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An exploratory study on White empathy and cross-racial experiences in the virtual world

Caitlyn I. Keckeissen
Smith College

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods, exploratory study was conducted to investigate two areas of inquiry: (1) whether the experience of playing SecondLife™ as an avatar of color had an impact on White-identified Americans' beliefs and values about race and racism; and (2) what participants identified as relevant to their process of developing empathy for people of color and acknowledgment of racism. Seven self-identified White adult Americans completed pre- and post-experiment measures of colorblind and symbolic racism as well as 6 non-consecutive hours over the course of one month, and then participated in a qualitative interview to reflect on the process. The study investigator hypothesized that participants would experience a decrease in scores on each measure as a result of the experiment. Participants experienced some variation between pre- and post-experiment measures of racism, however, 2-tailed t-tests demonstrated no statistical significance between the pre- and post-experiment scores; similarly, a Pearson's R test demonstrated no statistical significance in a bivariate analysis of participant demographics and rate of change. Thematic analysis of qualitative data using open coding demonstrated that participants perceived differences in social relationships based on avatar color and that participants tended to externalize causality for scores indicating a higher alliance with racist attitudes and beliefs, whereas they tended to internalize causality where their scores showed decreased alliance with racist attitudes and beliefs. It is recommended that future studies recruit more participants in order to establish statistical significance for the pre- and post-experiment measurements of racism, and increase demographic data in order to protect internal validity.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON WHITE EMPATHY AND CROSS-RACIAL

EXPERIENCES IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Caitlyn I. Keckeissen

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, MA 01063

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I would never have come to this vocation if it hadn't been for the many, many teachers who have mentored me through my personal journey in anti-racism work and in social work and who continue to share their wisdom with me and push me to new levels of self-awareness including but not limited to: Dr. Peter Murrell, John Wolfe, Dr. Robin Chandler, Maria Campanario, Dr. Emmett Price, Nakeisha Cody, Dr. Robert Hall, Dr. Kimberly Juanita Brown, and Dr. Nnamdi Pole, among many others who have shaped my commitment to social justice. An additional and special thanks to Mike Langlois, who kindly offered his thoughts on this thesis in its earliest phase and whose work has continued to stimulate and motivate my work; to Candice White for helping me develop my interests into practical research goals; to Eric Hamako for challenging my ideas and encouraging me to continue questioning myself; to Mareike Muszynski for inspiration and allyship in white anti-racism work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Appendix A: Human Subjects Review Approval Letter
Appendix B: Informed Consent
Appendix C: Mental Health Resources
Appendix D: Anti-Racism Resources
Appendix E: Flyer
Appendix F: Pre- and Post-Experiment Surveys
Appendix G: Post-Experiment Qualitative Interview Questions

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

Introduction

John Howard Griffin's "Black Like Me" (1961) documented a White man's self-proclaimed process of "becoming a Negro in the Deep South", and provoked strong responses from Americans of a variety of racial backgrounds. Griffin (1961), struck by a report about increased suicidality amongst African Americans living in the south, initiated his ethically questionable self-study with a question: "What is it like to experience discrimination based on skin color, something over which one has no control?" (p. 1). The present study models itself partially after Griffin's question.

Informed by contemporary research methods and previous empirical studies, the present research study was designed as a mixed-methods exploratory study intended to measure the impact of playing SecondLife™ as an avatar of color on White Americans' racialized beliefs and perceptions of self. Many years have passed since Griffin inserted himself into the world of the Civil Rights Era African American male and with the passage of time, so has the field matured. With gratitude to its predecessors and mentors, the present study has the benefit of retrospective wisdom. Therefore, the investigator cautions the readers that the purpose of this study is not to authenticate the experience of American racism, but rather to highlight the process by which White Americans may or may not experience an increase in their own empathy for people of color and acknowledgment of both overt and subtle racism.

1

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This study straddles three major areas of emerging research interests: (1) Whiteness studies; (2) internet socialization behaviors; and (3) the internet as a microcosm for social experiences, values, attitudes, and beliefs. A review of some of the relevant peer-reviewed literature, supported by empirical studies, considers the development of White empathy as well as the ways in which existing literature juxtaposes human socialization behaviors in the context of online versus offline communication and interaction.

Perspectives on American Racism

Racism is defined as a systemic privileging of one group over another for the benefit of the dominant group (Miller & Garran, 2008). However, long before the modern conception of the term "racism", there were various theories vying for recognition that intended to explain the differences between people of different racial backgrounds.

Orlando Patterson (1982) described "the racial factor" as "the assumption of innate differences based on real or imagined physical or other differences" (p. 176). Indeed, distinguished historical figures have attempted to connect phenotypic differences between humans with their behavior and worth. One of the earliest recorded accounts of this type of thinking by White people is attributed to Aristotle, who argued that while Greeks are free by their nature, "barbarians" (non-Greeks) are naturally inclined towards slavery and sublimation by despotic rulers (Lewis, 1990, p. 58). David Goldenberg (2003) traced the use of the biblical

story of Ham, who is punished by God with the curse of dark skin, as a theoretical foundation for the etiology of modern racism. These historical perspectives may well have paved the way for modern racism.

American racism is deeply embedded in American culture, likely as a result of the nation's history of prosperity as a direct result of the enslavement of Africans and their descendents. Though the Civil War and abolition movements saw the legal enfranchisement of African-descended slaves in America, the nation was far from finding resolution to the problem of American racism. The infamous 1857 Dred Scott case with the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that "any White man, however degraded, was the social superior of any African-American, however cultured and independent in means" (Allen, 1994, p. 33).

This demarcation of African-Americans as lessor citizens made way for both de facto ("in practice") and de jure ("legally sanctioned") discrimination, both towards African-Americans as well as other immigrants of color. Discrimination against people of color and myriad human rights violations against people of color in American have become manifested as segregation of schools and other public commodities (Guthrie & Springer, 2004; Massey, 1993), overrepresentation of Black, Latino, and Native American children in the foster care system (Greenblatt, 2012; Hill, 2004; McRoy, 2005;), and an extensive list of similar violations of human rights that cannot possibly be listed exhaustively here, but which deserve the attention of anti-racism scholars and researchers.

Whiteness Studies

American activists and scholars have attempted to explain both the historical and psychological etiology of racism in order to attempt to bring about its end in American society (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Brown, 2000; Miller & Garran, 2008). Whiteness studies is an

emerging field of study that examines both the history and culture of people identified as White and the social construction of Whiteness and its correlation with social status (Doane, 2013; Kolchin, 2002). W.E.B. DuBois' "Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization" (1890) is a major early contribution to the field of Whiteness studies. DuBois' characterization of White hegemonic rule is exemplified in this quote from "Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization" (as cited in DuBois, 1995):

> I wish to consider not the man, but the type of civilization which his life represented: its foundation is the idea of the Strong Man -Individualism coupled with the rule of might - and it is this idea that has made the logic of even modern history, the cool logic of the Club. It made a naturally brave and generous man, Jefferson Davis - now advancing civilization by murdering Indians, now hero of a national disgrace called by courtesy, the Mexican war, and finally, as the crowning absurdity, the peculiar champion of a people fighting to be free in order that another people should not be free" (p. 17)

DuBois' (1995) characterization of White culture as "the advance of a part of the world at the expence[sic] of the whole" (p. 18) laid a foundation for considering oppression politics in the context of race, using White American racism as a modern and relevant example.

Another early contribution to the field of Whiteness Studies came from John Howard's memoir <u>Black Like Me</u> (1961). Griffin, a White man, concerned about the myriad impacts of racism for African-American men in the deep south, darkened his skin using Methoxsalen and dyes and passed as a Black man for six non-consecutive weeks, traveling through Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia (Griffin, 1961). At the end of his memoir Griffin shares that he and his family were met with such hostility by the White community in their Texas hometown

that they were forced to leave their home and move to Mexico for several years (Griffin, 1961).

Griffin's book is a story of personal transformation; he shares that as a boy, he was "taught the whole mythology of race" (Bonazzi, 1997, p. 4) and by the end of his memoir, he compares American racism with the genocide of Jews within the reach of Nazi Germany, deeply convinced of its severe impact on the psyche of African Americans.

Griffin's description of his book as "a basic text for the study of this great contemporary social problem [the African Americans' situation]" (Griffin, 1961, p. 282) has generated disapproval from more recent critics of his work. Gayle Wald (1996) argued that Griffin's attempt to "authenticate the existence of racism and thereby promote a level of White cross-racial understanding" (p. 151) and the relative success of his book negated and overshadowed the contributions that many of Griffin's Black American contemporaries also made to the study of American racism (p. 152). Despite this criticism of Griffin's work, his memoir was a moderately successful large-scale attempt by a White American that prompted many White Americans to examine their own conscious and subconscious biases and privilege in order to dismantle racism.

Fueled partially by influential thinkers and writers like DuBois and Griffin, three major theories emerged which focused largely on individual expressions of racism. These theories included (1) symbolic racism (McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears, 1988); (2) modern racism (McConahay, 1986); and (3) racial resentment (Kinder & Sanders, 1988), and subtle racism (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Jones (1997) as quoted by Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne (2000) summarized the major tenets of these theories thusly: "that racial prejudice is manifested in (a) negative attitudes towards racial and ethnic minority groups, primarily Blacks; (b) 'ambivalence between feelings of nonprejudice or egalitarianism and those negative feelings';

5

and (c) a tendency for people who aspire to a positive, egalitarian self-image to nevertheless

show racial biases when they are unaware of how to appear nonbiased" (p. 59).

Measuring Racism and Racial Attitudes. These theories paved the way for two major

tools for empirical research that assess racism on an individual level: Symbolic Racism 2000

Scale (Sears & Henry, 2002) and Color-blind Racial Attitudes Scale (Neville, et. al., 2000).

Sears & Henry (2002) described symbolic racism as "a coherent belief system combining the

following ideas: that racial discrimination is no longer a serious obstacle to blacks' prospects for

a good life; that blacks' continuing disadvantages are due to their own unwillingness to take

responsibility for their lives; and that, as a result, blacks' continuing anger about their own

treatment, their demands for better treatment, and the various kinds of special attention given to

them are not truly justified" (p. 254). Color-blind racism describes a belief system that suggests

that a person's racial identity does not impact or predict their social, educational, occupational,

and economic success, and that people of color are culpable for their own disadvantages (Sears

& Henry, 2002; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Thompson & Neville, 1999). These two scales, the

Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale (SR2K) and the Color-blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS),

were developed to measure White people's symbolic racism and colorblind racial attitudes.

The Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale (SR2K). This scale (Sears & Henry, 2002) organized

modern racism into four major themes that attempt to "identify and systematize a cultural belief

system that many Whites have about Blacks in American society" (p. 256) thusly:

> "(1) 'work ethic and responsibility for outcomes,' the sense that blacks' failure to
>
> progress results from their unwillingness to work hard enough; (2) 'excessive
>
> demands', the sense the blacks are demanding too much; (3) 'denial of continuing
>
> racial discrimination,' the belief that blacks no longer face much prejudice in

society today; and (4) 'undeserved advantage,' the sense that blacks have gotten

more than they deserve" (p. 256)

The scale was developed to update the Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986) by addressing

several items that threatened its internal validity and generalizability, especially around concerns

that the Modern Racism Scale (MRS) (1) demonstrated limited generalizability, as it was mainly

used on college students; (2) did not control for political conservativism; and (3) that it failed to

represent the ethnic diversity of the United States by focusing on White Americans' attitudes

towards Black Americans.

   The Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS). This scale (Neville, et. al., 2000)

was developed to provide a "conceptually grounded scale to assess cognitive aspects of color-

blind racial attitudes" (p. 59). Neville, et. al. (2000) differentiated between racism and color-

blind racial attitudes and defined the former as "the belief in racial superiority and also the

structures of society, which create racial inequalities in social and political institutions" (61) and

the latter as "the denial of racial dynamics" (61); furthermore, Neville, et. al. (2000) identify both

ideological and structural components to racism whereas color-blind racial attitudes has only an

ideological component. The scale was developed using the following foundational assumptions:

   "(a) racism exists on structural and ideological levels (Thompson & Neville,

   1999); (b) racism creates a system of advantage for Whites, mainly White elite,

   and disadvantages for racial and ethnic minorities (cf. Thompson & Neville,

   1999); (c) denial of these realities is the core component of color-blind racial

   attitudes; (d) people across all racial groups can maintain a color-blind

   perspective; and (e) color-blind racial attitudes are cognitive in nature" (p. 61).

Items on the scale were generated based on Schofield's (1986) and Frankenberg's (1993) conceptualization of color-blind racial attitudes, existing literature about color-blindness, consultation with experts on racial attitudes, and informal dialogues with undergraduate students and community members. Results demonstrated initial reliability and validity to the scale as well as a three-factor solution based on an exploratory factor analysis, including: unawareness of racial privilege, institutional discrimination, and blatant racial issues.

White Privilege & Awareness. Hartman, Gerteis, and Croll's (2009) "Empirical Assessment of Whiteness" study examined the invisibility of White identities, understanding of racial privileges, and loyalty to ideas of individualism and color-blindness (p. 403). Data from Hartman, et. al.'s (2009) American Mosaic Project survey included 2081 Americans of various racial and ethnic backgrounds and found that (1) Whites attached less importance to their racial identity than racial minorities did (p. 413); (2) Whites were largely unaware of their privilege in society, particularly when asked to identify institutional racism (p. 414); and (3) Whites explained their success using individualism and color-blind ideologies (p. 416).

Emotional Responses to Encountering White Privilege and Racism. Much of the existing research on White identities focuses on affective exchanges between White people and their environment when asked to critically examine their privilege and attitudes about race and racism. Amodio, Devine, Harmon-Jones (2007) "Dynamic Model of Guilt" study found that participants experienced guilt at higher rates than any other emotion (other emotions measured included sadness, anxiety, positive affect, shame, and blame) after acknowledging that they had committed a racial transgression. Similarly, Todd, Spanierman, and Aber's (2010) study "White Students Reflecting on Whiteness: Understanding Emotional Responses" found that (1) participants with lower rates of "White fear" (fear towards racial minorities) were more likely to

experience an emotional reaction to their score on the Colorblind Racial Attitudes Scale; (2) participants with higher rates of "White empathy" (empathy for racial minorities) were more engaged in group discussion and reflection; and (3) participants with higher rates of "White guilt" (guilt about White privilege) experienced a negative, disengaged response during an individual reflective writing exercise (pp. 105-107).

White Empathy. Some research has focused on the process of empathy development, rather than the factors that influence empathy. Inzlicht, Gutsell, and Legault (2011) examined the processes of human empathy and prejudice. The study predicted that a group of White participants made to explicitly mimic basic behaviors demonstrated by non-White subjects would experience a reduction in prejudice (p. 361), much like Griffin's memoir. The study found a significant difference between White participants who mimicked or observed non-White subjects and White participants who did not either mimic or observe non-White subjects.

Interventions. There is current research that seeks means for creating sustainable change from internalized racism amongst Whites towards White anti-racism activism. Case (2012) recruited 17 White women from two midwestern U.S. college campuses who engaged in critical self-examination and reflection about White racial identity, and then to begin anti-racism activism work (pp. 82-83). Participants attended 40 group sessions lasting 1.5 hours each, and were engaged in the research process via group observation, personal interviews, or a combination of the two. Case's qualitative analysis revealed that women who participated in the White Women Against Racism (WWAR) group shared a feeling of mutual commitment to anti-racism work, motivated largely by the connections they formed within their group to other White women who identified as anti-racism activists. Other common factors that contributed to their continuing commitment included (1) the ability to transform racist behaviors and

9

microaggressions into learning opportunities, and (2) a strong skill base enabling them to notice and interrupt subtly racist behaviors (p. 94).

Another means of intervention for addressing White racism in the research includes offering White people opportunities to repair what they perceive as racial transgressions that they feel responsible for. In their "Dynamic Models of Guild Study", Amodio, et. al. (2007) found that an activation of guilt initiated a pattern of motivation to repair the transgression (p. 528), by offering subjects an opportunity to read articles about "prejudice reduction" (p. 527).

Attachment and Object Relations in Internet Socialization

Current literature on internet socialization behavior suggests that there is a correlation between Massive Multi-player Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) player's personal identities and those of the characters they create online. Smahel, Blinka, and Ledabyl's (2008) quantitative correlational study examined connections between attachment orientations and the potential for gamers to experience a phenomenon akin to behavioral addiction. The researchers surveyed 548 MMORPG players using an online survey. Participants in this study who the researchers identified as prone to addictive behaviors largely identified real feelings of pride, shame, guilt, and sadness as a result of their character's success within the game. As a result, Smahel, et. al. (2008) hypothesized that a player's attachment to their character may help researchers consider whether playing online games is an adaptive or maladaptive behavior.

Similarly, Wolfendale (2007) explored the concept of "avatar attachment", or the degree to which a player's character reflects and impacts the player's sense of self, by integrating findings from multiple qualitative studies. Wolfendale (2007) hypothesized that the meaning of the avatar is not limited to that of an object or tool that is manipulated by the participant, but rather that it represents the person's identity (114). Wolfendale's (2007) review of the pertinent

10

literature included direct quotes from MMORPG participants who experienced reciprocal emotional involvement with the virtual world. Studies showed that experiencing virtual harm to one's avatar or virtual character in the game world caused severe emotional distress to one's person in the non-virtual world (Wolfendale, 2007, p. 112). In these two related formulations of self identity and the virtual representation of self, there is evidence that people's identities are both reflected in and impacted by their virtual representations of self; indeed, there is an exchange of reflection and change between these two expressions of "self".

The Virtual Social World as a Microcosm for Society

A third category of literature has emerged around studying the virtual world as a microcosm for society, which mirrors the systemic privileging of the experiences of dominant groups. In Williams, Martin, Consalvo, and Ivory's 2009 "Virtual Census" large scale content analysis quantitative study, researchers found that Whites and males are over-represented as characters in virtual games and specifically that the number of White characters made available to virtual gamers outnumbers the amount of Whites who play virtual games (824). Specifically, Latinos and women are proportionately most misunderstood as a gaming population; women represent 38% of game players and Latinos, 12.5%, but only 15% percent of characters are women, and 2% are Latino (p. 824).

Williams, et. al. (2009) hypothesized that this "lack of appearance" communicates to people of color that they are unimportant and powerless in comparison to Whites, who are represented more frequently. This study further hypothesized that people of color may experience a larger disinterest in technology due to underrepresentation, which may, in turn, contribute to challenges around class advancement (p. 829).

In addition to social identity theory, Williams, et. al. (2009) applied ethnolinguistic vitality theory, which, when applied to virtual games, might suggest that games act as a mirror or microcosm reflecting systematic social inequalities that function in various levels of society (830). Similarly, Shaw's (2012) qualitative exploratory gamer identity study discussed the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, and gamer identities in the context of critical race theory. Shaw reported that of her 27 subjects, her few interviewees of color largely avoided conversations about race, and hypothesized that, as a result of this silence, the invisibility of Whiteness is present in gaming settings as it is in society at large (p. 31). Shaw (2012) concluded that the media has a greater responsibility to integrate and value diversity of experiences within MMORPGs and video games (p. 40).

Discussion

The existing literature demonstrates a critical examination of a person's online identity, the complex process of recognizing White privilege and racism within one's self, and the ways in which systemic oppression is repeated in different venues for human social interaction. The current study has attempted to integrate the results of previous research into an interdisciplinary investigation about the development of White empathy via a short-term mimicry experience using non-White avatars in the virtual game SecondLife™.

Relying on Inzlicht et. al.'s (2011) study findings that mimicry and observation of people of color increased empathy amongst White participants, as well as Griffin's (1961) account of his personal revelations following his mimicry experience, the present study hypothesizes that White participants will experience an increase in empathy for people of color as a direct result of playing as an avatar of color in the game SecondLife™. The present study further hypothesizes that participants' empathy will increase based on independent variables such as age and previous

experiences with discrimination. Finally, the present study endeavors to identify themes in participants' reflections on the process of the pseudo-experiment in order to generate further areas of inquiry around the topic of White empathy development.

The current study is a small exploratory pilot study that does not seek to generalize data but rather to develop further hypotheses and questions for this area of inquiry. The existing literature relies on both quantitative and qualitative data, and therefore the current study will rely on a combination of these data collection methods. In Todd, et. al.'s (2010) study "White Students Reflecting on Whiteness: Understanding Emotional Responses", participants' responses altered significantly based on qualitative versus quantitative data, and this study endeavors both to quantify change over the course of the experiment and to elicit narratives from participants about their internal process during the experiment.

Whereas the present study is exploratory and not generalizable in nature, the study investigator elected to utilize quantitative methods to test whether individual participants might experience a quantifiable difference in their racial attitudes. The present study hypothesizes that racial mimicry experiences such as those described in Griffin's memoir and Inzlicht et. al.'s (2012) study will have an impact on individual person's racial attitudes. To test the validity of this hypothesis, the study investigator selected the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS) and the Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale (SR2K), which focus on "assessing cognitive aspects of color-blind racial attitudes" (p. 59) and "measuring contemporary racial attitudes" (p. 278), respectively.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this mixed-methods, exploratory study was to deepen the understanding of American racism from the perspective of White Americans. The study investigator hypothesized that participants would experience (1) a decrease in racist attitudes and beliefs, and (2) an increase in empathy for people of color, as the result of an online experience playing SecondLife™, an online role-playing game, as an avatar of color. The study investigator designed the present study to assess the impact of this intervention using both quantitative and qualitative measures. SecondLife™ was chosen as the venue for this experiment because of several factors including the individual player's ability to customize their avatar (thereby making it possible for participants to create avatars of color), the focus on the social environment (thereby facilitating social interaction during the experiment), and the relative lack of a particularly goal, trajectory, or levels within the game (thereby enabling participants to focus on their character and social interactions rather than focusing on progress as is the norm in many other online gaming experiences, such as World of Warcraft).

Recruitment

The study investigator utilized convenience and snowball sampling to generate a small, homogeneous sample of participants. The online social networks Facebook, SecondLife™ community message boards, and paper flyers were used to make the target population aware of the study. Interested parties were invited to take a screening survey via SurveyMonkey™ to

demonstrate their eligibility using the following criteria: (1) 18 years of age or older; (2) born, raised, and currently living in the United States of America; (3) White-identified (based on self-identification); and (4) gamers with experience using the game SecondLife™.

Successful candidates shared their contact information with the study investigator via SurveyMonkey™ and promptly received a welcome email and a paper copy of the informed consent. Upon signing and returning the informed consent, participants began the study.

Sample Characteristics

The study assessed a sample (*N*=7) of White-identified, adult, Americans who had previous experience playing SecondLife™ and who had not previously experienced formal anti-racism training. Participants reported an average age of 35 years old, and self-identified as White (*n*=5) or caucasian (*n*=2). All participants reported that they had played SecondLife™ and four participants (57%) reported that they had experienced some kind of discrimination in the past. This study did not collect any additional demographic data.

Data Collection

Participants were required to create a distinct identifier for their avatar and DropBox™ folder that would mask both personal and gaming identities, in order to protect participant confidentiality. Following the receipt of participants' informed consents, the study investigator created a unique DropBox™ folder for each participant that only the participant and the study investigator could access. The DropBox™ folder was updated as soon as participants completed each element of the study.

First, participants completed a 36-item pre-test survey that inquired about participant attitudes, values, and beliefs about race and racism in the United States using Likert scales.

Following their completion of the pre-test survey, participants created a new SecondLife™ character with the singular requirement that the character should have a non-White skin tone. Participants were required to play the game for 6 sessions of 60 minutes each over the course of one month. In order to control for internal validity, participants were required to send the researcher a screen shot of their log-in and log-out times via DropBox™. Upon conclusion of the quasi-experiment, participants completed a post-test survey, which was identical to the pre-test survey.

The study investigator scored the pre- and post-tests and then conducted a brief qualitative interview, during which participants were informed of their scores on the pre- and post-tests and asked to reflect on the experience. As in the pre-test, the post-test was also administered using DropBox™. The study investigator emailed participants individually once they had completed the post-test survey to schedule the qualitative interview, which the study investigator then administered via SecondLife™'s online chat function.

The study investigator predicted that participants would spend a total of 8 hours on the study, including 0.5 hours for the screening and pre-test, 6 hours for the quasi-experiment, 0.5 hours for the post-test and 1.0 hour for the qualitative interview. All participants spent the requisite 6 hours playing SecondLife™, and most spent much more time playing the game than required, resulting in an mean time of 10 hours playing SecondLife™ as their study avatar. Participants who completed all parts of the study were given $25 to spend in SecondLife™ per their preferences.

Scales. While the CoBRAS requires loyalty to its present format, the authors of the SR2K Scale state that the present format is "a recommendation based merely on the manifest content of these items and the measurement information we have from our studies" (p. 278) and

suggest that the scale may be "shortened or lengthened as needed" (p. 278). Sears & Henry

(2002) further maintain that the scale may need to be updated "just as updating has been

necessary for earlier measures of old-fashioned racism and of symbolic racism as well as for the

[Modern Racism Scale]… as attitudes and the language within which they are expressed

continue to evolve" (p. 279).

The pre-test survey was adapted and synthesized from the Symbolic Racism Scale (Sears

& Henry, 2002) and included the complete and unaltered CoBRAS (Neville, et. al., 2000). The

study investigator modified the SR2K Scale (Sears & Henry, 2002) to accommodate the present

context; specifically, because this scale in its original form utilized race-specific language (i.e.

"Asian people" rather than "people of color"), the study investigator altered the race-specific

language to read "people of color" throughout. Additionally, the study investigator utilized the

unabridged version of this scale rather than the recommended 8-question version in order to

consider whether the specific context and population of the present study would be more

responsive to different questions from those than the initial data set generated by the authors of

the scale. In doing so, the present study aims to generate information that will be useful for

future repetitions of similar studies.

Ethics and Safeguards

The proposal for this study was submitted to, revised for, and eventually approved by the

Human Subjects Review (HSR) board at Smith School for Social Work, to ensure that

participant safety and confidentiality were maintained. All participants were required to sign and

return the informed consent to the study investigator. Anticipated risks to participants in this

study were minor and related to discomfort around discussing race and privilege as well as the

potential for the activities of this study to exacerbate of symptoms of internet addiction, if

participants had previously experienced such symptoms. The pre- and post-test surveys were not

anonymous; therefore the study investigator implemented safeguards to ensure confidentiality

were taken in compliance with federal research standards, under advisement from the HSR.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample population. The results of the pre-

test demographic surveys were manually entered into Microsoft Excel and, using Excel's

statistical tools, frequencies were run for the following demographics: country of origin, race,

age, involvement in Second Life, and previous experiences of discrimination.

The pre-and post-experiment surveys were calculated to reflect distinct before and after

scores for each participant as well as a rate-of-change score for each participant. Demographic

data were assigned codes to compare against survey data. Analysis of the quantitative survey

consisted of two parts: descriptive statistics for demographic and Likert scale questions, followed

by multi-variate analysis using inferential statistics that examined relationships between

demographics characteristics, survey results, and rate of change from the pre-experiment survey

to the post-experiment survey.

Open coding was used in order to generate a thematic analysis for the participants'

responses to the qualitative survey. Responses to each open-ended question from the online

interview were manually entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet by the researcher. The

researcher read through each individual response, and categorized responses using open coding.

Next, the researcher created a numerical codebook and combined any theme categories that were

similar. Details of these analyses are provided below.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The major findings of this pilot study were that all participants experienced greater

identification with avatars of color and lower identification with White avatars, denial of

privilege, and difficulty assuming responsibility for any changes to their scores. The major

findings of the quantitative portion of this study were that this experiment had no generalizable

quantified impact on participants' beliefs about colorblind or symbolic racism. As the

investigator predicted, this pilot study had a low participation rate and therefore did not produce

any statistically significant results from the quantitative data. Despite the lack of statistically

significant quantitative data, the results generated several recommendations for future

incarnations of this study, which will be reviewed in the discussions chapter of this report.

Qualitative Analysis

The major findings from the qualitative analysis showed that all participants who

participated in the interviews felt the experiment impacted their social interactions in

SecondLife™, and that most participants attributed their scores on the pre- and post-tests to

external factors. Four of the seven participants completed the interview.

Social interactions in SecondLife™ as an avatar of color. Participants were asked to

describe their social interactions with both White avatars as well as avatars of color while they

played as an avatar of color. All participants (*N*=4) identified their interactions with avatars who

were White as inhibited, and only 1 of the 4 participants who completed the interview reported

positive interactions with White avatars. Two of the participants reported feeling ignored by White avatars. One participant reported incidents of overt racism, including name-calling and stereotyping, and one participant attributed their inhibited interactions with White avatars to their own feelings of hesitation. Two of the participants felt an increased attraction to avatars of color, and three participants experienced uninhibited interactions with avatars of color.

Some participants reflected on their own process of feeling attracted to or repelled by other avatars based on skin color. One participant, Eliante, described this as a subconscious process: "I felt a bit more gravitated toward [avatars of color]. It wasn't even something I thought about. I saw them and I simply walked toward them". The same participant said, of White avatars: "I did feel a little more hesitant interacting with [White avatars]. That was just at first". Some participants shared anecdotal reflections about their perceptions that they had experienced discrimination and/or stereotyping. One participant, Redfire, stated: "From what I experienced, there are a lot of preconceived ideas as to how I should have talked and/or acted. Meaning, several people used ghetto speak when talking to me, when I just talked as usual".

Personal reflections about racism. Participants were asked to share whether they believed their opinions about race and racism were impacted by the experiment. Three participants shared their personal definitions of racism. Two participants defined racism in relational terms while the other defined racism as an introspective process. One participant expressed feeling greater empathy for racists as a result of the study, while two others expressed contempt for racists after participating.

One participant, Eliante, reflected on newfound empathy for racists: "I guess I can understand what racists feel a little. How they would feel more comfortable with their own groups and feels[sic] hesitant (and even repelled) by others that they consider different" and later

concluded that "we are all racist to an extent". Participants who expressed contempt for racist peers included Ripdman and Eldzin. Ripdman expressed feeling contempt for White avatars who demonstrated racist behavior by ignoring and rejected his avatar: "I was pretty disgusted with the way I was treated"; Ripdman later concluded that "a-holes come in all colors" in reference to the experience of being ignored and rejected by people playing as White avatars. When asked about how he felt towards people playing as White avatars in the game, Eldzin stated that "the ones who play White just to be racist I want to hurt".

Several participants shared that they felt the quasi-experiment had impacted their thoughts about race and racism. One participant, Eldzin, explained their own process of increasing awareness: "This experience opened my eyes more to the fact we haven't [gotten over racism] and probably never will". This participant attributed his learning process to the experiences of the avatar: "I applied for a job as a dancer and didn't get it; I noticed that a white av[atar] applied and got it… So I thought it if happens in [SecondLife™] then it probably[sic] happens out in the real world". Eldzin later expressed a desire to share their process for increased awareness: "I think everyone should play a different race… at least once to see what its like and how people can be treated since a lot think racism doesn't happen". Another participant, Ripdman, stated that the experience "reaffirmed my knowledge that racism is out there even though folks try to sweep it under the rug" and felt that the experience did not change his overall attitude or beliefs about race and racism, but that it did change his opinion about "some folks in the game I 'know'" (referring to those players with White avatars who ignored his avatar).

Participant justification of scores. Participants were given the results of the quantitative portions of the study and asked to reflect upon why their scores had changed. For participants whose scores increased on particular items (meaning that they aligned more closely

with colorblind and symbolic racism beliefs after the experiment), Three participants denied a closer alignment with racist beliefs by minimizing their results or attributing their results to other factors (i.e. data entry), and of the three who reacted to increases in their scores, all three justified the increase using a colorblind racism argument. For example, one participant, Ripdman, stated that "I suppose that undeserved advantages would refer to affirmative action etc which to me is tipping the scale in the opposite direction and even today, two wrongs don't make a right". Another participant, Eliante, stated that "I think people of every group could have an advantage over another" and that "I don't think racism is a major institutionalized thing".

When participants were asked about why their scores decreased on particular items (meaning that they aligned more closely with anti-racism beliefs after the experiment), half (n=2) attributed this to an increase in personal awareness about racism as a result of participating in the study, while half (n=2) acknowledged the existence of racial discrimination independent of their participation in the study. For example, RedFire stated that "[the study] opened my eyes a bit as to how some people treat others in [SecondLife™] based on their appearance", while Eldzin stated that "I knew [racism] was still going on but not how much of it was still going on, then after the study when I realized it was still in a way just as bad as it was in the past just more hidden and done in different ways".

One participant, Eliante, explained a negative change in his score thusly: "No one gave me any problems about my avatar. And, in my life, I don't notice much outward racist sentiments. Plus, the fact that we have affirmative action and a colored president. And probably other things that are not in my mind at the moment". Similarly, Redfire attributed negative changes in the score to having a "fairly set mindset" and to a denial of institutional racism using a personal anecdote: "Thinking it over, I realized that there are more people of color that get a

'free ride' in this country". When asked to explain what Redfire meant by a "free ride", Redfire responded: "When I was on welfare, 99% of the people there were colored, either black or Hispanic, and they all had brand new iPhones. It seemed they got special treatment or were told the loopholes when Whites were not".

Univariate Analysis

The mean and standard deviation for each scoring area were calculated, including the pre-test scores, post-test scores, and the difference between the scores. A high score indicates greater alliance with the beliefs that constitute Colorblind Racism or Symbolic Racism. Table 1 shows that while scores on the CoBRAS increased by a factor of 1.2 (SD = 1.53), scores on the SR2K decreased by an average of 1.6 (SD = 5.75), and the large standard deviation shows that there was a wide range of responses. The structure of the Symbolic Racism Scale is such that it was possible to determine which factors captured the greatest area of change.

Table 1
Participant Scores on Pre- and Post-Experiment Surveys

Variable	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Difference Mean (SD)
CoBRAS	65.14 (7.84)	65.40 (3.92)	1.20 (1.53)
SR2K	49.60 (8.08)	48.00 (9.49)	-1.60 (5.75)
Theme 1: Work Ethic & Responsibility	10.80 (2.05)	13.00 (2.45)	2.20 (4.09)
Theme 2: Excessive Demands	20.60 (3.97)	17.60 (4.72)	-3.00 (6.12)
Theme 3: Denial of Continuing Discrimination	12.00 (2.55)	11.80 (3.49)	-0.20 (1.79)
Theme 4: Unearned Advantage	6.20 (1.48)	5.60 (1.14)	-0.60 (0.84)

These data demonstrate that while participants' scores in the areas of Excessive Demands, Denial of Continuing Discrimination, and Unearned Advantage decreased (M = -3.00,

SD = 6.12; M = -0.20, SD = 1.79; M = -0.60, SD = 0.84), their scores increased in Work Ethic &

Responsibility (M = 2.20, SD = 4.09).

Bivariate Analysis

A paired t-test was performed to ascertain whether the pseudo-experiment was effective;

to determine if differences exist in participant scores on the two measures before and after the

pseudo-experiment. The results of the t-test demonstrated that while there was change in scores,

changes were not to a statistically significant level between the before and after groups (as the

table below indicates), likely due to the low number of participants in this pilot study.

Table 2
T-Tests Comparing Before and After Group Scores on CoBRAS and SR2K Scales

Variable	t Critical Value	p-level	Mean Difference
CoBRAS	2.13185	0.23831	1.2
SR2K	2.13185	0.3973	1.6
Theme 1: Work Ethic & Responsibility	2.13185	0.14752	2.2
Theme 2: Excessive Demands	2.13185	0.16743	3.0
Theme 3: Denial of Continuing Discrimination	2.13185	0.40745	0.2
Theme 4: Unearned Advantage	2.13185	0.26457	0.6

CoBRAS (t(4)= 4, one-tailed p = .23)

Though this study did not generate statistically significant findings, participants did

experience individual rates of change. The discussion chapter addresses implications for future

research accordingly.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the use of a mimicry experience for increasing White empathy had differential influences for this group of participants, and that the majority of this group of participants attributed positive changes (i.e. changes that indicated less alliance with colorblind racism) to their personal merits and negative changes (i.e. changes that indicated increased alliance with colorblind racism) to their self-validated perspectives of the non-existence or lack of significance of racism. By exploring the impacts of the racial mimicry experience on individual participants' attitudes and beliefs about race and racism, this pilot study affirms some of the existing literature about Whiteness and empathy as well as portrayals of self in virtual environments, and suggests the plausibility for using a similar model in future research and racism education.

Overt and Subtle Racism in SecondLife™

Participants reported that they experienced several incidents of racial microaggressions as well as overt racist incidents while playing SecondLife™, ranging from being denied jobs in the game to being called by ethnic slurs. Though participants struggled to identify reasons for these events, they may have resulted from the underrepresentation and consequent invisibility of people of color in online games (Williams, et. al., 2009; Shaw, 2012). Rather than denying the existence of such incidents, participants readily admitted them and were eager to use them as evidence that racism does, indeed, exist.

Emotional and Cognitive Responses to the Experiment

Previous research has demonstrated that White-identified Americans tend to respond to acknowledgments of their own racism with both emotional and cognitive reactions (Amodio, et. al., 2007; Hartman, et. al., 2009). Qualitative findings from this study indicate that the experiment's role-play exercise may have had an impact on participants' cognitive process and beliefs about race and racism, though participants' emotional responses were more inhibited. All participants used language that reflected on their thought process such as "I thought about it more" (Eliante), "thinking it over" (RedFire), "I realized" (Eldzin), and "It reaffirmed my knowledge" (Ripdman), but only two participants used words that described feeling states, including "disgusted" (Ripdman) and "frustrated" (RedFire). This may be due to the experiment failing to impact participants on an affective level, or it may be due in part to study design, which did not control for participant communication styles or comfort with discussing affective responses to external stimuli.

Increased awareness of racism. All participants shared during their qualitative interview that they believed the experiment had impacted their thinking on American racism in some way. For one participant, this experiment drew him to the conclusion that "we are all racist to an extent"; for another participant, the experience of being rejected by a potential employer resulted in the conclusion that "if it happens in [SecondLife™] then it probably[sic] happens out in the real world". Though this study does not purport to authenticate the experience of American racism via White narratives of brief mimicry experiences, the participants' process of making sense of these experiences may be indicative of increasing personal awareness of racism, which may in turn impact their commitment to repairing racial transgressions. McIntosh (1988) asserted that "To redesign social systems, we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen

dimensions" (p. 5). An awareness-increasing experience such as this one may have profound effects for White Americans who struggle to accept their privilege and the systemic disadvantaging of Americans of color.

White denial of privilege & colorblind racism. White-identified Americans frequently deny the privileges afforded to them on the basis of their race as a sometimes unconscious process of maintaining their status quo of dominance over Americans of other races (Hartman et. al., 2009; McIntosh, 1988). The participants in this study often demonstrated denial of privilege and colorblind racism arguments directly after acknowledging racism: in one case, after sharing an insight about racial groups with advantages, a participant immediately followed this statement with the reprieve: "I just want to clarify something. I don't think racism is a major institutionalized thing". Participants may have struggled to incorporate their new cognitive experience with existing collective cognitive schemas predicated on unconscious White privilege, which may account for this occurrence, however, the data could not confirm this and follow-up research should be conducted in this area.

Efficacy of the Intervention

Qualitative data from the study found that most of the participants felt they had experienced a new perspective on American racism, which usually included greater awareness about and acknowledgment of American racism and which was frequently accompanied by justifications and negations of American racism.

Mimicry and Empathy. The study investigator observed no outward display or discussion of empathy, though the qualitative interview was designed to obtain this information with initial questions about how participants felt towards White avatars and avatars of color. Despite their lack of discussion about affective responses to avatars of color, participants were

27

largely preoccupied with their contempt for White racists, which may be related to findings from previous research (Hartman, et. al., 2009), which asserted that Whites tend towards individualism to explain their success, the corollary to which is that Whites may use individualism to distance themselves from other Whites who present as racist. It is recommended that further research be conducted on this phenomenon.

Re-Connection with Dominant Identity. One possible explanation for the process of justifying, denying, or minimizing American racism is that participants may have felt the need to reassert their loyalty to their dominant identities after the experience of aligning with (and to a certain extent, becoming) the non-dominant racial group. Existing literature on online gaming psychology and behavior demonstrates that online gamers identify with and are impacted by the characters they create within games such as SecondLife™ (Smahel, et. al., 2008; Wolfendale, 2007). When, in the present study, participants' avatars experienced discomfort and/or rejection (for example, when RedFire's avatar was denied a job), participants took note of this cognitively and some even consciously connected it with their changing attitudes when questioned about the changes in their scores. This suggests that by playing as an avatar of color, participants may have experienced empathy for that avatar's struggles. It remains to be explored whether empathy for an avatar with particular characteristics will translate into empathy for people in the non-virtual world who share those same characteristics.

Differential Results. While quantitative results demonstrated a numerical increase in scores, which indicated that after the role-play participants were aligning more closely with racist attitudes and beliefs, the qualitative data are more reflective of the ambiguity and complexity of the internal processes that participants experienced during this study. Without additional data, it is impossible to know whether participants might have experienced a decrease in their scores

over time (indicating a reduction in racist attitudes and beliefs), and this will be discussed further in the implications section of this report. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that participants' scores on the measures increased due to greater levels of self-awareness of their own racist attitudes and beliefs; however, without further research on this topic, this cannot be concluded.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this research study, including limitations in the study design, conflicts between gaming culture and research protocols, and insufficient time. This exploratory, pilot study was relatively wide in scope, which enabled it to explore various areas for further research, and also prevented it from producing any tangible or statistically significant results to add to the knowledge base for any of the areas of inquiry. Additionally, the target population expressed some general distrust for the research process and the research community. Specifically, potential participants cited concerns about confidentiality, suspicion about the intent of the research, and concerns about gamer objectification. For potential participants who were able to move past some of these concerns, only 12 of 87 who were eligible completed and mailed informed consent forms to the study investigator (a process which was mandated by the HSR committee); several potential participants who elected not to complete the informed consent stated that they did not want to share their mailing addresses with the study investigator despite reassurance that their personal contact information would be kept confidential. As a result of these challenges, the study investigator successfully recruited only 12 participants, 7 of whom completed some part of the study. The low participation rate may have contributed to the lack of statistical significance for the quantitative results. Finally, participants may have experienced greater rates of change if they had spent more time in game play using their avatar of color.

Implications for Future Research

Data from the present study indicate several recommendations for future research. First, the study should be replicated using the same methods with a larger number of participants in order to better test for statistical significance and more generalizable results. Second, the study design should be modified to focus on the processes by which participants experience both cognitive and affective reactions to the mimicry experiences, and results should be used to develop new approaches to anti-racism education for White adult Americans. Third, future incarnations of the study should collect additional data (specifically demographic data) to establish greater internal validity. Fourth, future incarnations of the study should lengthen the amount of participation time and establish baseline and outcome measures to determine whether participants experience greater change over longer time participating in the role-play. Finally, if the research demonstrates statistical significance, the SecondLife™ racial mimicry experience may be integrated into existing anti-racism education, or developed into a new anti-racism education protocol.

Despite the lack of statistical significance, the results of the paired t-test demonstrated relatively low p-levels, which suggests that a repetition of this study with a higher participation rate may demonstrate statistical significance. It is therefore recommended that this study be repeated to attempt to establish the SecondLife™ racial mimicry experience as an effective intervention for reducing colorblind racial attitudes and symbolic racism in White Americans.

Qualitative data demonstrated that some participants experienced a shift in thinking and/or began to question their previously-held beliefs about race and racism. While the quantitative portion of the study tested for cognitive changes as a result of the experiment, participants' qualitative responses tended to be anecdotal rather than reflective. Future

researchers on this topic might re-design qualitative questions to encourage greater focus on participant process. The study investigator originally designed the study to have participants include regular journal prompts as they played SecondLife™ but, with several limitations due to time and resources, was compelled to omit this part of the study process. Future attempts at this study might consider incorporating such a tool to enhance researcher understanding of participant process. Finally, while this study focused on cognitive biases, the racial mimicry design may also benefit from a racial identity development lens, though this might require a longitudinal study and a more in-depth qualitative interview process.

The study investigator has identified three new research questions based on data from this study:

1. Are participants' behaviors in this study informed by cognitive and affective states?

2. What specific factors lead to an increase in empathy and/or a decrease in racist or colorblind attitudes and beliefs when White participants play SecondLife™ as avatars of color?

3. Are participants' scores on CoBRAS and SR2K scales accurate reflections of the efficacy of this experiment, or do they rather account for increased self-awareness about personal racism and color-blind racial attitudes?

Conclusion

This pilot study elucidated further areas for inquiry regarding the development of empathy for people of color and decrease in racist cognitions amongst White, adult Americans after being immersed in SecondLife™ and playing as an avatar of color. More specifically, data from this study demonstrated that its participants were more likely to reflect on their cognitive than affective experiences of race and racism, and this may have been due to design, participant

personality and communication style, or both. Future research in this area may benefit from reviewing the limitations to this study in order to build similar studies with greater reliability, validity, generalizability, and statistical significance; with greater attention to long-term outcomes measures, this research could potentially inform social justice educators as well as anti-racism oriented clinicians and therapies. Though the development of this area of study has been somewhat problematic, as it has previously privileged voices of White Americans in the establishment of the existence of American racism, recent literature appears to be holding the complex and subtle difference of studying factors of empathy and cognition specific to Whites experiences of their own racist attitudes and beliefs. It is the hope of this researcher and many of her anti-racism-oriented contemporaries that the research and resulting literature will continue to develop this consciousness.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Review Approval Letter

SMITH COLLEGE

School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950   F (413) 585-7994

January 12, 2013

Caitlyn Keckeissen

Dear Caitlyn,

You have done a very nice and complete job in responding to all the Committee's concerns and requests. We thank you. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Happy New Year and good luck with your study!

Sincerely,

Marsha Kline Pruett, M.S., Ph.D., M.S.L.
Vice Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Michael Murphy, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Caitlyn Keckeissen and I am a masters level clinical social work student at the Smith College School for Social Work. The purpose of this research study is to learn how assuming a non-white racial identity while playing MMORPGs may impact your feelings, values, and beliefs about race and racism. The data from this study will be used for my thesis, and for presentation and possible publication.

First I will ask you to create a name for your avatar in order to protect your confidentiality. You will use this name to create a DropBox™ account as well as your SecondLife™ account. Next, I will be asking questions about yourself, including demographic information and information about your feelings about race and racism. Following your completion of two surveys, you will play the online game Second Life™ as a non-white character for 6 hours over the course of a month, verifying your time in the game by sending me a screen shot via DropBox at the beginning and end of your sessions. Finally, you will complete a second online survey. When you're done I will interview you via online chat, again using your avatar's name.

To participate, you must be: (1) self-identifying as white (including those who are of Latino or Middle-Eastern descent and identify as white); (2) born, raised, and currently living in the United States; (3) have played Second Life previously; and (4) over the age of 18. People who have ever participated in anti-racism training or instruction, such as a class, workshop, or training program will be excluded. I anticipate that the entire study from start to end should take you 8 hours to complete.

There is small risk from participating in this research. You may experience increased feelings of discomfort related to your identity as a white person. Additionally, your avatar may experience racist comments from other players in Second Life as you move through the game as a person of color, which may also cause feelings of discomfort. I have provided you with a list of referral resources, enclosed in this envelope, to support mental health and emotional needs. In addition, I will provide you with reading and social support resources regarding race and racism upon completion of the study.

Participation in the study offers the opportunity to reflect on your social identity and learn more about race relations and racism. You may feel more confident discussing race and racism. Additionally, you may experience positive feelings about contributing to research. Results may be used to help social workers and others strengthen their work. Finally, I will give a $25.00 VISA gift card to all participants who have completed all parts of the study to thank you for your time and efforts.

I value and appreciate your need for confidentiality. This study is designed to ensure that your confidentiality and privacy are protected. Your name and mailing address will be used only for the purpose of obtaining a signed copy of this "Informed Consent" document. Should you choose to email me, I will delete your email after responding to it, but I must retain any and all data that I collect on paper for 3 years per federal regulations. For your comfort, I encourage you to limit your emails to logistical questions about how to complete the study. All files associated with this project will be retained for 3 years per federal regulations and stored in a locked file

box. Please note that I am the only person who will view your name, mailing address, or email address, should you choose to utilize it.

All of your information will be disguised for all others who read it, including my thesis advisor and a data analyst. Additionally, your privacy will be maintained in publications or presentations. Information will be presented as a whole (i.e. as percentages) and when personal quotes or vignettes are used they will be carefully disguised. All paper records will be kept in a locked file box, in order to protect your identity, and electronic information will be stored on my computer using DropBox, which is password protected. As discussed above, federal research guidelines require me to securely retain all data (notes, tapes, transcripts, and surveys) for a period of three (3) years. I will delete them after three (3) years or, if I continue to need them, I will continue to keep everything secure, and destroy them when I no longer need them.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection process, and you may decline to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. In order to withdraw from the study formally, just email me, and I will destroy all materials pertaining to you. The deadline for withdrawal is two weeks following your final interview, after which I won't be able to remove your information from the study. If you have any concerns about any aspect of this study or your rights, please be in touch with myself or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee, at (413) 585-7974.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Participant Name (Printed)	Date

Participant Signature	Date

Researcher Name (Printed)	Date

Researcher Signature	Date

I have included two (2) copies of this form, already signed by me. Please sign and return one (1) copy to me in the stamped and addressed envelope, and keep one (1) copy for yourself.

I thank you sincerely for the spirit in which you have elected to participate in this study, and I thank you in advance for the anticipated time and effort associated with your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Caitlyn I. Keckeissen, B.A.
M.S.W. Candidate, Class of 2013
Smith College School for Social Work

Appendix C:

Mental Health Resources

Please consider accessing the following resources if you are concerned about your mental or emotional well-being.

Information and Referrals for Participants Seeking Therapy:
- **www.nmha.org/farcry/go/searchMHA** - A search tool offered by Mental Health America that can connect you with mental health resources in your local community.
- **(1-800) 843-7274 // (1-858) 481-1515** – The Therapist Referral Network provides referrals to individual mental health professionals who participate in a variety of insurance plans. Some therapists offer affordable fee structures and may accept subsidized insurance such as Medicare and/or Medicaid.
- **therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/** - The Psychology Today Therapy Director enables you to search for mental health professionals in your area. Provider profiles detail therapist credentials, contact information, and fees.
- **www.medicare.gov/** - The Medicare Participating Physician Directory can assist you in finding a mental health provider who accepts medicare.

Some researchers and online gamers have observed that there are cases wherein game play interferes with people's functioning in various areas, including but not limited to social life, mental health, education, financial stability, and occupation. This study will not collect any data about your internet use outside of the time spent to complete the study and will never distribute this data to anyone. However, if you believe that you may be displaying addictive behaviors or that your use of online games is impacting your overall well-being, you may wish to access resources to help you address your concerns. Below are several resources for getting help if you feel you need it

Internet Use Resources
- **www.olganon.org** – Online Gamers Anonymous is a 12-step recovery model program and a fellowship of people sharing their experience, strengths, and hope to help each other recover and heal from the problems caused by excessive game playing.
- **http://www.mikelanglois.com/philosophy.htm** – Mike Langlois is a licensed, independent, clinical social worker who identifies himself as an "online gaming therapist" and discusses the distinction between healthy online gaming behaviors as well as unhealthy online gaming behaviors.

Appendix D:

Anti-Racism Resources

Thank you for your participation in this study. As you know, the objective of this study is to learn more about how white-identified Americans relate to racism in the U.S. Part of this work is making personal choices to learn more about fighting racism. Some white-identified people who begin learning about their racial identity find that they would like to learn more about anti-racism work. Below are some resources for you if you wish to learn more about anti-racism.

**Learn More:** Read these books and blogs to learn more about race, racism, and anti-racism.
- Alexander, M. (2010). The new Jim Crow: mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness. New York: New Press.
- Griffin, J. H. (1961). Black like me. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Miller, J. L., & Garran, A. M. (2007). Racism in the United States. New York: Brooks Cole.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). "Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" and other conversations about race. New York: BasicBooks.
- Wise, T. J. (2005). White like me. Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press.
- **www.colorlines.com** - An online news website that specializes in news about race and racism in the United States and around the world.
- **www.colorofchange.org/** - An activism-oriented website that sends you alerts about anti-racism activism that you can engage in, sometimes from home.

Get Involved! Check out these links for information about who is doing anti-racism work in your area and learn more about how you can get involved.
- **www.antiracistalliance.com/** - A New York/New Jersey/Connecticut area organization committed to undoing structural racism. Offers workshops and trainings.
- **www.communitychangeinc.org/** - A Boston area organization committed to promoting racial justice and equity. Offers workshops and trainings.
- **www.crossroadsantiracism.org/** - An Illinois area organization whose mission is to dismantle systemic racism and build antiracist multicultural diversity within institutions and communities. Offers workshops and trainings.
- **www.carw.com/ -** A group of white people in the Seattle area working to undo institutional racism and white privilege through education and organizing in white communities and active support of anti-racist, people of color-led organizations.
- **www.projectsarn.org/** - An organization that campaigns and engages in project-work in the South to end racial disparities in criminal justice, economic opportunities, education, environmental justice and health care. We're a network of activists who cross the lines of race, gender, class, age and immigration status to build community relationships in the South.
- **www.organizingagainstracism.com/**- Organizing Against Racism (OAR) is a network of anti-racism groups and activities that are based in or around Chapel Hill, NC.
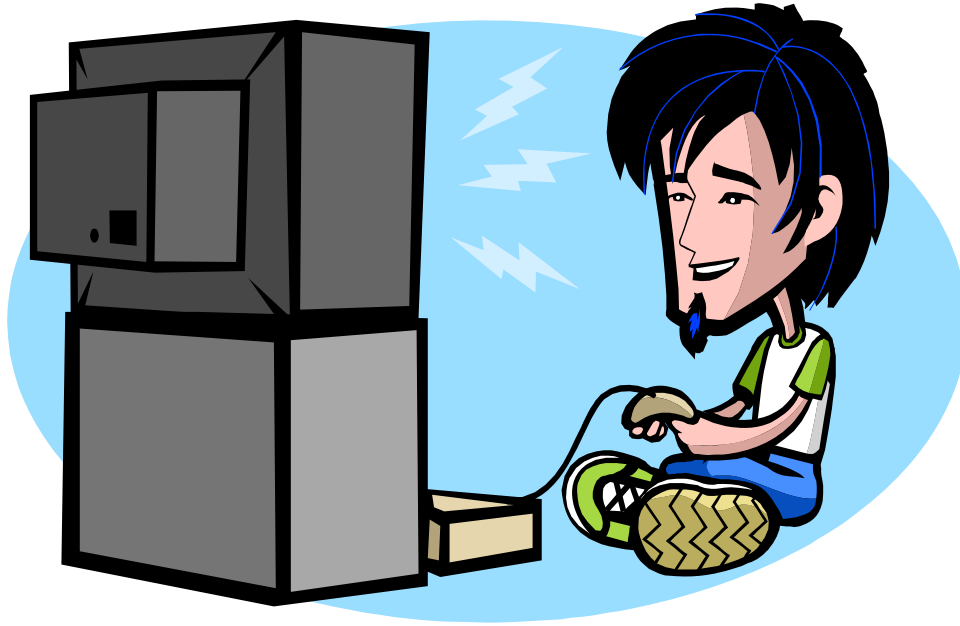
PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

Have you ever played Second Life™? Use your hobby to contribute to research and earn $25!

I am studying race in the United States by conducting a short-term experiment with participants who are willing to play the game Second Life™ for 6 hours over the course of one month. In order to participate, you must be a white-identified, English-speaking American over the age of 18 years who plays or has played Second Life™ and who has never been trained in anti-racism work. Participants who complete all parts of the study will receive a $25 VISA gift card. **Interested in finding out whether you're eligible for the study? Call (555) 555-5555 or email ckeckeis@smith.edu, and I will send you more information.**

Second Life, SL, and inSL are trademarks of Linden Research, Inc. Please note that this study is not affiliated with or sponsored by Linden Research

Pre- and Post-Experiment Survey

Symbolic Racism Scale		1	2	3	4	5
1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = neutral 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree						
01	Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich.					
04	Race plays a major role in the type of social services (such as type of health care or day care) that people receive in the US					
06	It is important that people begin to think of themselves as American and not African American, Mexican American, or Italian American.					
07	Due to racial discrimination, programs such as affirmative action are necessary to help create equality.					
09	Racism is a major problem in the US.					
10	Race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not.					
11	Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today.					
12	Racial and ethnic minorities do not have the same opportunities as white people in the US					
13	White people in the US are discriminated against because of the color of their skin.					
14	Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension.					
15	It is important for political leaders to talk about racism to help work through or solve society's problems.					
16	White people in the US have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.					
17	Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and values of the US.					
18	English should be the only official language in the US.					
19	White people are more to blame for racial discrimination than racial and ethnic minorities					
20	Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against white people.					
21	It is important for public schools to teach about the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities.					
22	Racial and ethnic minorities in the US have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.					
23	Racial problems in the US are rare, isolated situations.					
26	Race plays an important role in who gets sent to prison.					

Colorblind Racial Attitudes Scale	1	2	3	4	5
1 = strongly disagree　　　2 = disagree　　　3 = neutral　　　4 = agree　　　5 = strongly agree 1 = none at all　　　　　　　　　　　　　3 = only some　　　　　　5 = a lot					
1.1 It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if [people of color] would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.					
1.2 Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. [People of color] should do the same.					
1.3 [People of color] work just as hard to get ahead as most other Americans.					
1.4 How responsible, in general, do you hold [people of color] in this country for their outcomes in life?					
2.1 [People of color] are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.					
2.2 [People of color] are demanding too much from the rest of society.					
2.3 Some say that leaders [of color] have been trying to push too fast. Others feel that they haven't pushed fast enough. What do you think?	Too Fast		Not sure		Not Enough
2.4 Some say that the civil rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel that they haven't pushed fast enough. What do you think?	Too Fast		Not sure		Not Enough
2.5 How much of the racial tension that exists in the United States today do you think [people of color] are responsible for creating?					
2.6 [People of color] generally do not complain as much as they should about their situation in society.					
3.1 How much discrimination against [people of color] do you feel there is in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead?					
3.2 Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for [people of color] to work their way out the lower class.					
3.3 Discrimination against [people of color] is no longer a problem in the United States.					
3.4 Has there been a lot of real change in the position of [people of color] in the United States in the past few years, only some, or not much at all?					
4.1 Over the past few years, [people of color] have gotten less than they deserve.					
4.2 Over the past few years, [people of color] have gotten more economically than they deserve.					

Appendix G:

Post-Experiment Qualitative Interview Questions

1.   When you played as an avatar of color, how did you feel when your character was harmed in some way (e.g. physically, emotionally, socially)?
2.   How did you feel towards other people playing as avatars of color in the game?
3.   How did you feel towards people playing as white avatars in the game?
4.   How did this experience compare to other experiences in online gaming?
5.   Do you feel that participating in this experience had any impact on the way you think and feel about racism?
      a.   How do you think your scores on the initial survey might have changed?
      b.   (Share results)
      c.   Why do you think your scores did/did not change?
6.   How are other forms of discrimination like or unlike racism? Some examples include discrimination against people who are homosexual, transgender, women, religious (i.e. Muslim or Jewish), disabled, etc.
7.   Please use this space to share any reflections that the previous questions did not invite you to share.