PARTICIPATORY QUITTING: QUITTING TEXTS AND WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PLAYER CULTURE

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Abstract

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PARTICIPATORY QUITTING: QUITTING TEXTS AND WORLD OF WARCRAFT

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In over a decade of scholarship on the subject scholars have focused on the creation and circulation of various kinds of fan-made texts as a central component of participatory culture. Scholars such as Henry Jenkins, T.L. Taylor, Nancy Baym, and Mia Consalvo have studied everything from fanfic, FILK, slash fiction, and fanzines to online forums, walkthroughs, machinima, and web comics – among many others – as evidence that media fans are both critical consumers and active producers of media content. In all of this work on participatory culture, however, quitting has so far been ignored.

This project is a qualitative textual analysis of quitting in World of Warcraft player culture, specifically of the quitting texts that players create when they stop playing the game. My analysis reveals that quitting texts contain richness, depth, and diversity; they come in multiple forms, contain varied themes and practices, and are meaningful to the players that make and view them. As such, like other kinds of fan/player made texts quitting texts are an important element of participatory culture, and are key to understanding both media fandom and the player culture that gave rise to them.

Approved: ____________________________

Mia L. Consalvo

Associate Professor of Telecommunications
Dedication

To my dog, Smaug, who has always supported me the best he knows how,

to my parents, Tom and Janis, for their time and support,

and to my wife, Jennie, without whom this project would not have been possible.
Acknowledgments

I would like to offer special thanks to the members of my committee for all the time and effort they put in to help make this project the best it could be. To Roger Cooper who somehow found time as the director of the School of Telecommunications to not only serve on my committee, but to read drafts when Mia was away. To Karen Riggs for her tough love approach to my methodology section, for showing me what was wrong with it and how I could make it better. And especially to my committee chair, advisor, and fellow gamer Mia Consalvo for putting up with the trials and tribulations of a needy advisee, and for all the academic and emotional guidance that kept me on track despite my natural tendency to wander.
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This project is about quitting.

For almost two years I have been a regular and consistent player of the MMOG (massively multiplayer online game) World of Warcraft (WoW). During this time I have played the game with many different people, some old friends, and a lot of people I met and only know in game. Some, like me, are still playing the game, but many have stopped playing, some more recently than others. A number of my offline friends simply lost interest in the game, and still more of my in-game friends logged off one day for good, not to be heard from since. In each case, a permanently-grayed-out-name on my ‘friends’ list is the only record I have that I played with them.

Furthermore, in recent months, I have been part of a large end-game guild; that is, a group of players organized around exploring and conquering the most challenging content the game has to offer. This guild has a forum that we all use regularly to discuss everything from the game itself to other topics that strike people’s fancy. The longer I am in the guild the more I have noticed that players often use the forum to announce they are quitting the game. In some cases the quitting player viewed the guild as a kind of family, and thus felt that he owed the guild an explanation. In other cases the player was just informing others in the guild so they could plan for the upcoming loss of a member. As I read these posts I began to notice common themes, even between posts of different writing styles.

Take, for example, this short and sweet forum post written by a character in the guild named Anna:
After awhile of thinking, and some time away, I must retire Anna from the game. It's been a long fun journey and everyone in [the guild] has made it all the more enjoyable. I will miss you all and wish everyone the best of luck, and to stay safe in whatever you do, but most of all to go and kick some ass in the instances [game content] to come.

And compare it to this excerpt from a much longer post written by another member of the same guild:

I started playing wow last august, about a year ago. In that time I have 125 days played. Do the math.

Yeah, it’s pretty bad.

Anyway, I've hit the wall. Hard…

Warcraft is an amazing game, and I've made some wonderful friends. You guys have made my final months in [the game] worth it. I may be back for the expansion if I'm pleased with the changes, but otherwise, I'm out for good.

It's been lovely, but now I must say adieu. Best of luck in AQ, Naxx and beyond [game content].

These two posts, while different in many ways, have a couple of things in common. They are both sincere goodbyes, and both posts wish the guild future success in the player’s absence. The more such quitting posts I read, the more these, and other similarities, began to come to the surface, and it was not long before I found myself interested in how people quit. As my curiosity piqued, I began to look for other quitting posts, in other places. It was like opening the door to a different world.

Ironically – or perhaps fittingly - shortly after starting to look at quitting in some detail, I encountered it personally when I was forced to write a quitting post of my own. Due to my work on this thesis, and other school related matters, I went through a fairly long period where I was inactive in WoW. One of my fellow guild members noticed my
absence one day and wrote a forum post inquiring as to why I was not around. This is an excerpt of my response:

I am writing my thesis this quarter, and have an otherwise ridiculous schedule. I cannot, in all honesty, expect to make any kind of reliable raid schedule. So I decided that instead of getting in people’s way, and competing for spots others deserve more, it would be better to just step aside, and let the rest of you see the new content and get the good loot. I don’t want to quit, though, just take an extended absence, at least until the thesis is done. I would LOVE to be able to play WoW and work on a thesis at the same time, but I just know myself enough to understand that won’t happen.

Leaving is in no way a comment on the guild or my feelings about it, especially in regards to you warlocks. Essentially, you are all awesome, every last one of you, and I will miss playing with you guys most of all. Good luck to all of you in the game. And good luck in real life as well.

People quit World of Warcraft all the time, and most of them probably do so quietly - they simply stop logging into the game. But others, I noticed, do not go quietly. Instead they seem intent on leaving a record of their departure. The more I looked for quitting posts, the more I came across, and soon it was not only forum posts I was finding but a wide array of ‘quitting texts’ including blog entries, works of fiction, online movies, and many others. As with the posts from my guild forum I noticed that despite an array of form, function and even medium, these quitting texts contained a series of emergent themes, ideas, and practices. It occurred to me that I was looking at a specific aspect of Wow player culture – the culture of quitting – that had been invisible to me. The more attention I paid to these texts, the more I realized that the texts themselves – their form and function – both contributed to and offered insights into the larger player culture. Even the act of quitting, it would seem, is a meaningful cultural event.
Quitting texts may be a meaningful cultural event, but how does one make sense of them? How is one to understand them? Answering these larger questions requires asking a different, focused set of questions, and it is on these questions that I will focus my research: What themes, ideas, and practices emerge from an analysis of quitting texts? What do these themes, ideas, and practices tell one about the role of quitting texts in player culture? And finally, what do quitting texts say about the MMOG genre?

There are a number of scholars whose work is important to this project. Specifically, I draw from three separate areas, fan culture studies, the segment of games studies dedicated to MMOGs, and a small but diverse set of literature on quitting, as it applies to games and play. Taken together the work of scholars in these three areas provides a foundation on which to build my own research and offers a meaningful set of tools for my analysis.

The foundational work for studying media fans and fan cultures comes from Henry Jenkins, beginning with his book *Textual Poachers* (1992). Though *Textual Poachers* deals primarily with fans of television programs, Jenkins’ insights lead to a model of fandom that can be applied more broadly. Specifically, he outlines two essential qualities of media fans that describe not only how fans relate to media texts but also how fandom operates as a participatory culture.

First, Jenkins describes fans as having an active relationship with the media texts they consume. As opposed to being a passive, or a simply receptive audience, fans vigorously read and re-read media content, pulling their own meanings and interpretations from it. Jenkins labels this kind of active reading practice “poaching,” a
term he borrows from the work of French literary theorist Michel de Certeau (Jenkins, 1992, p. 24). In regards to media fans and fan culture, however, Jenkins’ own use of the concept of poaching differs from that of de Certeau in an important way. Where de Certeau describes poaching as a primarily individual or private experience, Jenkins describes fan poaching as a communal practice-- fans read and interpret media texts as part of a social group: “Fan reading… is a social process through which individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussions with other readers” (p. 45). According to Jenkins, group reading and interpretation change the nature of how fans relate to texts by expanding the experience of the text beyond its initial, individual consumption. The result is that poached meanings of the text are “more fully integrated” into the lives of fans than would otherwise be possible if fans simply read texts on their own (p. 45).

Second, Jenkins describes fans as being media producers in their own right. According to Jenkins, an essential quality of fan culture is that fans take the meanings they poach from various texts and use these meanings as inspiration to create their own cultural products, thus blurring the lines between producer and consumer: “…Fandom does not preserve a radical separation between readers and writers. Fans do not simply consume preproduced [sic] stories, they manufacture their own fanzine stories and novels, art, prints, songs, videos, performances, etc” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 45). In addition, fans share their creations with each other in the same way and through the same channels that they share interpretations and poached meanings. In this manner – through communal poaching and the production and sharing of fan texts – fans create their own
social networks and fan communities. Jenkins calls this process participatory culture: “Fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community” (p. 46).

Writing in the early 90s - before the widespread availability of the Internet - the fan communities and participatory cultures Jenkins describes are predominantly organized around large-scale gatherings, like conventions, and the physical circulation of various print media, like magazines or newsletters. With the spread of Internet technology, however, fans have found new ways to communicate and form communities and cultures online. Recognizing this, a number of scholars have expanded on Jenkins’ original conceptions to include the Internet and online communication as central components in their own study of fans. Nancy Baym has explored the role of online communication in the formation of fan communities, specifically in regards to fans of soap operas (Baym, 1995, 1998, 2000). Mia Consalvo has analyzed how the Internet allows fan communities of Star Trek and Buffy the Vampire Slayer some creative control over the media that interests them and how this poses a potential challenge to media corporations and copyrights (Consalvo, 2003a). Amy Lauters has studied the online culture of fans, focusing specifically on fan-fiction archives for the show Lois and Clark (Lauters, 2001).

In addition, realizing the essential role of the Internet in contemporary fan experiences, Jenkins himself has turned to analyzing fan cultures online (Jenkins, 2006). Furthermore, drawing from the work of some of these other fan culture scholars, and
notably from the work of Pierre Levy, Jenkins has recently focused on the concept of “collective intelligence” and how it is connected to the study of fandom.

Collective intelligence, a term borrowed from Pierre Levy, refers to knowledge available to all members of a community. This is not to be confused with knowledge known by members of a community, for the focus of collective intelligence is on what knowledge is made available to the community through the use of communication technologies. For Levy, the important technologies are those of current multi-media society, and his interest is in how these technologies might be used to create a kind of “knowledge space,” or “cosmopedia,” where there is a mutual production and reciprocal exchange of knowledge (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 136-139). In this cosmopedia Jenkins sees many ideas that mirror, or are compatible, with many of his own ideas from participatory culture. In fact, Jenkins claims that fan culture might be one of the best examples of collective intelligence in the world today: “Online fan communities might well be some of the most fully realized versions of Levy’s cosmopedia, expansive, self-organizing groups focused around the collective production, debate, and circulation of meanings, interpretations, and fantasies in response to various artifacts of contemporary popular culture” (p. 137). In other words, Jenkins considers “collective intelligence” to be a concept every bit as important to the study of fandom as are “poaching” and “participatory culture.”

Moving away from fan culture generally and toward video games specifically, a handful of scholars have combined elements of fan culture and game studies, drawing on the concept of participatory culture in their own study of video games and game players.
Both Mia Consalvo and James Newman, for example, have analyzed texts produced and circulated by online fan communities as a way to understand more about those communities and the fans that comprise them. Specifically, Consalvo has analyzed walkthroughs of the video game Zelda 64, which she argues can be read as examples of fan-authored narratives that offer insights into the complex, intertextual relationship that fans have with the game and each other (Consalvo, 2003b). Similarly, Newman has analyzed the discussions and discourses of a handful of online forum communities made up of video game fans, highlighting this highly social forum communication as a contrast to the “mainstream” portrayal of video game players as anti-social or solitary (Newman, 2005).

The second body of scholarship to inform my research is work done on MMOGs, which for my purposes begins with T.L. Taylor, who has done extensive studies of the culture and community of online game players (Taylor, 2003, 2006a, 2006b). Though much of Taylor’s work centers primarily on the MMOG Everquest, her ethnographies contain a number of more general insights that are applicable to studying players of other games in the genre. While Taylor’s work is not expressly a study of fan culture, elements of her scholarship are reminiscent of the concepts “participatory culture,” and “collective intelligence.”

For example, Taylor notes that one of the most important things a new Everquest player learns is that there is a thriving and active player culture within the game (Taylor, 2006b, p. 36). This culture is important to players because it can have a very large impact on how they play the game and the level of success they have while playing. This
culture, for example, often includes rules, or norms, for polite and or acceptable behavior, and players who break these norms will often have a harder time finding people willing to play with or help them. As Taylor explains, however, this player culture is not limited to the game alone but exists in a cultural network much bigger than the game itself (p. 57):

…It is important to note that it is not just the first-hand, real-time interpersonal relationships and groups that constitute the social world of the game, but also the collection of message boards, databases, comics, fan art and stories, and even game modifications that contribute to players feeling a bond and connection to the [game] world and their fellow gamers.

Of central importance to Taylor’s analysis is that nearly the entirety of this network is player built, organized, and operated-- that is, created by players, with players, for players. As a specific example Taylor describes the website Allakhazam.com, which is a nearly comprehensive, encyclopedic database of *Everquest* – and now other MMOG – information, created entirely through input from the game’s players: “Notably, the knowledge available at sites like Allakhazam… are built from player input and represent a kind of collective experience repository where players can benefit from the play (and work) of others” (Taylor, 2006b, p. 57). Online databases like Allakhazam specifically, and the player culture network more generally, are living examples of collective intelligence and participatory culture in action.

In addition, participatory culture at work in MMOGs and player culture is something on which Taylor focuses much attention. In a segment of her book nominally directed towards MMOG developers, Taylor makes her own feelings on the participatory nature of MMOGs quite clear (Taylor, 2006b, p. 159):
The word ‘participatory’ might raise red flags for some designers. The idea that players can act as meaningful agents within the overarching game structure is generally seen as naïve. But let me reframe this: players already are core actors in the maintenance and life of the game. There is no culture, there is no game, without the labor of the players. Whether designers want to acknowledge it fully or not, MMOGs already are participatory sites… by their very nature as social and cultural spaces.

More recently, Taylor’s own research focus has shifted from Everquest to World of Warcraft, and some of her observations of WoW player culture have led her to re-examine some aspects of her prior research (Taylor, 2006a). Specifically, by looking at certain aspects of WoW player culture that either did not exist, or manifested quite differently in Everquest, Taylor comes to question if research into the “emergent culture” of MMOGs has gone far enough. For example, in analyzing a couple of the most popular player-created mods¹ for World of Warcraft Taylor notes ways – either through the technology they employ or their cultural use by players – that these mods can work to create and reinforce hierarchies in the in-game community, segregate certain players from others, and even allow for “panoptic” surveillance between players – that is players surveilling other players. As Taylor notes, these potentially negative qualities of emergence and production in player culture stand in contrast to the “common language” of emergence culture, which, she says, “…often carries with it an implied notion of positive and ‘freeing’ interaction” (p. 332). In other words, instead of identifying these mods as emergent cultural artifacts, and celebrating their production, Taylor takes the next step in analyzing how they are used, in this case, in potentially negative ways. She argues that to identify and celebrate emergent culture in MMOGs is not enough,
especially if one is interested in unearthing some of the problematic aspects of culture that players create. Writes Taylor (p. 319):

…what I argue is that we need renewed efforts to understand the role systems of stratification and forms of social control play in these game worlds. Rather than simply identifying ‘emergent culture’ as a prime property of MMOG life and stopping there, we also need a better understanding of the complex nature of player-produced culture and its relation to the technical game artifacts.

This includes a better understanding of player-produced culture in relation to artifacts of quitting.

Taylor, however, is not the only scholar actively studying MMOGs. A body of work on the genre and its players is ever expanding. Coming from scholars in a variety of disciplines, research into MMOGs has taken a number of different forms and has been approached from a number of different angles. Mia Consalvo, for example, has analyzed MMOGs and player culture as part of a larger study of cheating in video games (In Press). Part of Consalvo’s work focuses on the game Final Fantasy XI, specifically in exploring certain aspects of MMOG gameplay – such as powerleveling, the use of various third party programs, gil-farming and gil-sellingiii – that some players, and in some cases the game’s developer, consider to be cheating. Not everyone considers such actions to be cheating, and even some players that consider such actions to be cheating willingly use them to gain advantage. An important part of Consalvo’s analysis involves exploring how the game’s players navigate, define, and even police the issue of cheating as a player community.

Edward Castronova has looked at various economic aspects of MMOGs. His work has included analyzing the real-world political economy of the MMOG industry as
well as analyzing the in-game economies of virtual worlds, complete with statistics covering traditional economic concepts like labor supply, production, trade, income and even inflation (Castronova, 2005). Castronova has also done research on the intersection of virtual and real world economies, exploring issues of ‘ownership’ in regards to virtual property and analyzing various aspects of what has become known as the real-money-trade (RMT), the practice by which players, and even companies, sell virtual, in-game goods, services and money for real world currency (Castronova, 2003).

Castronova is far from the only scholar to look at RMT. In fact, RMT has become something of a hot-topic for those who study MMOGs. For example, RMT is a crucial component of Consalvo’s analysis of cheating and Final Fantasy XI and of Taylor’s discussion of racial identity in World of Warcraft. In addition RMT figures quite prominently in the work of Constance Steinkuehler, who I will discuss in more detail below. RMT is also a heavily discussed topic on Terra Nova, a collaborative weblog – to which many of the scholars mentioned in this literature review are contributing authors – dedicated to exploring issues surrounding ‘virtual worlds’ of all kinds, including MMOGs. RMT has even garnered the attention and research interests of non-academics, such as journalist Julian Dibbell, whose recent book Play Money (2006), is a personalized account of an MMOG player and active RMTrader. Though not a peer reviewed publication, Dibbell’s book is nonetheless an interesting and insightful look into RMT and many of the issues surrounding it.

Much of the work of Constance Steinkuehler has involved studying cognition as it applies to MMOGs, a task that has involved an analysis of MMOGs and players. For
Steinkuehler, much of this analysis revolves around what she refers to as the “mangle of play” (Steinkuehler, 2006). Specifically, Steinkuehler argues that MMOGs are not simply the software that comes in a box, with its hard-coded systems and rules, but are instead a product of the interplay between the coded rules of the developers on one hand and the actions/practices of the player community on the other. This kind of complex interaction—between players and developers, and between play actions and hard-coded rules—is what Steinkuehler refers to as the mangle of play, and her own analysis is thus focused on understanding MMOGs as a product of this mangle. For example, in writing about her own work with the game Lineage, Steinkuehler states that “…the game that’s actually played by participants is not the game designers originally had in mind but rather one that is the outcome of an interactively stabilized ‘mangle of practice’ of designers, players, in-game currency farmers, and broader social norms” (p. 200).

Steinkuehler’s work seems quite similar to that of T.L. Taylor and the study of emergent culture in MMOGs. For example, in her article discussing the mangle of play, Steinkuehler writes that studying MMOGs “…requires understanding not just the formal rule systems designed into them, but also the full range of human practices through which players actively inhabit their worlds and render them meaningful” (Steinkuehler, 2006, p. 200). Here the similarities between emergent culture and the work of Steinkuehler are clear, as both seek to understand how players “actively inhabit their worlds and render them meaningful.” However, despite the similarities, the two are not actually connected. Steinkuehler does not draw explicitly on the concept of emergence. Instead, with the
concept of the ‘mangle of play’ Steinkuehler is offering a different way to study and understand similar phenomena.

Henry Lowood has written about gameplay movies, or machinima, in *World of Warcraft* player culture (Lowood, 2006). Lowood’s article is part history of player-created movies – beginning even before *World of Warcraft* – and part cultural analysis of the role of these movies in player culture and part textual analysis of the movies themselves – including an examination of the now-famous Leroy Jenkins movievi. Specifically, Lowood’s article is important to my own research in two ways. First, his examination of gameplay movies provides context and tools of analysis for understanding a particular subset of quitting texts – those in movie form. Second, and perhaps most importantly, Lowood proposes a concept that will be quite valuable to understanding quitting texts of all forms; this concept is the ‘community player.’ In describing the primary goal of his article, Lowood also provides a definition of what he means by a community player (p. 363):

> My aim is to document how players – those I call community players – use computer games to create their own narratives, culture and performance. The community player is not only creative and theatrical but also takes care to exhibit mastery of technology and cyberathletic skill. It is important to recognize the contributions made to the game culture by the extroverted and expressive play performance of the community player. Part stage actor, part activist, the community player plays for other players.

In much the same way that Lowood’s study of gameplay movies is about community players, my own study is about community quitters, or community players who quit. In other words, since community players play on a stage and play for other players, they quit in the same way.
The third body of scholarship that informs my study is research done on quitting, especially in regards to games and play. Such scholarship, however, seems to be fairly scant. Though there is much work on play in both anthropology and sociology, very little of it deals with quitting in an explicit or direct way. For example, quitting seems to be absent from Sutton-Smith’s work on play and games (Sutton-Smith, 1997) and from Clifford Geertz’s now famous analysis of “deep play” and the Balinese cockfight (Geertz, 1973, p. 412). I would have expected to find something about quitting in the work of both scholars.

In his book *Homo Ludens* (1950), Johan Huizinga potentially discusses quitting in regards to a type of player that is problematic to games and rules, the ‘spoil-sport.’ In describing how and why spoil-sports are problematic, Huizinga writes that “by withdrawing from the game he [the spoil-sport] reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others” (p. 11, my italics). This suggests that one possible way to understand the spoil-sport is as a quitter; however, Huizinga’s own definition of a spoil-sport – “someone who trespasses against the rules or ignores them” (p. 11) – is ambiguous and seems to indicate that a variety of different kinds of players qualify as spoil-sports. For example, people who refuse to play the game – ignore the rules – or people who play by different rules – trespass against them – would both be examples of spoil-sports who are not necessarily quitters. As such while a quitter can be a spoil-sport, not all spoil-sports are quitters, and, since Huizinga focuses on spoil-sports as a group, he does not focus on quitting specifically.
What literature specifically about quitting that does exist seems to come from studies of sports and leisure, including a study into why people quit youth soccer (Paul, 1986) and two studies regarding conflicts and/or reasons that cause people to quit a Monday night pool league (Chick, Roberts, & Romney, 1991; Roberts & Chick, 1984). All three of these studies find, perhaps not surprisingly, that people quit such organizations when commitments in other areas of life take precedence, or when reasons for joining originally have been eliminated or remain unfulfilled. These studies, however, are the results of quantitative surveys and thus are quite different in form and function from my own study. These studies are singularly focused on figuring out why people quit, whereas in my own research I am only interested in this question in so far as it is addressed in the quitting texts that players create. I would guess that thousands of players have quit for the same reasons, yet only some of these players created a quitting text, and it is the texts themselves that interest me. I am more interested in how people quit than why.

Specifically in regards to MMOGs there is a small amount of research that deals with quitting. Ironically, one of the studies I came across involves the opposite of quitting; that is, the study seeks to understand what elements of MMOG gameplay make people want to play more and continue playing (Choi & Kim, 2004). In addition, the Daedalus Projectviii, a website run by Nick Yee that publishes research into MMOGs of all shapes and sizes, contains three studies that involve quitting. One is a statistical look into the demographics of quitting, which found that female players and older players reported themselves less likely – than men and younger players respectively - to quit their
MMOG in favor of another (Yee, 2003b). The second is also statistical and looks at the number of months that people played before quitting and the number of months people kept their accounts active after quitting (Yee, 2003a). The third study is a collection of responses that players gave when asked about why they quit (Yee, 2003c)\textsuperscript{viii}. This third study is the most relevant in regards to my own research since the players’ responses are presented in their own words and thus seem to have much in common with quitting texts. Though I should note that as mostly private responses to a survey question the explanations for quitting found in the Daedalus study are actually much different than the quitting texts I study, which are more public in nature and often not created in response to anything but a player’s own volition.

In their respective areas the work of these scholars provides the foundation for an analysis of what I call ‘participatory quitting’ in World of Warcraft player culture. The literature reviewed here provides a foundation for the study of participatory culture, MMOG players, and the movies and other kinds of texts that players create. A few of the above studies provide some foundation for the study of quitting. None of the studies, however, combine all these areas in a focused way. The studies of participatory culture, MMOG players, and player created texts do not involve quitting. And the scholarship on quitting does not involve participatory culture, MMOG players, and player-created texts. My goal is to begin combining these areas with my own research.

\begin{notes}
\textsuperscript{i} The “friends” list is a function provided by the game that allows players to flag each other as friends. Once flagged the list allows players to see whether or not their friends are logged into the game. The names of players who are not online are written in faded
gray text. Hence a permanently-grayed-out-name on my friends list is a player who I once flagged as a friend, but who is no longer playing the game.

ii Mods, short for modifications, are player-created programs that alter the experience of World of Warcraft in some way. Commonly mods are used to either change the visual look, or add functionality to the game’s user interface. Mods are quite popular among the WoW player base and there are numerous websites dedicated to compiling and hosting mods of all forms. Such websites include Curse Gaming, found at: http://wow.curse-gaming.com/en/files/addons/ and World of War.net found at: http://www.worldofwar.net/

iii Gil is the in-game currency of Final Fantasy XI, and gil-selling and farming refers to certain aspects of the real money trade (RMT) that is discussed later in this chapter. Third party programs are simply programs (often created by players) that players run while playing the game to gain some kind of advantage. Powerleveling is the practice of a high level character aiding a low level character such that the more powerful character does the majority of the work while the low level character receives the majority of the benefits.

iv Terra Nova can be found at: http://terranova.blogs.com/

v Here Steinkuehler is borrowing the concept of ‘mangle’ from the work of Andrew Pickering who discussed Mangles of Practice in his book of that name (1995). Steinkuehler adding play to the concept, and applying it to an analysis of MMOGs is, I think, both inspired and useful.

vi The Leroy Jenkins movie is something of a cultural phenomenon within World of Warcraft player culture, and Lowood likely includes it in his analysis because of its widespread popularity. Because it is such a popular movie it can be found countless places online, including You Tube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3DtKMEO9N0 It is difficult to describe the appeal of the Leroy Jenkins movie to someone who does not play the game, but if you do play, and have not seen the movie, I suggest watching it. I doubt you will be disappointed.

vii The Daedalus Project can be found here: http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/

viii Though I mention it here alongside other scholarship on quitting the research of the Daedalus Project is ultimately problematic for a few reasons. First, the studies are self-published and are not peer reviewed. Second, the statistical studies are the result of voluntary surveys made available online and are thus not derived from a random or scientific sample, but a sample of convenience. Third, and finally, the “why we quit” study does not venture much beyond simply listing player responses and offers very little in the way of qualitative analysis. Though these reasons mean it should be taken with a grain of salt, I nonetheless find the research of the Daedalus Project to be useful and interesting. In the least these studies show that there is some interest – other than my own - in quitting as it applies to MMOGs.
Chapter 2: Process and Methodology

My research for this project consisted of two major parts. The first involved the search for and sampling of quitting texts, and the second involved a qualitative textual analysis of those texts. By using such a qualitative approach, the focus of this project is explicative in nature; that is, the focus is on uncovering, exploring, and explaining the layers of meaning in quitting texts and offering insights into the role of quitting texts in player culture. My goal is not to quantify quitting texts, the differences between them, or even to speak to issues of their frequency. I make no claims as to the commonality, or rarity, of one kind of quitting text or another, and I am aware that my categorization of quitting texts is the result of nothing more than my own personal interpretations of them. A more quantitative study of quitting texts is possible, but such a study would be unable to get at the kinds of questions I am interested in exploring: What prominent themes, ideas, and practices emerge from an analysis of quitting texts? What do these themes, ideas, and practices reveal about the role of quitting texts in player culture? And, what do quitting texts say about the MMOG genre? A qualitative approach provides the best chance of answering these specific questions.

To uncover answers to these questions I found and analyzed dozens of player-made quitting texts. I limited my analysis to quitting texts created by *World of Warcraft* players, even though other MMOGs also have players writing quitting texts of their own. I limited my analysis in part because *World of Warcraft* is the MMOG with which I am most familiar. As a longtime player I understand the game and how it is played and am
familiar with the game’s players and their culture. I have been an active participant in
*World of Warcraft* player culture for as long as I have been a player. While some might argue this
means I am too close or comfortable to my subject to adequately study it, I contend that,
for this project, such closeness is necessary. As will be made clearer in my analysis,
many, if not most, of the quitting texts require some amount of intimate game knowledge
to fully appreciate or understand. In the case of some quitting movies, for example,
elements such as the in-game locations where the movie is set or the power level of the
items worn by the quitting character can be of vital importance to the overall meanings of
the movie. Both of these elements are examples of information easily identifiable to
players at a glance, but that may be lost on someone unfamiliar with the game. This is
not to suggest that someone who does not play the game could not study quitting texts in
their own way, but that such a study would be different in appearance from my own. In
other words, my experiences as a player and the knowledge I have accumulated through
playing are inseparable from my research and analysis.

In addition to my familiarity with it, *World of Warcraft* serves as a good research
focus for two reasons: its size and its cultural significance. Though official figures are
difficult to come by, recent data suggests that *World of Warcraft* dominates the MMOG
market and overshadows its nearest competitors, both in terms of subscription rates and
market share. According to a recent article on msnbc.com, *World of Warcraft* supports
more than 7 million subscribers worldwide, making for a large and diverse player base
(Levy, 2006). Seven million is noteworthy when compared to the “hundreds of
thousands” of players that Taylor cites *Everquest* having at its height (Taylor, 2006b, p.
1). According to mmogchart.com, a website dedicated to tracking the growth of online games, *World of Warcraft* occupies an impressive 52.9% of total MMOG market share, with its nearest competitor coming in at only 12%\textsuperscript{ix}. Even if these figures are not entirely accurate it is safe to claim that *World of Warcraft* is the largest and most successful MMOG on the market.

Perhaps because of its success and size *World of Warcraft* has garnered the attention of journalists and academics alike. In a now famous article published by 1up.com *WoW* is referred to as the new golf, indicating that in some circles playing the game is as important to getting business done as is playing golf in conventional business circles (Pinckard, 2006). The article was also widely quoted and discussed on other sites throughout the Internet including the weblog *Terra Nova*\textsuperscript{x}. Though academics have certainly studied MMOGs before, such as T.L. Taylor with *Everquest*, *WoW* seems to be getting more attention than other games in the genre to date. The Sage journal *Games and Culture*, for example, recently dedicated an entire issue to *World of Warcraft*. The following is an excerpt from that issue’s introduction (Krzywinska & Lowood, 2006):

*The World of Warcraft* is a complex world indeed, an extraordinary mixture of art and design, technologies, economics, the social and the cultural. It is a game, a virtual world, and an online community. For these reasons and more, scholars and researchers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and interests have been participating in the game in both academic and ludic terms.

Finally, *World of Warcraft* has become something of a pop-culture phenomenon. It has spread beyond its initial confines of a video game to become a board game, action figures, plush toys, and even a collectible card game. The game has even spilled over onto television where it was recently the focus of an entire episode of the animated
comedy *South Park*. *WoW* as a force in popular culture is perhaps even more evident in other countries than in the United States. In China, for example, it was recently part of a major marketing tie in with Coca-Cola that included everything from game footage in *iCoke* commercials, to the appearance of *Wow* characters on *iCoke* cans\textsuperscript{xi}.

**Finding texts to analyze**

My actual method for finding texts to analyze was an ongoing and ever changing process. As such, an account of how I found the texts I analyzed reads less like a recipe than it does a narrative, or a journey. What follows are the details of research travels.

All of the texts I analyzed were found online and consisted of forum posts, movies, and blog entries. I did not intend to limit myself to these three forms of quitting texts specifically, but, through the course of my research, they arose as the most common forms to be found. In fact, compared to these three forms, others were relatively scarce. As such, despite the fact that I was not interested in obtaining any kind of representative sample, I did not find enough examples to meaningfully analyze other forms of texts. My analysis focused on the three specific forms I have described. Other forms, however, represent possibilities for future research and are described in the final chapter.

The majority of the texts I analyzed were found in the public domain and are easily accessible by anyone with access to the Internet and a computer that can read HTML. The only exceptions were a handful of quitting texts that I acquired from the forums of a guild of which I am a member. In this case the guild forums are password protected and restricted to guild members only. Since these texts are not available to just
anyone I sought permission from the texts’ authors to use their creations in this project. When available, I asked for permission using email, or if necessary, through the forums themselves by using a private message. I only quote or cite texts for which I have received permission, and, if the author did not consent, or simply did not reply, their text does not appear in this project. Finally, the authors of the texts in question, and even the name of the guild itself, will be kept anonymous. All of these precautions should alleviate any potential ethical concerns involving the use of sources from a private forum.

All of the texts analyzed for this project were collected in the three months between August 15 and October 15, 2006, though there were no temporal restrictions placed on the texts themselves. In other words, while I searched for texts during this specific time, I did not limit myself to texts created in this time period; in fact, many of the texts I found were created weeks or even months before this period and are still available online.

Though I originally started by looking for texts on a small number of websites, my search quickly grew to include many websites above and beyond my starting point. I began my research by looking primarily at the guild forums of which I am a member, as well as the official World of Warcraft forums hosted by the game’s developer Blizzard. My daily reading of these forums uncovered a number of quitting texts, but, wanting more, I expanded my search to include a number of third party forums dedicated to World of Warcraft discussion, including Allakhazam, Gamespy, and WorldofWar.net. In addition, I found a number of quitting threads and posts on third party forums that unlike
those above are not expressly dedicated to *WoW*, such as the *Penny Arcade* forums\textsuperscript{xvi}, the *IGN* boards\textsuperscript{xvii} and similar sites that contain a wider range of video game topics.

Links from these forums led me to the prospect of movies as quitting texts, and I soon discovered both *You Tube* and *Google Video*\textsuperscript{xviii} as prime sources for quitting movies of both *WoW* and other games. As a player I was familiar with the website *Warcraftmovies*\textsuperscript{xix} as a source for movies about *World of Warcraft*, and, while the site did provide some useful information for my research, it contained relatively few quitting texts. Moreover, most of the movies the site did have were also hosted on either *You Tube* or *Google Video*.

I also uncovered a number of quitting texts in the form of blog entries. When I started my research I did not look for blogs at all, but, once I found them, they proved to be a useful source for a number of interesting quitting texts. Unlike forums or sites that collect movies, however, individual blogs tend to be on websites of their own, so finding blogs that were also *World of Warcraft* quitting texts proved something of a challenge. In some cases I was lucky enough to find blogs linking to other blogs of similar theme, which meant that finding one quitting text led directly to finding more. In other cases I found quitting text blogs through prodigious use of the search engine *Google*.

The research approach described above sounds chaotic because it was. Aside from checking the various forums daily, no good stringent or well-defined method for finding quitting texts presented itself. As such, looking for them often entailed a wide variety of approaches to attack the problem. The nature of the search meant that some
days I would find either no or very few texts, while other days it seemed like I could not
organize copies of what I found fast enough.

Analysis and likely interpretations

In his book on textual analysis Alan McKee (McKee, 2003) describes the method
of textual analysis as the search for likely interpretations, as in how a text is likely to be
interpreted by its audience. In addition McKee outlines the process one can follow as a
researcher to discover the likely interpretations of any given text. Since my goal with this
project was the interpretation of quitting texts I found McKee’s process to be a useful
guide for my own research. His steps provided a general model from which I drew
inspiration. The first two steps McKee outlines – choosing a question or questions I want
answered and finding the texts that are most helpful in answering those questions – I
described in detail above. The third step – analyzing the texts in search of likely
interpretations – I describe below.

McKee stresses the importance of context in analyzing texts for likely
interpretations. When people interpret texts, they are always within some kind of
context, and this context has a direct impact on which interpretations are likely. McKee
describes context as being composed of “relevant intertexts,” which are the separate but
related texts the audience “has on hand” when interpreting the primary text. Researchers
doing textual analysis, then, must familiarize themselves with these relevant intertexts if
they want to have any hope of making sense of the primary text and uncovering likely
interpretations. Specifically McKee writes that “what makes us ‘educated’ in our
‘educated guesses at the likely interpretations of a text,’ is our knowledge of relevant intertexts” (p. 92).

McKee organizes relevant intertexts into four general categories: 1: other texts in the series, 2: the genre of the text, 3: intertexts about the text itself and 4: the wider public context in which the text circulates. He stresses that this categorization is only a rough guide but I found his categories useful for providing the context of my own textual analysis.

Other texts in the series refers to other texts in the same series as the primary text, such as other episodes in a television series, the other novels in a trilogy, or the sequels and prequels to a video game. These other texts are important because the primary text often does no offer enough information on its own. It would be difficult, for example, for a researcher to fully make sense of *Star Trek* by only watching one episode; it is only by watching a number of episodes that the show’s overall structure and narrative functions become clear. “It’s only by consuming several texts in a series,” writes McKee, “that you get a sense of what the rules are, and what various aspects mean. You start to see what is normal for [a text] and what is unusual” (p. 94). While quitting texts do not belong to a series in the same way as a television show, the basic principles that McKee describes are still applicable. Looking at any one quitting text on its own could only tell me so much – it was only by looking at a number of them that their rules, similarities, differences and what constitutes normal and abnormal began to emerge.

In explaining why the genre of a text is a relevant intertext McKee writes that “knowing the genre and its rules helps us to make reasonable guesses at how a text is
likely to be read by audiences” (p. 95). In other words, people have different expectations when viewing texts of different genres - what one expects to see in a sports game is quite different from what one expects to see in a fantasy adventure – and these expectations mean some interpretations are more likely than others. As an example McKee explains that an audience is going to have decidedly different reactions to characters bursting into song if they are watching a musical, than if they are watching an episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. While I agree with McKee that the genre of a text is important, it presents something of a conundrum in regards to quitting texts. Specifically, unlike the kinds of media texts with which Mckee is primarily concerned, quitting texts have no genre conventions to draw upon, and thus my research cannot rely on genre conventions as a source of context. Despite this, however, some of what Mckee writes about genres is useful for my own research. Specifically, Mckee ties genre in with viewer expectations, people expect different things from different genres, and though quitting texts have no genre conventions, they are not without viewer expectations; when they view quitting texts players have different expectations (and thus different likely interpretations) than they do other kinds of player-made texts. As such, though I lack genre conventions, I can, and should, take audience expectations into account as part of my analysis.

McKee describes intertexts about the text itself as “publicly circulated texts that are explicitly linked to the text you’re interested in” (p. 97). Ironically this is precisely what quitting texts are if the primary text of interest is World of Warcraft – as quitting texts are publicly circulated and explicitly linked to the game. In other words, if I were
conducting a textual analysis of *World of Warcraft* I would probably want to look at player-made quitting texts as a relevant intertext in my research. By reverse logic then, I should look at *World of Warcraft* as an important (if not the most important) intertext in my own study. This, however, is perhaps not surprising considering that playing *World of Warcraft* is the only thing I can be assured that the authors of quitting texts have in common – one cannot quit a game one has never played. *WoW*, however, is far from the only relevant intertext since in some sense just about every player created text (quitting or not) can be potentially relevant to understanding quitting texts. Forum post quitting texts, for example, often draw on practices common to those forums, and quitting text movies are often made using conventions common in other kinds of player-created movies. In each of these cases the forum posts and movies in question provide at least some of the context essential to make sense of the related quitting texts.

The fourth and final category, the wider public context in which the text circulates, is in many ways ill-defined and all-inclusive, but, according to McKee, this is both intentional and necessary: “We draw on all kinds of other knowledges about how the world is organized – how we make sense of it – when we make sense of a text” (p. 99). One example McKee gives is language. Generally a text is created using a certain language and whether or not one speaks that language has a large impact on how the text is interpreted. McKee also frames this category in terms of dominant discourses which are too involved to be discussed here but can generally be described as the cultural norms and assumptions that are present in both the text and the audience viewing it. While language and dominant discourses are both relevant contextually to the study of quitting
texts, my own research involved a context that McKee did not discuss: player culture. *World of Warcraft* player culture is the very definition of the wider public context in which quitting texts circulate. As such, any reasonable attempt to study quitting texts must include some understanding of MMOG player culture in general, and *WoW* player culture specifically. It is in this way that previous scholarship on MMOG players is so important to my research. And it is in this way that my own experiences as a player, and my familiarity with the player culture are such essential tools.

In summary then, my research was an analysis of quitting texts with special attention given to the context – relevant intertexts – that give them meaning. This processed involved:

- Analyzing groups of quitting texts in search of emergent common rules, forms, ideas and practices, as well as in search of differences and the qualities that make individual quitting texts unique.

- Analyzing quitting texts by thinking about what kinds of audience expectations they entail and how these expectations are tied to interpretations.

- Analyzing quitting texts in terms of related intertexts. Related intertexts in this case includes *World of Warcraft* the game, as well as other separate but related player-created texts and artifacts such as movies and forum posts.

- Analyzing quitting texts via their position and role within *World of Warcraft* player culture, drawing heavily on knowledge gained as both a player and an academic.

While I followed this model for each text I analyzed, some texts relied more heavily on certain of the above categories than others, such that making sense of any
given text was as unique a process as the text itself. Some texts made the most sense when looked at as a group in search of common rules and differences, whereas others made the most sense when looked at in relation to specific elements of player culture.

Notes

ix These figures found at http://www.mmogchart.com/Chart7.html on October 18, 2006.


xi iCoke is not a typo but comes from Blizzard’s own documentation of the marketing tie-in, found at http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/community/chinaicoke.html on October 18, 2006.

xii The official WoW forums can be found at http://forums.worldofwarcraft.com/?sid=1. It is necessary to make a few comments on the nature of the WoW forums and the effects this nature has had on my research. First, posting to the forums themselves requires an active game account, thus ensuring that conversations on the forums are limited to players of the game. Reading the forums, however, is not limited as such, and thus any of the forum content is available to be read by anyone. Second, the forums have a remarkable turnover rate; hundreds of new discussions and thousands of new posts are made each day, and in order to prevent the forums from growing to an unmanageable size, a roughly equal number of discussions and posts are destroyed. As such, the actual life span of any given discussion, or post, is quite small, with only the most popular and active discussions lasting more than a couple weeks, if that. Because my period of collecting quitting texts lasted three months, most of the texts I found no longer exist online, and as such are impossible to cite directly. I partially solved this problem for my own purposes by taking screenshots of all the threads I found and saving the screenshots. While this allowed me refer back to the posts and analyze them at my leisure, it does not make citing them any more possible. To this end, though I supply a link in my citations of the WoW forums the link itself will most likely be dead by the time anyone reads this.

xiii Found at http://wow.allakhazam.com/forum.html

xiv Found at http://www.forumplanet.com/PlanetWarcraft/

xv Found at http://forums.worldofwar.net/

xvi Found at http://www.penny-arcade.com/forums/

xvii Found at http://boards.ign.com/


xix Found at http://video.google.com/
Chapter 3: Making Sense of Quitting Texts

In this chapter I discuss the prominent themes, ideas, and practices that emerge from an analysis of quitting texts and what these themes, ideas, and practices reveal about the role of quitting texts in player culture. My analysis uncovered three general categories that can be used to organize and make sense of player-made quitting texts: virtual suicides, goodbyes, and critiques. Virtual suicides are texts that involve players permanently deleting one or more of their characters. Goodbyes are texts wherein players say goodbye to the game and to the people they interacted with while playing the game. Critiques are quitting texts that criticize the game or certain aspects of it.

These categories were formed based on a number of common themes, ideas and practices that emerged from a close study of quitting texts, which I make clear using an example of one category. Each category refers to an essential trait shared by all texts within that category. Virtual suicides, as I mentioned, are texts that involve players permanently deleting one or more of their characters. However, the categories also refer to traits that are common to texts within that category but are not necessarily ubiquitous; traits, in other words, that are not an essential part of the category but are a nonetheless common occurrence. Again with virtual suicides as an example, a common practice is for players to delete their items before deleting their character, however, not all virtual suicide texts do this. Finally, the categories also refer to preferences in form and/or medium of texts. That is, texts within a category are often built using similar structures.
and favor certain mediums. Compared with the other categories, virtual suicides, for example, are generally more visual in nature and most commonly made in movie form.

While these categories are meant to be useful tools in explaining the majority of quitting texts, they are not a complete and rigid typology of quitting texts, and they are not meant to provide a comprehensive series of rules that all quitting texts follow. In fact, these categories are not comprehensive, mutually exclusive or exhaustive. Some texts cannot be explained using these categories, texts often combine elements of multiple categories, and the potential for additional categories certainly exists. Examples of texts that belong to more than one category, texts that fit in none of these three categories, and the possibility of additional categories are discussed later in this chapter.

In the following sections of this chapter I directly quote numerous examples of quitting texts. In each case I have tried to be as true to the original text as possible, and have thus left the original spelling and syntax of these texts intact. The only exceptions to this are texts taken from specific guild forums that require password access. In these cases I have used pseudonyms in place of the actual names of people and/or characters in the text. I also use a pseudonym to refer to the author of the text, such that the specific guild and players involved will be known only to me. In the case of the other texts, however, which were all fully open to the public, specific names mentioned, and the name of the author, appear as they were originally written.
Virtual suicides

Virtual suicides are texts that involve players permanently deleting one or more of their characters. I call these kinds of texts virtual suicides because they involve the willful destruction of a player’s online avatar, or character. Death in World of Warcraft is a common and temporary occurrence and indeed any given character is likely to die countless times in the course of the game. As such, the destruction I refer to in virtual suicides is not the temporary death of a character in game, but the much more permanent act of a character being deleted. Deleting a character in World of Warcraft is not difficult, but it does require some effort and intentionality on the part of the player. Deleting a character is not something one could reasonably do by accident. To delete a character in WoW one must highlight the character in the character selection screen, click the delete button, and then type the word “d-e-l-e-t-e” into a text box for confirmation. The game responds with a message saying the character is being deleted, and the character disappears from the select screen.

Deleting one’s characters is a more permanent separation from the game than quitting alone. If players simply quit the game and stop paying their monthly fees, their accounts become inactive but are kept intact. In fact, if players later change their minds and want to resume playing, they can return to their account and find their characters exactly as they left them. A deleted character, however, is lost completely and can never be played again. While Blizzard does have the capability of restoring deleted characters - something that is done under special circumstances - such a restoration is beyond the
capabilities of players. As such, just as suicide permanently removes someone from this world, deletion permanently removes one’s character from World of Warcraft.

Compared with the other categories, virtual suicides are generally more visual in nature and most commonly made in movie form. In my search for quitting texts I found only two non-movie virtual suicides, compared to more than a dozen in movie form. Moreover, the majority of all quitting movies I found involved characters being deleted. While my own research is in no way a representative sample, the disparity I uncovered leads me to believe that in the case of virtual suicides there is a real trend towards visual images and movies specifically.

Virtual suicides likely favor these visual forms for two reasons. First, visual virtual suicides serve as proof that characters really were deleted. While there is no reason to assume that someone writing about deleting a character is lying, witnessing the character being deleted removes the potential for any such doubt. Second, virtual suicides in visual form seem to pack more of an emotional punch. While one can sympathize with a written account of character deletion, actually watching it take place is a more visceral experience.

As quitting texts virtual suicides come in a variety of forms and sport varying levels of complexity and creativity. While movies are the most common form of virtual suicides, I did find other forms, including texts that documented the act of deleting through a series of screenshots and written texts that provided a narrative account of the character deleting process. The most basic virtual suicide I found was a simple four-word forum post, found on the IGN forumsxxi:
These four words were followed by a link to a screenshot of the player’s character select screen, which contains one solitary level 5 character. One assumes that this screenshot was taken after the players “char” was deleted and that a higher level, more accomplished, character is now missing from the list. The most complex virtual suicides I found were longer – as long as 7-10 minutes in some cases - more involved movies that included the deleting of characters as part of a larger overall production. Many of these movies included in-game footage, music, narrative structures, and even messages from the author to his audience - most commonly given as text on the screen during the movie. All four of these elements – in-game footage, music, narrative structures and messages from author to audience – are indeed common to most player-made *World of Warcraft* movies, but quitting texts, and virtual suicides in particular, often use these elements to enhance the overall theme of the text. Below I provide examples in regards to in-game footage and music.

Some virtual suicides use in-game footage as a way of paying a final tribute to the character, or characters being deleted. One such movie hosted on *You Tube* under the name “/quit Wow” stages a defiant suicide of the character to be deleted. During the movie the character jumps off a precipice and proclaims “death before dishonor” before hitting the ground and dying. The player then logs out of the game and deletes the character. As previously stated, death in *World of Warcraft* is both commonplace and temporary, so this character’s apparent suicide has no serious in-game consequences; however, this staged suicide in the context of the character ultimately being deleted
serves the role of metaphorically linking the character’s in-game death and removal from existence. In addition, the phrase “death before dishonor” serves as the character’s metaphorical last words.

“/quit WoW” also contains another element of in-game footage that is common to virtual suicides: the destruction of a character’s virtual possessions. Before having the character jump to its death the player takes the time to remove all of the character’s items and destroys each in turn. Another example of a movie that features item destruction is “end of WoW” which features a warrior character having all of his items destroyed as he walks through the virtual city of Ironforge. Once his items are gone the character waves goodbye – literally through the use of an emote command – and the player then logs out of the game and deletes his characters. Often in World of Warcraft, the accomplishments of a character are measured in the items or gear they use. The most powerful characters often possess rare items that are easily recognizable to other players at a glance. As such, destroying a character’s items is perhaps a way of symbolically destroying that character’s accomplishments, and, in the case of really rare or powerful items, deleting the items is likely meant to illicit a specific reaction from the audience. When viewing some virtual suicides as a player – as opposed to as a researcher – I have personally winced in reaction to some of the items being deleted.

“End of WoW,” incidentally, is also a good example of the use of music to enhance the theme of the virtual suicide. While the character is walking through Ironforge, and his items are being deleted, the song “I Can See Clearly Now the Rain is Gone” is playing. The use of this song, which is itself an optimistic look at new
beginnings, is perhaps the author’s way of being optimistic about life after WoW. The movie, in other words, helps bring closure to one chapter of the author’s life, while representing the beginning of another. An example of another movie that uses a specific song in a meaningful way is “Quitting WoW” – hosted on YouTube by zephyrusxxvii - that uses the song “My Black Dahlia” by the Hollywood Undead as its soundtrack. “My Black Dahlia” is a hard-hitting song seemingly about being hurt or wronged by a loved one. Use of the song in this virtual suicide perhaps indicates that the author feels similarly hurt, or wronged by a game he once loved.

While these two examples are perhaps explicit in the content of the song used, other texts use music primarily as a way to set a mood. Specifically many texts draw on music that creates a certain emotional feel – such as ‘happy’ or ‘sad’ – in an attempt to create some kind of context for the visuals in the movie. The aforementioned “/quit WoW” for example, uses a fast-paced techno track that, in combination with the deleted items and staged suicide, creates something of a surreal viewing experience. This is not to say that the music doesn’t fit with the rest of the text, but that the movie would be a much different experience with a more uplifting, or depressing, musical selection. Similarly, the movie “Quitting WoW” – hosted on YouTube by EMOPPOULxxviii – is little more than a recording of a player deleting more than a dozen characters spread over multiple servers accompanied by grinding hard rock power ballad. In this case the music creates an entirely different experience than the text would be without it: What could easily be a drawn-out boring movie is sustained by the music as something full of energy and drive.
No discussion of virtual suicides would be complete without discussing the category’s most famous example: “Drakedog’s Last Video – R.I.P.” When World of Warcraft was still young, Drakedog was one of the few players widely known throughout WoW player culture. Specifically, Drakedog – who was a Warlock – became famous for making movies that highlighted his skills in PvP – player versus player combat. Not only were Drakedog’s skills noteworthy, but his videos also served as a way for other players to learn and improve their own PvP abilities. As a testament to precisely how popular Drakedog’s movies were, and still are, the website Warcraftmovies lists him as third in their Hall of Fame, indicating that he is the third most downloaded author in the website’s history with more than 950,000 total downloads. The two authors above Drakedog on the list – PALS FOR LIFE and The Godfather – have already received academic attention themselves, as they are the authors of the two movies analyzed by Henry Lowood in his article on World of Warcraft movies and player culture (2006).

Drakedog’s most downloaded movie, however, with just over 200,000 downloads, is his ‘last’ movie and the movie in which he commits virtual suicide. The movie begins with Drakedog sitting on a throne while the player highlights all of the items the character is wearing such that the audience knows exactly what he has. Drakedog played the Korean version of the game, and, as such, all the item descriptions are in Korean. Despite this, however, Drakedog was accomplished enough that most of the items highlighted are easily identified by non-Korean players. Once all the items have been highlighted Drakedog proceeds to destroy each of them in turn. He then has his character put on red boots and a red pair of pants, logs out of the game and deletes
his character. Finally, the movie ends with a message displayed on the screen in white text, and, although the message is in Korean, *Warcraftmovies* provides a translation:

> *War* is not fun anymore. Tired of 24 hour-long honor competitions, sick of endlessly repeating dungeon raids. Seeing my friends leave *War* one by one also was a pain. Lastly, I'm tired of crying 'EE!!' alone now that my friends left the game. I want some rest.

Aside from being, perhaps, the most famous example to date, Drakedog’s final movie is in many ways the quintessential virtual suicide, in that it incorporates and includes many of the common practices belonging to the category.

In the context of existing literature on participatory culture and MMOG players, virtual suicides can be understood in interesting ways. In particular, the work of Henry Lowood on player-made movies, or machinima (2006), sheds an interesting light on virtual suicides. As a category that is predominantly movies, much of what Lowood writes about machinima is applicable in some way to understanding virtual suicides, but his idea that is the most applicable to my own work is the concept of the community player. As described in chapter two, Lowood describes the kinds of players that create movies as community players: “The community player is not only creative and theatrical but also takes care to exhibit mastery of technology and cyberathletic skill… Part stage actor, part activist, the community payer plays for other players” (p. 363). Since community players have these qualities while they play, it would make sense that they are the same way when they quit. Virtual suicides, then, represent one way that community players can be creative and theatrical, and enact their quitting on a stage. In other words, by making a virtual suicide, community players can make their exit just as much of a production or event as was their time in the game.
A good example of just such a player is Drakedog, who can be described as the consummate community player. Not only did Drakedog become famous for being creative and theatrical, he specialized in making movies that showcased his cyberathletic skill. Moreover, when he finally did quit, he made a virtual suicide that turned his leaving the game into an event.

*Goodbyes*

At their most basic, goodbyes are texts that players write to say goodbye to the game itself and to the people and community they interacted with while playing the game. While this could seem like two different focuses – game or players – more often that not a goodbye combines both elements into a single text – game *and* players. In addition, unlike the other categories, which often involve players/quitters who are upset with the game, goodbyes generally involve players/quitters who are leaving the game on good terms - the goodbye reads more like a fond farewell than a good riddance. In other words, goodbye texts are often constructed as tributes. A player appreciates the game, and the people he played with, and thus creates a text to honor that appreciation.

Unlike virtual suicides, which are predominantly visual, goodbyes seem to favor the written word. With the exception of the occasional movie, the vast majority of goodbye texts I found were forum posts. In addition, goodbyes were most commonly found on more personal or intimate forums, such as those dedicated to a specific server, or those of a specific guild. The reason for this, I think, is that in comparison to other kinds of quitting texts, goodbyes are themselves more personal in nature. Many
goodbyes mention specific people, characters, or guilds by name and are meant more for specific people than a wider audience. Again, despite the fact that it is not a representative sample, my own research backs this up – all but a few of the goodbye forum posts I found came from either the official Blizzard forums dedicated to specific servers or from guild websites to which I had access.

Goodbye posts from these various websites share a number of common traits and practices. One that I have already stated is that posts often mention specific people, characters or guilds by name. Often this is done by simply listing the characters or people in question, as in this post from the official Dalaran server by a character named Kartarxxxv:

Well it is time for me to quit WoW. I had tons of fun with everybody on Dalaran mostly pvping :). I would like to say thanks to the pvp group that I rolled with. Bluey, Scarapino, Jshock, Ramzabeoulve, Machao, Rosalin, Eve, and all the others:) I had a lot of fun facing all those horde groups. Have fun everybody.

KARTARSAUCE

Bye.

I also found a much longer and more impressive example on the official server for the Magtheridon forum, in which a character named Mell lists close to 100 names as part of saying goodbyexxxvi:

Well, my account I had Mell on closed about a month ago and this one will be closing in about 6 hours so I figured I'd say goodbye too all of the people that made this game way more fun than it actually is. I'm canceling for school this year and hopefully I'll be back for expansion, but not sure as of yet if I will or not. I don't think I could have had as near as fun of a time playing for the past 2 years without all of you. [Magtheridon] was definitely a special server for me. It sucks so much of the community we used to have is gone now.

amarxist, tatiana, kestral, arakaine, ghani, elitha, piarry, jonasher, elidora, jake,
elvée, punkinhaid, nightz, mccauley, hyroniemus, bibimbap, superdood, jaiken, glue, ally, bofirial, crais, shuni, madmaxo, treznor, kitana, solidsam, nodin, sparticusrex, brooks, walken, shablamo, ghost, rasputin, erros, ivalice, cristos, grummore, cythetha, ismarion, siriuswhite, sevarius, anexion, prionace, wildfury, cassius, dragosoni, narysta, califax, hoei, blueviper, otichaw, carnate, archfiend, chizzy, azem, vinci, klanana, corybantic, emirsa, yutt, chuunin, sagen, espo, splex, joho, geedorah, isis, hans, glori, railz, shokenju, sindel, menion, kamil, forr, the dat crew, the atr crew, the requiem crew, the wrecked em crew, the team ezmode crew, theresistance crew and anyone else I may have forgotten. You guys ***%ing rocked.

Both of the above texts are obviously tributes to the people with whom the players played the game. The first example, for instance, specifically thanks the characters that the player enjoyed PvPing with – PvP is often used as a verb in forum communications – and the second text specifically thanks the long list of players for making the game “way more fun than it actually is.” In other examples however, the tribute to other players is even more personal, as player names are mentioned along with specialized notes and comments. As in this excerpt of a post from a guild forum - because the post comes from a guild forum I am using aliases in place of the original names mentioned in the text:

Ivan, you're a great guy, officer, and paladin. And your methods are effective; don't let any of the officers that are scared to tell people off tell you otherwise…

Aaron, stay sexy.

Sam & Katy, great people, great parties, and Sam is a good player. (lol <3 you Katy)

Sin and Xion, still the guilds best couple, Sin, you're crazy, in a good way.

Po, Marion, Shine, good members, good officers, good players, no matter what I've said before. You need to ascend to the top imo.

Another common trait of goodbye texts is to provide a reason, or rationale for quitting the game. Sometimes the rationale given is the fault of the game, which often results in a text that has much in common with a critique (critiques are discussed later in
this chapter). In many cases, though, the rationale given is described in terms of being out of the player’s control, indicating that, perhaps, the player is forced to quit the game and only does so reluctantly. More often than not players who are forced to leave the game cite real life reasons, like work, school, or relationships as their reasons for having to quit. For one example of such a reluctant goodbye one needs look no farther than my own quitting text from chapter one, where I cite school as the reason I had to quit playing and tell my fellow warlocks I will miss playing with them. Another example, from the official Magtheridon server forum, also cites school as the reason for quitting and specifically thanks the server community for making the game so much fun:

College started and I can't play like I used to, too much classes and #$@, work+school ==> no time to fk around.

Some of you thought I was a big fat nerd that lives in his mom's basement, some thought I was with disabilities, but the best one was a "Hitman that kills for gold" lol that made me laugh for 2days, I am a normal gamer that plays for his own fun and I am 100% sure that if I rolled on another server, the fun I had in this game would not be the same ever! The community of Magtheridon is the best, all the drama and #$@ talk, that’s what made it fun…

Farewell Magtheridon…

Another example, from the official Drak’thul server forums, also mentions school but adds “restarting his social life” and “being in a relationship” as reasons for quitting the game:

I know none of you may know me, I never got a level 60, or did I do anything great. But I'd just like to say goodbye to everybody. I've been on Drak'thul since release and I've had a blast. I guess, after two years of play, it's time to quit and restart my social life. I've had a blast playing this game and playing on this server. School just started up and I'm in a relationship, no time for this game. Thanks for making this game so enjoyable Drak'thul. I'd especially like to thank Vini Vidi Vici, and Sassy, for making my stay in the guild so awesome.
All of the previous examples are forum posts, and, while they succeed in outlining some of the common traits and practices of goodbyes, other forms of texts do exist. One such example is a movie titled “Farewell.” In this case the title of the movie is an accurate description of its contents. The movie is not an actual movie per se, but is instead a montage of screenshots set to music and saved in movie form. The screenshots are not ordered in any particular way, and do not tell a story, but are instead seemingly random snapshots into various gameplay experiences of a gnome rogue. The individual screenshots are too numerous to describe fully, but they portray a wide variety of in-game events and activities, including PvP experiences, fighting raid bosses, exploration, as well as a number of mundane activities like dancing, fishing, eating and drinking.

“Farewell” is very obviously a goodbye to the game in general, but under close inspection it also a goodbye to certain players and characters. A number of the screenshots, for example, are group pictures of the characters guild, or smaller group shots of the character and a few others. While one cannot know for sure why these specific screenshots were included it seems safe to assume that at least some of them were included as a tribute to the guild and other characters in them. In addition, at the very end of the movie, as blue text on the screen, the author leaves a written message for his intended audience:

Goodbye Guys :(
I <3 you all :D
And GL in Naxx

Evidently then, despite the fact that no names are mentioned, the movie seems to be intended as a goodbye for specific people: the guild to which the player belonged.
In the virtual suicides section above I have already discussed how some movies use music to enhance an overall theme, and “Farewell” does this in much the same way as the examples listed above. Specifically, the aptly named song “In Loving Memory” by Alter Bridge, which is itself a melancholy exploration of saying goodbye and the loss of a loved one, accompanies the series of screenshots. From the first few lines of the song, the mood of the movie is set:

Thanks for all you've done  
I've missed you for so long  
I can't believe you're gone

The choice of this specific song only adds to the overall function of the movie as a farewell.

A common theme that runs throughout much of the scholarship on both participatory and player culture is an emphasis on the ability of those cultures to bring people together and create community. Henry Jenkins, for example, specifically describes the creation of community as a function of participatory culture: “Fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community”(Jenkins, 1992, p. 46). In this context, since they are player-produced texts, one way to understand goodbyes is to examine the role that they play in the formation of player community.

In her book Play Between Worlds, T.L. Taylor provides a specific account of how player-made texts contribute to the formation of a larger player community (Taylor, 2006b, p. 58):

Relating shared experiences through art (be it comic or not) is a common way players circulate feelings about the game to others and reflect on their own
experience. For example, when new fan-produced movies turn up – on all kinds of subjects including sitting in tiresome camps, or in a more poignant one I recently saw, a long-time player touring the world as a way of saying goodbye and leaving the game – links to them often circulate rapidly. While sharing information about the game or passing along a link to a favorite comic can be a way of connecting with an existing social network, it also becomes a powerful mechanism for participating in a larger game public.

Though Taylor is specifically talking about Everquest player culture and texts created by Everquest players, the core of her idea is applicable to World of Warcraft player culture and, incidentally, to goodbye quitting texts. In fact, one of the specific examples she describes is a quintessential goodbye quitting text: the movie involving “a long-time player touring the world as a way of saying goodbye and leaving the game.” The circulation of goodbyes, then, is one of many ways that players relate shared experiences and participate in a larger game public. The irony, therefore, is that, while on the surface goodbyes are about quitting, they are ultimately about participation.

**Critiques**

Critiques are quitting texts that criticize the game or some specific aspect of it. Criticizing World of Warcraft is a common theme of all player-created texts, as much of the forum conversation about the game involves players criticizing one aspect of the game or another. As a category of quitting texts, however, critiques contain the added element of being the stated reason that the author is quitting the game. In other words, unlike the many players who continue to play World of Warcraft despite the faults they find in it, players who write critiques are ostensibly quitting the game because of the perceived faults they criticize. As a result, unlike goodbyes described above, which are
mostly focused on the positive and stem from an appreciation, critiques are mostly focused on the negative and stem from the player’s dislikes.

Like goodbyes critiques seem to favor the written word, though there are movies with elements of critique to them. The previously discussed “Quitting WoW” for example, contains a critique-like element in that the movie opens with a message from the author that reads: “This game sucks ;_;” (;_; is an emoticon for a crying face). This critique, however, is different from most of the texts in the category in that it is too simple. The critique has no depth or description, and readers do not know, for example, why the game sucks, just that the player thinks it does. The more common written critiques often provide this additional level of detail. While such texts are not above simple proclamations like “this game sucks,” they generally include an explanation as to why the author holds such an opinion, if only as a list of grievances. Also like goodbyes, many critiques are written as forum posts, but other kinds of written texts are also common. Most of the blog quitting texts I found, for example, fall under the category of critiques. Unlike goodbyes, which are more commonly found on more personal or intimate forums, critiques are generally more open and aimed at a wider audience, be it the General Discussion section of the official Blizzard forums, various third-party forums, or the general blogosphere.

Given its exceptionally large player base – over 7 million subscribers – one might reasonably expect there is little consensus in regards to what aspects of World of Warcraft are criticized. As the logic goes, different players are bound to like, or dislike, the game for different reasons, and the more players the more likely that each aspect of
the game will have its detractors. However, a look at critiques as a whole reveals certain
trends in respect to which aspects of the game get criticized. This is not to suggest that
other aspects of the game are not criticized – look at texts long enough and one is bound
to find critiques of every aspect – but that my own analysis of quitting texts found that
certain aspects of the game were more commonly criticized than others.

One aspect of World of Warcraft that texts often criticize is the repetitive nature
of the gameplay. Many texts, for example, express that the game was fun for a while, but
soon became repetitive, which killed the fun. In these texts the game is often described
using words like boring or monotonous as in the case of this forum post from the Penny
Arcade forums:

It was inevitable, the day I would no longer be able to run MC for the umpteenth
time without bashing my head against my monitor and trying to contain my
boredom while I called out for yet another rebuff on vent. My 60 lock was fun, for
a while, but after collecting about 5 epics and realizing I had spent over 60 hours
in MC alone... for 5 fuckin' items that really weren't THAT much better than the
ones I had before. And then it hit me, I was no longer having fun.

This attitude is echoed in an entry from a blog called “Burton Speaks,” of which the
following is an excerpt:

...the game is a time-sink. It's freely admitted that the whole idea is to lock you
into spending more and more hours playing the game... and that means you're
doing the same boring, monotonous tasks over and over and over and over again
for some slight reward. Yes, there's a reward. No, it's never easy to get...

The game stinks and the plans for the future only seem centered around "pretty
much the same, but more of it."

This excerpt also highlights another common complaint with World of Warcraft, the
amount of time the game seems to require. WoW is a game that many people spend
hundreds, if not thousands, of hours playing, and the game generally rewards those
players who play more often. A number of quitting texts comment on this and discuss
the potential of the game taking up too much of one’s time. In particular, one entry from
the blog plasticbag.org eloquently discusses the amount of time *WoW* can monopolize
and the effects this can have. The entry itself is too long to reproduce in its entirety, but
here is an excerpt of its highlights:

…so I typed in /played over the weekend and I got back the figure of *fifteen days
and four hours* for my main character - another nine hours for my second. Fifteen
days *solidly*. That's three hundred and seventy three hours of immersion in
Nordrassil when I could have been doing something else, something more useful.

Let me give you some context there. Imagine playing *WoW* was my second job,
which is how it has felt at times. Thinking in terms of eight-hour days and five
day work weeks, I've played the game for roughly *two and a half months*. And
that's *on top* of the day job. It's no wonder that the weblog has slipped.

Where the above blog entry notes how the time commitment involved in playing
*WoW* can impact one’s job, or keeping up one’s weblog, other texts have noted how
*WoW* can impact other areas of life, such as spending time with family. In a blog entry
called “Quitting World of Warcraft,” for example, a former player discusses the level of
time commitment needed to play *WoW*, and how that time would be better spent with his
wife and daughter:

*WoW* isn’t something you can dip in and out of. If you do your friends and guild
members are suddenly a lot higher level than you and have done the quests you
need to do. To play *WoW* well takes commitment and regular play. Which leads
me to the insurmountable obstacle …

Time.

*WoW* just takes up too much time. I don’t have enough free time to waste on this
game, my wife, daughter and writing are more important.

A third aspect of *World of Warcraft* that quitting texts commonly criticize is the
apparent lack of options of things to do in the game once one’s character has achieved
level 60. Like many MMOGs one of the primary goals in playing *World of Warcraft* is to level-up one’s character, with the max level available – at the time of this writing – being level 60. For many players, however, the game does not end at level 60 but instead the focus changes from leveling-up to advancing one’s character in different ways. While playing the game at max level – often referred to as the end-game – has kept countless players busy for even more countless hours, other players have found *WoW*’s end-game offerings to be insufficient. Specifically, a number of players have written critiques expressing dissatisfaction with raiding, the practice of conquering content in large groups of 20-40 players, and PvP, which are seen as being the only two viable end-game options offered by the game.

In the “Burton Speaks” blog entry, for example, the author specifically outlines a general disdain for the lack of end-game options and raiding in particular:

… there's not much to do at 60. I mean, sure, you can raid. That's where you get 20 or 40 people together and go kill some stupidly impossible guy hidden in a boring cave. And then you get to do it 1,200,232,102 more times because there's a 1% chance he might drop the thing you're looking for (if and when you kill him) - and you'd better hope no one else wants it. Raiding also takes large blocks of time, since you have to coordinate the schedules of 20 or 40 people. So, since I had no blocks of time, I was (quite contentedly) doing PvP.

Ironically, as the above excerpt indicates, the author was not as disdainful of PvP as he was of raiding, though evidently his relative like of PvP was not enough to keep him playing. Other texts, however, display plenty of disdain for both raiding and PvP. An excerpt from an entry of the blog “Utopian Hell,” for example, finds not much to like in either:

… my friend and I have “soloed” (really duoed, but there’s no such thing in the world of MMOs for some dumb reason) all the way to level 60. We had fun doing
it, too, and it hardly seemed like a grind. Then came level 60, and we realized we had only a few choices.

PVP: I’m not too into pvping, though I’ll take it occasionally. However, the battlegrounds tend to be taken over by well-organized groups that steamroll any of the pick-up groups that might go in. Couple this with wait times an hour or more, and, well…

Raid: Just the way I want to spend my already-truncated evenings (between work and school, there’s very little time). Join up with a group of strangers, spend hours organizing everyone together, spend more hours trying to decide on rules, and finally spend more hours getting killed when it turns out the people you went with are stupid.

That’s it! The endgame is about collecting purple pieces of armor (and weapons), joining uber guilds and basically kissing your free time goodbye. It’s a waste. Pure and simple…

Understanding critiques in respect to existing literature on participatory culture and MMOG players is perhaps best done through the work of T.L. Taylor. In particular, in a chapter of her book *Play Between Worlds* (2006b) called “Whose Game is This Anyway” Taylor discusses the struggle that goes on between players and developers as developers attempt to define the game and how it is played and players attempt to make meaning in their own ways. While Taylor discusses this struggle by drawing on specific examples and themes like RMT, fan-fiction, and the potential productive power that players possess, her general ideas can be used to frame an understanding of quitting text critiques – that is by viewing critiques as being an active part of this struggle.

One of the primary points that Taylor makes in discussing this struggle between players and developers is that ultimately player culture matters. There is no game, in other words, without the involvement of players. The culture, practices and experiences of the players lend life to the game and make it what it is. Constance Steinkuehler makes a similar argument in her conception of the mangle of play (2006), though for
Steinkuehler this mangle is less a struggle than a complex interaction. As such, whether part of a struggle with developers or a mangle of play, quitting represents one avenue that players have to respond to developers and to the game. Quitting by itself, however, only serves to remove the player from the struggle or the mangle without making a contribution to either. By quitting and writing a critique players are able to meaningfully incorporate their quitting the game into the overall interplay between players and developers.

Texts of multiple categories

The three categories described so far are not mutually exclusive, comprehensive or exhaustive, and in this section I want to discuss some examples of texts that draw on elements of multiple categories.

As it happens, a number of the texts I have described previously are good examples of texts that work in multiple categories. In fact because they are not mutually exclusive, many texts draw on elements from multiple categories. The famous “Drakedog’s Final Video,” for instance, is an excellent example of a virtual suicide and a critique. Drakedog’s video is the quintessential example of a virtual suicide, right up to the end of the movie when he leaves a final message for his audience, which if anything, is a list of critiques:

*WoW* is not fun anymore. Tired of 24 hour-long honor competitions, sick of endlessly repeating dungeon raids. Seeing my friends leave *WoW* one by one also was a pain. Lastly, I'm tired of crying 'EE!!' alone now that my friends left the game. I want some rest.
Drakedog’s specific critiques have much in common with some of the other critiques I have described above. In particular the “24 hour-long honor competitions” is a reference to PvP and the time commitment involved with it. And the “repeating dungeon raids” is a reference to end-game raiding and how repetitive it can be. As such, by being “tired” of one and “sick” of the other Drakedog manages to touch on all of the most commonly criticized elements of *World of Warcraft* in one short sentence.

Another text I have already described that fits into more than one category is the movie “End of *Wow*,” the virtual suicide involving a warrior walking through Ironforge. In addition to being a virtual suicide “End of *Wow*” is also a goodbye, but just barely. Before any of the actual footage starts, the movie opens with a simple message on the screen: “TY blizz <3” which translates as “Thank You Blizzard” with a heart standing for something like “much love.” The player making the movie apparently still appreciates the game on some level and seemingly added the short message as a small tribute. In addition, the way in which the player leaves the game, with a wave, is friendly, indicating that the player is parting with the game on good terms.

Having already discussed a virtual suicide-critique and a virtual suicide-goodbye, a goodbye-critique will round out combinations. The best example I found of this combination is a text I have not previously discussed. A post on the official *World of Warcraft* General Discussion forum combines elements of both critique and goodbye quitting texts:

Well, I still have till December to finish out the six month payment that I made in July. But I'm gone, and my bros are too. Tho I love the game (and still think its a great achievement) I quit because of the focus on end-game, raid-based content. I play this game for the PvP battlegrounds…
…the game is just too focused on high-level, raid gamers. The raids bored me. Since its never as fun playing against NPC’s as it is other people…

…have fun all. The game is still a great game. Blizzard has a working formula and has a ton of artistry and technical talent. Hopefully at some point the company will focus more on the needs of the PvP'er, without necessarily sacrificing the solid end-game provided to level 60 raiders.

While the player who wrote the text is evidently a fan of PvP, a dislike of end-game raiding led to quitting the game. Even while he is making some serious critiques of the game, he obviously has a lot of respect for it and has many nice things to say, calling it both a “great achievement” and a “great game.”

Texts that do not fit

While doing my analysis I came across a number of texts, that while certainly quitting texts, do not fit into any of the above three categories. At first glance these texts appear to be so unique that they are a category in and of themselves. On further observation, however, it seems that these texts might represent categories in addition to the ones I have described. One example of such a text – and a personal favorite of all the texts I analyzed – is a movie by the name of “I quit WoWxlvi.”

The movie itself is actually a scene from the Tom Cruise film Top Gun. Near the end of Top Gun there is a scene where Maverick – Cruise’s character – is standing on the deck of an aircraft carrier, holding the dog tags of his recently deceased flying partner and best friend Goose – played by Anthony Edwards. As the famous Top Gun theme music builds to a climax Maverick looks down at the dog tags in his hand, then reaches back and throws them into the ocean, signifying that Maverick has finally let go and
gotten over the death of his friend. In “I quit WoW” the scene is the same. Maverick stands on deck looking out over the ocean. In his hands, however, he holds not dog tags, but a World of Warcraft game box. Finally as the music reaches its emotional apex, Maverick reaches back and throws the game into the sea. At this point the image fades – the music keeps playing - and is replaced by white letters on a black screen that proclaim “I quit this shit.” The image then fades again into what looks like an explosion, a ball of fire in the shape of a clenched fist with an extended middle finger.

All told “I quit WoW” is less than 30 seconds, but is nonetheless quite the quitting text. It is not, however, a virtual suicide, a goodbye, or a critique. The movie does not follow any of the common traits or practices of the categories I described above, and its intertextual use of a scene from Top Gun is unique among all the texts I analyzed. This does not mean, however, that “I quit WoW” does not have a category, or belongs to no category. Perhaps “I quit WoW” represents a category of quitting texts that involves using other media intertextually. Or perhaps “I quit WoW” could be qualified as an anti-goodbye, or anti-tribute, since its goal seems to be mocking the game more so than appreciating it. However, a single text does not a category make, and “I quit WoW” is the only example of such potential categories that I found.

Another example of text that does not fit into any of the three categories is a forum post I found on the Penny Arcade forums in which the author announces that he is quitting the game, and uses the rest of the post to ask for advice about selling his character:

For the past 6 months or so I've known that I should quit, just didn't really want to go through with it yet. Basically a combination of RL things taking up more and
more time alongside a decreasing will to play.

…Anyway, here's the thing. I'm tempted to sell my account, rather than let it go to waste. Of course, this brings up a lot of questions... which I could use some help on. First up, [as far as I know] selling the account is against the *WoW [Terms of Service Agreement]* is it not?

…If I did go to sell the account, how much does [sic] the materials on my character matter? Would it be better to liquidate everything not really usable? What about the 50 arcanite or so [that] I have, best to keep that on the char? Input would be great here kinda lost atm.

Like “I quit *WoW*” this post is a quitting text, but is not a virtual suicide, a goodbye, or a critique. Nowhere in the text does the author pay tribute to the game, say goodbye to anyone, criticize an aspect of gameplay, or discuss deleting his characters. In fact he wants to keep them around in order to sell them. Also as with “I quit *WoW*,” this post could represent some other kind of category. The text could, for example, represent a category that involves the advertising and selling of characters. Given that the buying and selling of accounts is not uncommon it would make sense that such a category exists. By that logic, however, I should probably have found numerous examples of texts that involve selling accounts or characters, where instead, this is the only one I found.

The fact that these two texts were more or less unique among the texts I analyzed does not mean that other texts like them do not exist. In fact, I fully suspect that there are similar quitting texts out there, just that one likely needs to look in places I did not. Moreover, I believe that once other similar texts are found, different categories will begin to emerge. Such other texts, and categories then, are one possibility for future research and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

A third example of texts that do not fit cleanly into any of the three categories are
texts that are not actually quitting texts, but that are made to look like them. In other words, fake quitting texts. One day, while browsing the official World of Warcraft forums as part of my research I came across a thread titled “No WoW ever again”\textsuperscript{xlix}. When I opened the thread, however, I found this: “MUAhAHAHAAHAHA, are you kidding me? I wouldn’t stop playing wow if it gave me herpes!” Instead of the quitting text I expected to find I found a text that was obviously meant to deceive. The title of the thread, in other words, was intended to get people to think the post involved someone quitting the game, in order to set them up for the punch line.

Finding this text reminded me of forum post from a guild forum that I had encountered as player a long time ago, in which the author used a series of doctored screenshots to give the impression that he had deleted his characters. The rest of us in the guild realized the post was a fake when one of the characters in question logged into the game later that day. While both of these texts are examples of fake quitting texts, the one from my old guild forum is particularly interesting in that it was made to emulate a virtual suicide. This emulation suggests, among other things, that virtual suicides are a solidified and recognizable form. The common traits and practices of virtual suicides, in other words, are sufficiently familiar within player culture that the category can be parodied. Like the other texts that do not fit a category, these fake texts also present a possibility for future research. However, unlike the other texts fake quitting texts do not represent additional categories so much as the potential for understanding existing categories in new ways.
Conclusion

The categories outlined above, as well as the examples of uncategorized texts, begin to outline themes, ideas and practices that arise from an analysis of quitting texts. In particular, the three categories – virtual suicides, goodbyes, and critiques – represent specific collections of themes, ideas, and practices, and provide a way to organize and make sense of quitting texts by grouping similar texts. However, the categories are not enough to make sense of all quitting texts, as certain texts contain themes, ideas and practices that are not covered by the categories. In some cases these uncategorized texts might represent themes, ideas and practices that are the building blocks of additional categories. Such additional categories, however, are beyond the reach of this project and represent possibilities for future research and are discussed as such in the next chapter.

The potential roles that quitting texts play in player culture are as diverse as the texts themselves. Some quitting texts seem to be the creations of community players and represent those players’ exit from the game’s grand stage. Some texts seem to be related to the formation and structure of player communities, even if, ironically, those texts are written by players leaving that community. Some texts seem to be caught up in the complex interaction between players and developers, and serve as some players’ response to a game that they do not like. And some texts have other roles to play, ranging from the inexplicable use of Tom Cruise and a flaming middle finger to writing an advertisement and asking for advice on how to sell a character. Moreover, since many texts actually fit into more than one category, texts often serve multiple roles in player culture. Any given text, for example, can simultaneously be a community player’s final hurrah, an example
of a text that helps form the player community, and be embedded in the struggle or mangle of play between players and developers. “Drakedog’s Final Video” is one example of a text that likely fulfills all these roles.

Despite the variety of roles they serve within player culture, quitting texts as a whole are windows of insight into the larger workings of the MMOG genre. So what do quitting texts say about MMOGs? The answer lies in what quitting texts say about players, participatory culture, and community, and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Notes

xx Such as in the situation of an account becoming hacked or otherwise compromised.
xxiii Found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mci8qznidg on October 18, 2006.
xxiv Ironforge is the name of a virtual city within the game.
xxv Emote commands allow players to perform actions that are expressed as text (e.g. "Jim waves his arm around") to other nearby players. In the case of waving the player would type the command /wave and their character would wave in game.
xxvi In this section I discuss two different movies that were both hosted under the name Quiting WoW. In order to distinguish between the two I reference the screenames of the people who hosted each movie. The movie hosted by zepherus found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wD0I9whn3jc on October 18, 2006.
xxvii Drakedog’s Last Video – R.I.P. can be found numerous places online, I found it here: http://www.warcraftmovies.com/movieview.php?id=14524 on October 18, 2006.
While the significance of putting on other clothes, and the color red is unclear in the context of American culture, the gesture likely has some significance in Korean Culture. The website http://www.communicaid.com/south-korea-business-culture.asp, for example, states that “Signing a contract or writing a person’s name in red ink is the worst thing you can do in Korea, since this indicates that the person is deceased.” The color red, then, seems to be linked with death in Korean culture, and thus Drakedog’s use of the color in his character’s final outfit might be significant as such.

The Translation can be found here: http://www.warcraftmovies.com/movieview.php?id=14524

According to Warcraftmovies.com EE stands for Evil Empire and is the name of Drakedog’s (former) guild. As such, “crying EE!!” seems to be a reference to some kind of guild specific rallying cry.


Since this message is written using a lot of slang and shorthand here is a rough translation: “Goodbye guys [frowning face], I [love] you all, and [good luck] in [Naxxramas]. Naxxramas is the name of one of the larger end-game instances (game content) in WoW.


Found at http://www.pennyarcade.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=1073823173&p...s=0&postorder=asc&start=0&sid=4c0c1d74a0eb6848a371671618fe747a on October 18, 2006. Though the practice is against the Terms of Service Agreement that one has to accept before
playing the game, account selling is a not uncommon. One only has to search *Ebay* for a phrase like “level 60 rogue” to get a rough idea of how common account selling is. xlix Found at http://forums.worldofwarcraft.com/thread.html?topicId=12711779&sid=1 on October 18, 2006.
Chapter 4: Concluding Remarks

Just as my experiences as a video game player have profoundly impacted my life as an academic, my study of quitting texts has affected me as a player. In the interest of full disclosure my own quitting text was ultimately temporary, while working on this project I have gotten back into the game, though I now view it with much different eyes. Specifically, I have a little more respect for player culture and for those players who do quit. I have also become something of a connoisseur of quitting texts in that I am able to appreciate their finer qualities and enjoy the ones that are well made.

Before I started this project I was passively familiar with quitting texts through my encounters with them as a player. I was aware that people quit, and that some people wrote forum posts, or made movies when quitting, but the cultural element of quitting texts, their depth, richness and diversity was largely invisible to me. Choosing to study quitting texts as an academic was like opening the door to a different world, and I was consistently surprised with how deep, rich, and diverse the culture of quitting really is. What I found greatly exceeded my expectations.

The purpose of this study was to address the following questions: What themes, ideas, and practices emerge from an analysis of quitting texts? What do these themes, ideas, and practices reveal about the role of quitting texts in player culture? And, what do quitting texts say about the MMOG genre?

In regards to my first research question the three categories of quitting texts I described in the last chapter – virtual suicides, goodbyes, and protests – organize quitting
texts around certain common themes, ideas, and practices. More specifically each category is defined around a specific essential element. For example, virtual suicides involve players deleting one or more of their characters. Goodbyes involve players saying goodbye to the game and to other players they interacted with while playing the game. Critiques involve criticizing the game or certain aspects of it. Moreover, each category is comprised of a number of themes, ideas, and practices that are common to the category.

Virtual suicides are predominantly visual in nature and most often made as movies that incorporate elements like in-game footage and music into the overall text. Virtual suicides commonly feature players deleting their in-game items and possessions in addition to their characters. Unlike virtual suicides, goodbyes are more commonly written – though movies do exist – and are more personal or intimate than other kinds of quitting texts, generally directed toward server-specific or guild-specific forums. Goodbyes are often made as tributes to the game and other players, and many goodbyes mention specific players or people by name. Goodbyes also often serve as an explanation for why a player is leaving the game, and, unlike critiques which often blame the game itself, goodbyes tend to cite real life pressures – such as work, school and/or relationships – as the reasons for quitting. Finally, like goodbyes, critiques also seem to favor written texts though they are decidedly less personal in nature and are generally found in more public locations like blogs and larger forums. People who write critiques are generally unhappy with the game, and they cite specific, perceived flaws with the game as their reasons for quitting. Three specific aspects of World of Warcraft seem to be more
criticized than others – the repetitive nature of the game, the large amount of time the
game requires, and the relative lack of gameplay options for high-level characters.

In regard to my second research question, my discussion of how quitting texts begin to make sense in regards to existing literature on participatory culture and MMOG players highlight some of the roles that quitting texts play in player culture. Though the specific roles that quitting texts play are as diverse as the texts themselves, certain roles seem to be more prominent than others. Individual categories of quitting texts play smaller, more specific roles, while quitting texts as a whole serve a larger, essential role in player culture.

As I discussed in the previous chapter virtual suicides are dramatic productions of community players. In his work on machinima and Wow player culture Henry Lowood (2006) proposes the concept of community players in describing the kinds of players who create gameplay movies. Community players, he proposes, play the game theatrically – as a performance for other players – and my research into virtual suicides indicates that such players quit in the same way. Virtual suicides are theatrical performances of community players. However, unlike other kinds of machinima, which are often made to showcase skill and mastery with a game, virtual suicides are more about making a dramatic exit. They are, in other words, the community player’s final production and performance.

Also as discussed in the previous chapter critiques play an interesting role as meaningful statements in an ongoing interplay between MMOG players and developers. In the literature on MMOGs the player/developer relationship is described in two ways.
T.L. Taylor (2003; Taylor, 2006a, 2006b) describes the relationship as a struggle, with developers trying to define the game and how it is played, and players trying to create meaning in their own ways. Constance Steinkuehler (2006) describes relationship as a ‘mangle of play,’ a complex interaction between the practices of players and the code written by developers. Whether categorized as a struggle, or a ‘mangle of play,’ the relationship between the players and developers of MMOGs is important, and my research indicates that critiques play a part in this relationship. In particular, critiques are one way for players to respond to the game and its developers, and through writing critiques players are able to meaningfully incorporate their act of quitting into the player/developer relationship.

In addition to the smaller roles of individual categories quitting texts as a whole play an important role as the backbone of participatory culture. In over a decade of scholarship on the subject Henry Jenkins has focused on the creation and circulation of various kinds of fan-made texts as a central component of participatory culture. In *Textual Poachers* (1992) Jenkins examines fanfic, FILK, slash fiction, and fanzines among others as evidence that media fans are both critical consumers and active producers of media content.

More recently Jenkins has turned to exploring how media fans organize and operate online, specifically highlighting game players as quintessential examples of online participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). In addition, other scholars have used Jenkins’ ideas as centerpieces in their own studies of online fan cultures, including Baym (1998; 2000), Consalvo (2003a; 2003b), Newman (2005), and Lauters (2001). These
scholars have expanded the study of participatory texts beyond Jenkins’ original set to include online forum and bulletin board communications and video game walkthroughs. Focusing on MMOGs specifically, scholars like Lowood (2006), Taylor (2003; 2006a; 2006b), and Steinkuehler (2006) have studied player culture through a wide array of player-made texts such as information databases, web comics, various forms of machinima, and even mods that alter gameplay.

In all of this work on participatory culture and fan/player-made texts, quitting texts have so far been ignored, despite the fact that they appear ripe for study. Quitting texts show richness, depth, and diversity; they come in multiple forms, contain varied themes and practices, and are meaningful to the players that make and view them. When it comes to quitting and participatory culture, people do not go quietly. On the contrary, they go out of their way to express themselves and leave a lasting mark – they create quitting texts. Just like the other kinds of texts that have been studied quitting texts are a key element of participatory culture, and are key to understanding both media fandom and player culture. The creation and circulation of quitting texts is one more way players relate shared experiences, participate in a larger public of the game, and form communities. Quitting texts are, in other words, part of the material out of which player culture is built.

Because of their important role in participatory culture, quitting texts offer insights into the larger workings of the MMOG genre and can help us better understand both the genre and the people who play it, hence my third research question: What do quitting texts say about the MMOG genre?
Simply put, quitting texts show that MMOGs are not just games, but focal points for thriving player communities. Even though the texts I studied are ostensibly about *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*), they are as involved with culture and community as they are with the game. Communities in *World of Warcraft* exist on a number of levels, ranging in size from small circles of friends, to guilds, to specific game worlds and servers all the way up to the general player community, and I found quitting texts for each level. Some quitting texts, like Drakedog’s virtual suicide or the *Top Gun* example, find resonance within the larger general player community, whereas others, like Mell’s goodbye to 100 people or my own post to specific members of my former guild, situate players in smaller more intimate communities.

Virtual communities (of which player communities are an example) have been something of a hot topic for more than a decade. Howard Rheingold – who is often credited with coining the term “virtual community” – captured the attention, and imagination of many with his book *Virtual Community* (1993), in which he explored the potential of online communication technologies to bring people together in new ways and create new kinds of communities. While Rheingold’s study was not academic and has been critiqued by many as overly optimistic – Rheingold saw virtual communities as potentially being liberated from real world social structures and identities – his work nonetheless raised a number of questions and issues that scholars have subsequently addressed. Scholars like Nancy Baym (1995), for example, have explicitly explored how online communication technologies (in this case newsgroups) play a role creating community and how existing social structures are altered, strengthened or diminished in
online social spaces. Other scholars, like Elizabeth Reid (1995) and Sherry Turkle (1995) have studied early virtual worlds – in the form of MUDs – with an eye to the fluent nature of identity in those worlds and the kind of playing with identity that they allow.

While I see my own work as more closely aligned with participatory and player culture it is not without connection to studies of virtual community. That is, my work is less concerned with identity and social structures than it is with the cultural practices of players and the kinds of texts that players create. However, as I have mentioned, quitting texts are themselves intimately tied to the virtual communities from which they emerge and say something about those communities and how they operate. In the least, quitting texts begin to show that involvement with these communities is a meaningful emotional experience and that leaving them is not so easy as flicking an “off” switch. Instead, quitting texts represent precisely how difficult leaving these communities can be and showcase the kinds of frustrations, pains, and poignant emotions that are involved with doing so.

At the same time, however, the quitting texts I analyzed are a validation of virtual communities and the players’ position within them. By writing quitting texts players contribute to player communities and thus reaffirm that they belong to them, even after they have left. Players may quit, but – thanks in part to the contribution of quitting texts – player communities live on, and quitting texts remain to be read by other players. Ironically, through the quitting texts they write, players continue to speak and be a part of player communities well after they are gone.
In addition to what they say about MMOGs and player culture, quitting texts represent an avenue for studying and making sense of MMOGs and player culture well into the future. In the final chapter of *Play Between Worlds* Taylor discusses a specific challenge of studying MMOGs, and suggests focusing in on something specific as a way to get at larger insights and observations about the genre and its players (Taylor, 2006b, p. 157):

The challenge for those of us interested in studying MMOG spaces is that they often are moving targets, as are their player communities. They seem to resist closure in any overarching way. Rather than being daunted by this, we can find paths into the study of these games by paying close attention to their contextual and provisional natures, as well as the practices in and around them.

Quitting texts are certainly a practice “in and around” MMOGs, and as such represent the kind of path into studying them that Taylor describes.

The analogy that Taylor uses to describe MMOGs and player culture – as moving targets – is an accurate one. As a player who has played *WoW* for almost two years I can say that the game I started playing – both in terms of the game itself and the player culture within it – is decidedly different from the one I now play. The same can be said for player communities. Even though I try to stay current the norms and practices of player communities change so quickly that it is difficult to keep up. Yet, quitting texts, I think, serve as something of a constant in the ever-changing environment. As long as there are MMOGs and player cultures, there will be players who quit them, and, as long as there are players who quit, quitting texts will be created. This is not to suggest that players will always create the same kinds of quitting texts – I would, in fact, argue the
opposite – but that quitting texts will continue to exist in some form as one path to studying and understanding MMOGs and player culture.

**Possibilities for future research**

As I have briefly mentioned in previous sections, my analysis presents a number of interesting possibilities for future research. Specifically, I find three such possibilities to be the most interesting: additional categories of quitting texts, meta-quitting texts, and player reactions.

While I did find a number of themes, ideas, and practices present in quitting texts, my own analysis was by no means exhaustive, and other themes, ideas, and practices certainly exist. More specifically, it is possible that there are categories of quitting texts in addition to the three I described, and future research could focus on finding and analyzing additional categories of quitting texts.

One such potential category is what I might call anti-tributes, of which the *Top Gun* movie might be one example. Since some players who quit write texts in tribute to *World of Warcraft*, it seems likely that others would write the opposite. In this regard anti-tributes might be similar to critiques, but would entail a different set of themes and practices. Where critiques focus on criticizing specific aspects of the game and gameplay, anti-tributes might focus on themes like satire, humor, and mockery. The goal of future research could be to figure out what these different themes are and describe how they operate.
Another potential category is one that involves the advertising, buying, and selling of characters and players accounts. Though not condoned by Blizzard, account selling is not an uncommon practice, and, as one forum post I found indicates, is a potential theme for inclusion in quitting texts. While I found only one example of such a text, this is likely less an indication of their actual scarcity than it is a product of my own research methods. Since account selling is not condoned by Blizzard, and since the starting point for much of my research was the official Blizzard forums – which are heavily policed by moderators – it makes sense that I found so few texts on the matter. A future study of this kind of quitting text, then, would have to start elsewhere and involve different sources than my own study. *Ebay*, for example, may be one such starting point, as the character auctions themselves may very well be quitting texts.

Finally, a third potential category, what I might call narrative quitting texts, would involve quitting texts that are also fan-fiction or role-playing texts. When I first started my research for this project I expected to find examples of fan-fiction and role-playing quitting texts. I thought, for example, that when players who write fan-fiction and role-playing texts quit the game they might incorporate their leaving the game into the narratives that they write, either by killing of their character, or writing the character out of the narrative in some other way. Initially, however, I did not find any such texts within the channels I was searching, and the overall course of my research eventually led me elsewhere, but I nonetheless expect that such texts do exist. More importantly, I expect such texts to be radically different from the categories of quitting texts that I have
analyzed, meaning that a study of such texts would likewise be different and would have
to draw on different methods of analysis.

Another possibility for future research rests in what I call meta-levels of quitting
texts, or meta-quitting texts. Meta-quitting texts simply refer to texts that are not actually
quitting texts, but that look and function like quitting texts in many ways. Here is one
example from the official Aggramar server forum written by a player named Poobead:

Later guys I am transferring off the server. So goodbye to all the original Slayers
Phil, Big, Pyran, Buffie, Theodan, Cyber, Wildfire and your bazillion lvl 60's and
a few others Bagherra, Hilana, Bungalo, Verani, Prot, Utopia, Darkboots,
Gayfurry and I am sure I missed plenty of you.

Good Night and Good Luck

Poo

At first glance this post is obviously a goodbye, and follows many of the common traits
of such, but on closer inspection the player is not actually quitting the game, merely
transferring a character from one server to another. Originally, once a character was
created on a specific server in World of Warcraft, that server was that character’s
permanent home. Players were free to make characters on as many different servers as
they so desired, but a given character was stuck on the server they started on. After the
game had been out for a while, however, Blizzard introduced a system wherein players
could pay a small fee to have their character transferred from one server to another. One
result of which has been server specific quitting texts: texts written by players when they
leave a server.

Another kind of meta-quitting texts are those written by players who quit a guild.
In World of Warcraft membership in a guild is mutually exclusive, and, though joining a
guild requires being formally invited by an existing member, players are freely able to
leave a guild whenever and for whatever reasons they wish. In some cases players who
leave a guild, often to join another, write a text when they do so. Examples of such texts I
have seen are similar in form and function to certain kinds of quitting texts. Some
players, for example, leave the guild on good terms, and thus write goodbyes, whereas
other players leave on poor terms and write texts that are lists of complaints and that read
more like critiques.

While I uncovered several examples of meta-level quitting texts during the
process of doing my research, I have not done any applied analysis of them. I have
noticed that meta-quitting texts share similarities with more traditional quitting texts, but
I have not examined those similarities in any serious way. A future study of meta-
quitting texts, therefore, could analyze such texts and compare them to the traditional
variety. Moreover, meta-quitting texts could be studied as their own kind of text, with
their own set of common themes, ideas, and practices.

Finally, a third possibility for future research is to study the kinds of reactions that
players have to quitting texts. Most quitting texts are circulated within player culture in
such a way that people can write responses to them. Players can respond to forum posts,
for example, by posting in the same thread, many movies are hosted on sites that allow
viewers to leave comments, and many blogs have comment sections of their own.
Looking at the kinds of comments and reactions players have, I think, could be just as
much, if not more interesting, than studying quitting texts themselves. Such a study
could look at common traits of player responses both independently and in relation to
certain categories of quitting texts. One could analyze player responses as one kind of
text, looking for themes, ideas, and practices present within them. One could also
analyze players’ responses to specific kinds of quitting texts, to see, for example, if
players respond to goodbyes in specific ways and how responses to virtual suicides are
alike or different.

The examples I have outlined above are but a few of many potential avenues for
future research into quitting texts and player culture. Obviously, with my own research I
have barely begun to scratch the surface of a topic with much potential. The nature of
research is to create more questions than answers, and because I uncovered more
questions (and more interesting questions) than I started with, I consider my own research
to be a success.

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Notes

1 Found at http://forums.worldofwarcraft.com/thread.html?topicId=30046900&sid=1 on
October 18, 2006
References


