu konusunu Goffman'ın perspektifinden inceleyebilmek, hem de bunu yaparken sadece Goffman'ın tekniğinden yararlanılarak literatüre katkıda bulunulması amaçlanmıştır.

Çalışma sırasında iki temel sınırlama ile karşılaşılmıştır. Bunlardan ilki, görüşmelerin içeriğinin doğrulanmasının imkansız olmasıdır. Tüm görüşmelerin bir sanal ortam olan Second Life'ta gerçekleştirilmesi nedeniyle, kullanıcıların sahne arkası hakkında verdikleri bilgilerin tamamı sadece kendi sözlerine dayanılarak toplanmıştır. İkinci olarak, Second Life'ta geçirilen zamanın sınırlı olması da bir sorun olarak değerlendirilebilir. Second Life'ta yıllardır aktif olan kullanıcıların oluşturduğu topluluk ile daha yeni kullanıcılar arasında büyük bir ayrım söz konusudur. Çalışma sırasında geçirilen zamanın bu deneyimli kullanıcıların geçmişlerine göre daha az olması sebebiyle, Nicole Madden karakteri bu çevrede kabul görmemiştir. Bu nedenle görüşme yapılan kullanıcıların çoğu Second Life'ta kısa ila orta uzunlukta bir geçmişe sahip olup, bu açıdan platformdaki topluluğun tamamını yansıtmadıkları söylenebilir.

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YAZARIN

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Adı : Nil
Bölümü : Sosyoloji

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce) : A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND SECOND LIFE

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