ZERGING NEWBS:

CONFLICT TACTICS FOR MMORPG FORUMS

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Abstract

Just like with face-to-face conversations, the discussions that occur online can take a wrong turn and spiral into a conflict. The study utilized content analysis methods on computer-mediated talk via World of Warcraft forums. The research focuses on the verbal tactics used by players for avoidance, cooperation and competition conflict management styles. The results of the study showed that in the observed forum the outcome of the conversations that contain elements of conflict could not be foreseen through the use of verbal tactics that represent certain conflict management behavior. The duality of the forum was examined with the use of structuration theory. Some of the rules and resources that contributed to the understanding of the observed community were need for identification, use of proper grammar and spelling, and experience level. While replying to the posts, forum members focused on responding to the user, not just the question posted. Thus, the identifiable features (e.g., avatar's level) were referenced. The appropriation of players' experience as a credibility resource was apparent in the comments when one's game skills and knowledge were challenged.

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Chapter 1: Review of Related Literature

1.1 Introduction

The borderline between the "real" world and virtual world is getting more blurry every day. Almost any social activity can be done online now: shopping, dating, socializing with friends, and of course gaming. The invention of the Internet gave birth to a new communication medium – the computer. Face-to-face (FTF) communication has been traditionally favored over computer-mediated communication (CMC). The assumption that CMC is less personal and more technical has been challenged by Walther's (1992, 1996) social-information processing (SIP) theory, which presumes that individuals using CMC can reach the same level of effectiveness FTF communication does, given sufficient time.

It is believed that anonymity as a unique CMC feature makes this communication medium more suitable for uninhibited behavior, characterized by swearing, name-calling, interpersonal conflict and flaming. O'Sullivan and Flanagin (2003) define flaming as "aggressive or hostile communication occurring via computer-mediated channels" (p. 70). This type of communication is inevitable in many online forums.

This study looks at online forum discussions of popular massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft (WoW) players. The game surpassed eleven and a half million subscribers as of November 21, 2008 (Blizzard Entertainment, 2008). The large player population with different age ranges increases the chances that one will encounter (if not become) a WoW player in the near future. The term *playing video/computer games* is frequently used with negative connotation.

It usually stereotypes players as nerds, computer geeks, or those who *have no life*. The literal definition of the phrase may provide some explanation as to its intended meaning. When the word *play* is used it often refers to entertainment, leisure, nonserious and relaxing activity. No wonder video game players are commonly thought of as lazy and light-headed. Since the video game industry is rapidly growing, it is time to put aside stereotypes and admit that the online world is more than just a game. World of Warcraft teaches players how to be competitive and collaborative at the same time. It requires teamwork and support for each team member. There are rules that need to be followed in order to achieve the next level, and like most games, there is a reward system established within the game to encourage players.

My interest focuses on the interactions of WoW players, what rules and resources they use while communicating with one another, and what verbal tactics are applied if they reach disagreement or conflict. The official WoW forum not only serves as a space for players to interact with one another, but also to build stronger community. Thus, an online forum was the chosen space for data collection.

A structuration theoretical framework is used to examine the duality nature of online forums, which implies that through applying rules in communication with others, individuals simultaneously create rules that will guide their future discussions. The purpose of the study is to examine the outcomes of online conversations that include elements of conflict or "flaming" messages (insulting comments that are directed at another person). The conflict in threads could lead to three possible outcomes: avoidance, competition, and cooperation. The author is interested in verbal tactics used by forum

interactants that represent a particular conflict management style (i.e. avoidance, cooperation, and competition).

1.2 Computer-Mediated Communication

1.2.1 Computer-Mediated Communication vs. Face-to-Face Communication

Many activities that traditionally required physical presence and face-to-face interaction (i.e. shopping, banking, socializing, dating, etc.) have shifted their medium to the Internet and are now conducted via computer-mediated communication. The Internet has been called the most important discovery ever since the wheel was invented. Even those who are skeptical towards technological development have to rely on CMC at some point in their lives. According to Jones (1999) "it does not matter whether one is on-line or not-one's life will be, in some way, for better or worse, touched by the Internet" (p. xii). The Internet as a communication medium plays an important role in our social and economic lives.

Many researchers emphasize unique CMC features such as asynchrony, lack of non-verbal cues (gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact), and anonymity that provide a new outlook on interpersonal communication. Many theories have been proposed to explain inherent differences between CMC and FTF interactions. *Social presence theory* (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) proposes that online interactions via text messages deprive users from sensing the presence of the other communicator. The main idea here is that the fewer sensory channels a medium has (e.g., visual, tactile, audio, etc), the lower is its social presence. The lack of social presence cues in CMC results in a reduced partner liking, impersonal communication, and greater focus on the

task. Another theory that views CMC as hindering relationships is the theory of *media richness* (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). According to this theory each communication medium can be categorized based on the complexity of message that it can convey effectively. This view suggests that FTF communication is the most effective communication medium (the "richest") since it entails both verbal and nonverbal cues, while CMC is viewed as a lean form of interaction, more suitable for task handling than developing interpersonal relationships. Sproull and Kiesler (1986) use a *reduced social cues* approach to describe online communication. They believe that people interacting online become less inhibited and more self-absorbed, since they are lacking contextual cues about the other person. This lack of cues could potentially undermine one's view of hierarchical status (i.e., leadership, power and status) and could challenge the impact of social norms, triggering deviant behavior.

All of these theories utilize "cues-filtered-out" approach, introduced by Culnan and Markus (1987), which assumes that "the functions served by nonverbal cues in FtF interaction go unmet in computer-mediated interaction because the nonverbal cues are absent" (Walther & Parks, 2002, p. 532). They view CMC as permanently flawed when it comes to socializing and interpersonal relationship. According to this perspective "CMC, because of its lack of audio or video cues, will be perceived as impersonal and lacking in normative reinforcement, so there will be less socioemotional content exchanged" (Rice & Love, 1987, p. 88).

Utz (2000) believes that the lack of social cues in CMC can mater: "people become depersonalized because the attention focuses on the written text, not the social

context." In the online group discussions, such as forum conversations, the anonymity feature leads to loss of self-regulation. Depersonalization happens when individuals are seen in terms of group identities. The social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) theory suggests that CMC outcomes are driven by norms and structures of the group (Postmes, Spears & Lea, 2000; Spears & Lea, 1992). Deindividuation can be defined as "both the lack of differentiation between the self and others and that amongst other group members" (Lee, 2008, p. 647). The theory implies that the lack of individuating cues promotes more attention towards group identity instead of personal identity, which raises individuals' awareness of their group identity. Due to relevant anonymity, online forums have a potential to equalize power and status differences that are more apparent in FTF communication. Individuals may feel less inhibited online since they are difficult to be personally identified. However, Abrams, Hogg, Hinkle, and Otten (2005) emphasize that in CMC "if people feel anonymous in the presence of a highly salient social identity, they will be depersonalized but not deindividuated" (p. 113).

1.2.2 Social Information Processing Theory (SIP)

The social identity model of deindividuation effects does have strong support from researchers, however this model does not account for what happens to people in online groups on the individual level like social information processing theory (SIP) does (Walther, 1992, 1996). Not all researchers view reduction of social cues in CMC as a barrier to interpersonal communication and establishing personal relationship. The notion that new media require new constructs and theories led to development of the SIP

model that predicts that individuals interacting online could reach the same level of effectiveness for both socioemotional and task communication given sufficient time (Walther, 1992).

Using five assumptions and six propositions Walther's (1992) SIP theory suggests that without nonverbal cues, CMC communicators adapt their relational behaviors to the remaining cues available in CMC, such as chronemic and linguistic strategies. This adaptation requires the following elements:

> (a) Certain drives, or *relational motivators*, may prompt communicators to (b) develop distinctive impressions of other interactants by *decoding* text-based cues and (c) derive *psychological-level knowledge* about other actors from CMC interaction. As this occurs they (d) manage *relational changes* and *encode* relational messages in CMC. (Walther, 1992, p. 67)

Relational motivators in CMC are need for affiliation, social rewards from other (i.e., affinity seeking), impression management and dominance drive. Walther (1992) believes that even information exchange in formal organizational settings is used for more purposes than task completion (pp. 68-69). In his theory, Walther does not focus on impression management, but rather examines impression formation through decoding of text messages and initial relational developments. He believes that formation of individual impressions of other interactants requires more time in CMC than in similar FTF encounters, and proposes that "it may take longer to observe and decode impressions from verbal and textual cues alone than from multichannel cues" (p. 71). Since relational development tie directly into interpersonal impressions formed by interactants, Walther

(1992) believes that "communicators use knowledge generating strategies such as interrogation, self-disclosure, deception detection, environmental structuring, and deviation testing to gather psychological-level information about other persons" (p. 71). After sufficiently frequent social information exchange, "initial levels of relational communication in CMC are expected to change" (Walther, 1992, p. 73).

Consistent with Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory (URT), SIP notes that CMC communicators exchange and collect information that allows them to predict behaviors and attitudes of others. Since URT was formulated for FTF communication setting, not all of its strategies for reducing uncertainty can be applied to CMC. Tidwell and Walther (2002) focus on two uncertainty reduction strategies available in CMC: verbal interrogation (i.e, asking questions) and self-disclosure (p. 323). Jourard (1971) notes that in addition to revealing impression-bearing information, self-disclosure could be used as a tactic to obligate the target individual into generating return disclosures (as cited in Tidwell & Walther, 2002, p. 323).

Social information processing theory also incorporates concept of anticipated future interaction. Just as in FTF communication, anticipation of future interaction prompts greater exchange of personal information and greater perceived similarity. Moreover, Walther (1994) believes that anticipation of future interaction "should account for differences in relational behavior more than should differences between communication conditions" (p. 481). The general expectation of CMC relational potential has been examined by Utz (2000). In a study on German multi-user-dungeons

(MUDs), participants who were skeptical about the relational potential of CMC were less likely to form relationships online.

Social information processing theory looks at time as a crucial variable, and names chronemics as one nonverbal cue that has not been filtered out from CMC. According to Bruneau (1979), chronemics focuses on "the meaning of human time experiencing as it influences and is influenced by human communication" (p. 429). Since forums provide users with an opportunity to view time stamps, interactants can base their perception of how urgent, dominant, or personal the responder intended to be based on the time the comment was made. For example, if the original poster (OP - a person who starts out a thread by posting a comment or a question) receives an immediate reply, such response could be viewed as more affectionate than the replies posted hours after an original post (Walther & Tidwell, 1995).

According to the first proposition of SIP theory, the development of interpersonal impressions among CMC interactants require more time than FTF communication, since CMC happens at a slower rate. Walther (1996) believes that previous experiments, which showed impersonal, task-focused and less social communication among CMC users, did not account for the rate at which message exchange happens online. He noted that in instances where the participants were given a limited amount of time, they concentrated more on task-completion and were less concerned about the social aspect of communication. Tidwell and Walther (2002) suggest that "CMC may require even more than four to five times the amount of time spent in a FTF interaction in order to convey the same amount of utterances" (p. 341).

In addition to chronemic strategies, CMC users adapt to linguistic cues of the messages. The use of metalinguistic cues indicate informality (e.g., naah, yum), spatial arrays create graphical effects (e.g., leaving spaces between words to indicate pause, running words together as a quickening of tempo), while intentional misspelling, such as a repetition of a vowel, is used to resemble a drawn-out pronunciation of a word, while a repeated final constant is used for stress (Walther, 1992, p. 79). Utz (2000) described the use of "emoticons" (simulations of facial expressions such as smiles, winks and frowns, created using keyboard symbols) and "scripts" (preprogrammed text that translates a combination of verbs and adverbs in nonverbal action, or display of feelings) in a German MUD. She found that those who used more scripts and emoticons believed they were more skillful at conveying relational and emotional messages than others.

The reduction of nonverbal cues in CMC possibly results in users' engagement of selective self-presentation and partner idealization. Walther (1996) uses a hyperpersonal perspective to explain this practice, and points out four categories of this perspective: sender, receiver, channel and feedback. Senders use selective self-presentation when describing traits, thoughts, and accomplishments, and choose to disclose positive or negative information about themselves. Receivers, on the other end, engage in somewhat idealized attribution of on-line partners, which happens due to the anticipation of future interaction and/or overattribution of their similarity. This overattribution is especially prominent when individuals meet in online groups, based on common interest or problem. The channel itself allows senders and receivers more control over their messages than in FTF interaction. Most of CMC happens via asynchronous channel,

which gives parties an opportunity to use it nonsimultaneously. Even though some CMC, such as instant messaging and communication in games, happens almost instantly, the users still have time to alter the messages before clicking send, an option impossible in FTF communication. Finally, hyperpersonal feedback effects may create self-fulfilling prophecies among CMC users. Since senders engage in selective self-representation, receivers tend to idealize their online partner, channels provide an opportunity to express oneself in the way one wants, the behavioral confirmation process may be cued. Individuals may alter their behavior to the expectations of others.

1.3 Anonymity

The lack of identifiable features in CMC, such as physical distance, and relative anonymity, are believed to make this communication medium more prone to frequent uninhibited behavior, characterized by the use of superlatives, swearing, name-calling, interpersonal conflict and flaming. Anonymity as a unique feature of CMC has been receiving much attention from researchers (Rains, 2007; Kahai, 2009; Lee, 2008). It has been named as a frequent cause of deindividuation, when the group members do not have individuating information about others. The anonymity feature could make one feel "less accountable and less self-aware and, consequently, [...] less inhibited by internalized norms and more willing to engage in behavior that the individual would not display in front of others" (Kahai, 2009, p. 451). The possibility to communicate with others without identifying oneself has both advantages and disadvantages.

Examining the aspect of anonymity in the group context related to electronic meeting systems, many researchers found it beneficial. Rains (2007) pointed out that

anonymity "mitigates status differences, liberates team members from a fear of retribution, and makes it easier for members to resist group pressure" (p. 101). An ability to voice an opinion without fear of being ridiculed could potentially result in more effective decision-making, promote cooperation and reduce power struggle. Cain and Smith (2009) compared moral reasoning skills of those participating in CMC group discussions to FTF discussions. Their findings show that asynchronous CMC communication with anonymity allowed individuals communicating online to increase their moral reasoning skills. Computer media prevented two or three individuals from dominating the entire discussion, as was observed in FTF groups, and allowed other group members to contribute to the discussion.

The downside of anonymity is the possibility to promote lack of trust. Anonymous senders could be viewed as unwilling to be held accountable for their ideas, and even though "message senders may feel more comfortable, receivers may perceive an anonymous source as less competent or credible than they would if he or she were identified" (Rains, 2007, p. 101). In anonymous online conversation the individual's motivation, expertise and thus the validity of his or her argument become questionable. de Laat (2008) reflected on the issue of trust, privacy and exhibitionism online by studying blogs (online diaries). He believes that in order to increase trust in an anonymous environment such as the Internet, people disclose their personal information, assuming that those who will read their blogs will be trustworthy. Such disclosure of private information is believed to promote trust among blog users.

1.4 Flaming and Uninhibited Behavior

The negative side to CMC, frequently correlated to its feature of anonymity, has been observed in the form of aggressive, hostile, uninhibited communicative behavior, referred to as "flaming." Griffin (2006) describes flaming as "hostile language that zings its target and creates a toxic climate for relational growth on the Internet" (p. 143). The reduction of social cues in CMC is argued to explain uninhibited behavior that happens online. Lea, O'Shea, Fung, and Spears (1992) summarize social psychological effects that possibly lead to flaming:

> (1) the absence of such [social] cues reduces the communication of social and normative constraints that regulate the expression of uninhibited behavior, (2) the absence of these cues reduces perception of status, leadership and power so that in organizational CMC managers' control of the communication is reduced, (3) the lack of immediacy caused by delays inherent in communication systems reduces the effect of social feedback, (4) delays and other inefficiencies in the communication medium increase arousal and cause frustration, (5) the conditions of CMC are similar to conditions that cause the psychological state of de-individuation, (6) a heightened self-consciousness or self-absorption in CMC means that attention is shifted away from the social context of the communication, and (7) CMC is relatively new and few standards and norms for the medium itself have so far emerged. (p. 93)

The concept of flaming has been viewed uniquely in the context of online discussions, such as forums, message boards, and chat rooms. This is not to say that

problematic interactions do not occur in FTF communication, but the label "flaming" specifies that a particular conversation took place online. Researchers proposed various definitions of flaming as "incendiary messages" (Tamosaitis, 1991), "inflammatory remarks" (Bernthal, 1995), "scathingly critical personal messages" (Cosentino, 1994), "vicious attacks" (Dvorak, 1994), or "rude or insulting messages" (Schrage, 1997). Thus, flaming can be summarized as "aggressive or hostile communication occurring via computer-mediated channels" (O'Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003, p. 70).

Flaming has a disreputable record of afflicting different electronic forums, including Internet discussion groups. In his study, Kayany (1998) examined 1,335 messages from social newsgroups on Usenet for uninhibited behavior online. He found that 15.1% of the examined messages could be categorized as flaming. The distinction was made between criticizing massages, those that were directed at ideas and opinions, and flaming messages, those that were directed at another person and expressed with hostility. The study challenges the common assumption of flaming as a characteristic of computer medium accompanied by reduced cues by posing an argument that "if flaming were medium-dependent, flaming should be found universally across every newsgroup, bulletin board and network" (p. 1136). Since this was not the case, Kayany favors social context of flaming as its explanation. His findings support the hypothesis that there is a significant difference between levels of flaming in different groups. Even though heated discussions were observed among social groups arguing about separation of Quebec from Canada, Kashmir politics in India, and ongoing conflict in the Middle East, it was cultural context groups discussing Indian religion that accounted for over half of the

flaming messages in the study. Kayany attributes such findings to the fact that India "deals with enormous problems of cultural and religious heterogeneity" (p. 1139).

As mentioned earlier, the anonymity feature of CMC also affects how individuals communicate in the social setting. Reinig and Mejias (2004) examined the decision-making process of Group Support Systems (GSS) and found that users "would be less likely to submit flames or critical comments if the existing social norms of the group regarded such comments as undesirable" (p. 700). Thus, social norms of the online group can very much prevent or interfere with inflammatory postings.

Another online practice similar to flaming has been labeled as "trolling" (Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002). This practice starts with a message that is not particularly offensive or controversial but is intentionally incorrect. The difference between flaming and trolling is that "the goal of flame bait is to incite any and all readers, whereas the goal of a stereotypical troll is to draw in particularly naïve or vulnerable readers" (Herring et al., 2002, p. 372). Even though these concepts are different, it is important to point out that in the forum discussions trolling and flaming often merge, since "in both cases there is intent to disrupt the ongoing conversation, and both can lead to extended aggravated argument" (Herring et al., 2002, p. 372).

Uninhibited communication in online forums is often presented with the use of offensive language. Kaye and Sapolsky (2009) researched the use of offensive language on prime-time broadcast and cable programming. They developed five categories for offensive language: "the seven dirty words," sexual words, excretory words, mild-other words, and strong-other words. According to the U.S. Federal Communication

Commission, *the seven dirty words* (cocksucker, cunt, fuck, motherfucker, piss, shit and tits) are deemed to be "too offensive to ever be said on television" (Kaye & Sapolsky, 2009, p. 25). The second category of *sexual words* includes sexual behavior and reference to sexual body parts. The category of *excretory words* includes the words that are "direct and literal references to human elimination processes and body parts" (Kaye & Sapolsky, 2009, p. 27). The other two categories (*mild-* and *strong- other words)* were determined in accordance with the level of mild or strong emotions and offense that they triggered in surveyed participants. Even though Kaye and Sapolsky's study examined offensive language on television, the same words used in online forums could be viewed as an attempt to flame or start an argument.

1.5 Arguing and Conflict Online

Since online discussion forums allow for convenient communication among people separated in place and time, they also provide place for discussion for those separated in opinions. Arguing in online forums is a very frequent occurrence. While studying online discussions, Weger and Aakhus (2003) applied a pragma-dialectic approach that "places an emphasis on the functional utility of arguments as they are used to achieve communicative goals" (p. 25). This allows participants to engage in critical discussion in order to resolve differences in opinions. Weger and Aakhus (2003) believe that in order to resolve an argument participants need to follow four rules:

> (1) They must not discourage each other from entering or defending standpoints, (2) have the responsibility to defend a standpoint when they are challenged by an opponent and to concede a standpoint when they can no longer defend it, (3)

> defend standpoints with relevant arguments, logically cogent reasoning, and correctly applied evidence, and (4) must not misrepresent either their own, or their opponent's evidence of reasoning. (pp. 25-26)

If participants of the forum do not follow this set of rules conflict will be more likely to arise.

Online forums are commonly used by certain groups with similar interests. Those groups frequently form subcultures or online communities that will be discussed later. Like any group, the online group consists of individuals with diverse backgrounds, different values, beliefs and traditions. Frequently these differences lead to disagreements and conflicts among members. Putnam and Poole (1987) describe intragroup conflict as rising from "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with realization of these goals" (p. 552).

According to Deutsch (1949, 1993, 1994) most conflicts involve mixed motives, thus they give rise to both cooperative and competitive communicative behaviors. Even though conflict has been frequently viewed as negative, it ranges on the continuum from destructive to constructive and can become a rewarding experience for the parties who genuinely care about the relationship. Deutsch (1994) describes the duality of one's motivations while in a conflict and labels them "concern for self" and "concern for other." These dual concerns range on the continuum from "low" to "high" and determine the strategies the parties will engage in while managing the conflict. Hence, if one's concern for self and concern for other are high, cooperation is implemented.

Accommodation will be associated with low concern for self and high for other, competition with high concern for self and low for other, while low concern for both will most likely lead to avoidance (p. 14).

In his theoretical model Deutsch (1949) mainly focuses on two conflict management styles: cooperation and competition. Cooperation could be observed through "perceived similarity in beliefs and attitudes, a readiness to be helpful, openness in communication, trusting and friendly attitudes, sensitivity to common interests and deemphasis of opposed interests, an orientation towards enhancing mutual power rather than power differences, and so on" (Deutsch, 1994, p. 15). By contrast competition uses "tactics of coercion, threat, or deception; attempts to enhance the power differences between oneself and the other; poor communication; minimization of awareness of similarities in values and increased sensitivity to opposed interests; suspicious and hostile attitudes; the importance, rigidity, and size of the issues of conflict; and so on" (Deutsch, 1994, p. 15). Keeping these conflict management styles characteristics in mind, the researcher was interested to find out whether the outcome of conflicting discussions could be foreseen with the use of messages that communicate a particular conflict management style. Thus the following research question is asked:

RQ1: What are the outcomes of online conversations that include elements of conflict?

Flaming and trolling postings, disagreements and arguments were viewed as elements of conflict. In order to answer the question above, the conflict management behavior was viewed as ranging on the continuum from highly cooperative to highly

competitive, with avoiding as a midpoint of the continuum. One way to examine conflict management styles in online forum conversations is to code language used. Sillars (1980a, 1980b; Sillars, Coletti, Parry & Rogers, 1982) developed coding procedures for classifying verbal tactics in interpersonal conflict. Coding was developed for three main categories of conflict styles: avoidance, distributive (competition) and integrative (cooperation). Similar to Sillars et al. (1982) coding strategy, the researcher analyzed online forum conversations that contain elements of flaming, by coding verbal tactics used for avoidance, cooperation and competition conflict management styles.

RQ2: What verbal tactics represent avoidance, cooperation and competition conflict management styles in online forum conversations?

1.6 Massively-Multiplayer Online Game of World of Warcraft

Computer-mediated communication today frequently takes place in virtual worlds such as massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs). This new genre of video games

> "combine[s] rich 3D environments and 'avatars' (or virtual bodies) with text-chat systems (similar to Internet Relay Chat or Instant Messaging) which players use to 'talk' to one another. The result is a form of virtual social interaction that has been purposefully designed to resemble face-to-face conversation in many ways" (Moore, Ducheneaut, & Nickell, 2007, p. 266).

The distinguishing feature of MMORPG's is their ability to create a virtual environment in which geographically remote individuals can interact in a real time environment by "offering an alternative channel for players to communicate, socialize, and eventually

form social communities" (Ang, Zaphiris, & Mahmood, 2007, p. 167). Moore, Ducheneaut, and Nickell (2007) believe that social networks and interactions in MMORPGs are "what enables game worlds to retain players long-term" (p. 266). Since anyone who pays the monthly fee for a popular MMORPG such as World of Warcraft (WoW) has access to the space, this virtual world can be viewed as a public space for socialization. Childress and Braswell (2006) make a comparison between a local Starbucks coffee shop and a virtual café in a popular MMORPG *Second Life*. The social interactions that occur in public places like coffee shops are very similar to the ones the gamer encounters online. Williams, Ducheneaut, Zhang, Yee, and Nickell (2006) describe WoW (see Appendix #1 for a comprehensive overview of the game) as "populated with a range of social experiences ranging from ephemeral impersonal groups to sustained and deep relationships that extend offline" (p. 340).

1.7 Community Engagement and Forums

In addition to socializing within the game, the Internet provides players with an opportunity to communicate with other gamers through CMC by using chat rooms, instant messaging and forums. The last option is very popular, since it does not require synchronous communication. Forum users do not have to be logged in at the same time to interact with others. They can add, follow, and reply to the posts whenever they have access to the Internet. Herring et al. (2002) describes beneficial forum features and emphasizes that forums "allow for convenient and ongoing communication among groups of people separated in place and time." He also believes that "such forums can

evolve into communities whose members share information, experience a sense of belonging, and provide mutual support." (p. 371).

The value and potential of forum discussions as a medium for community engagement has been gaining more attention from social science researchers (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998; Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Hodkinson (2007) describes an online group attachment and community building of those who interact in forums. He points out that many online forums not only have a "strong symbolic or 'imagined' sense of group identity, but also of intense and intimate communication among participants and resolute commitment to coherent sets to values and norms" (p. 629). The interactants on the observed forum have been viewed as and referred to themselves as an online community. Bagozzi, Dholakia, and Mookerjee (2006) define virtual communities as the groups where "members experience a consciousness of kin – an intrinsic connection to other members of the group and a collective sense of separation from those who are nonmembers" (p. 97). A person's opinions and ideas are more likely to be influenced due to their membership in the particular community. World of Warcraft players come from different cultures, have different values and beliefs, but WoW forums provide them with an opportunity to communicate and connect with those who share their interest in the game and form a subculture. In some sense the actions of forum users are shaped by the WoW community, game and forum structure. Since "online collectivities are not mere recreations of offline communities, but are often unique cultures with their own values, norms, rules, sanctioning mechanisms, shared history, and folklore" (King, 2008, p. 137), the researcher is interested in learning more about those collectives, and the

WoW community specifically. The following research question asks about the structure of WoW forums:

RQ3: In the forum discussions, what rules and resources shape World of Warcraft community?

Chapter 2: Research Methodologies

2.1 Theoretical Perspective

Post-structuralism serves as the epistemological stance for this study. This epistemology retains the view that "the meaning of words derives from their relationship to one another and not from any postulated relationship to non-linguistic reality" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 203-204). The origins of language are emphasized here. They are viewed as "situated within societal relationships of power [...] and within the unconscious [...]" (Crotty, 1998, p. 204).

Viewing online forum discussions as structures that are dual in nature, this study draws upon structuration theory (Giddens, 1979, 1984). According to the theory, human action is a process of producing and reproducing different social systems. In the conversation individuals strategically apply rules to achieve their goals, and thus create structures that affect future interactions (e.g., group norms and rules, societal expectations and institutions). Giddens' theory examines the idea of structures that are created through everyday communication.

By introducing the process of structuration, Giddens (1984) viewed larger social systems as grounded in actions of individuals. According to the theory, social structures consist of rules and resources. The rules do not exist abstractly or independently, they are entrenched in social actions. Those rules are "implicit formulas for actions," recipes for how to proceed in a certain situation (Griffin, 2006, p. 265). Kenneth (2006) distinguishes two kinds of rules: normative rules and codes of signification. The rules

that govern behavior are commonly known as normative rules, while signification codes are "rules through which meaning is produced" (Kenneth, 2006, p. 267). Resources, on the other hand, can be controlled and managed. One's expertise and knowledge, organizational position and status, techniques and technologies of management are examples of authoritative resources. Allocative resources refer to material goods and material world, and one's control of them. Thus, as people draw from rules and resources in communication with others they, with or without realizing it, simultaneously produce and reproduce structures that will guide their future interactions. The duality of structure resides in the notion that "the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and outcome of practices they recursively organize" (Giddens, 1984, p. 26). Hence, structuration could be summed up as a fluid process with rules and resources constantly changing, yet constantly constraining.

Three realms of structuration process: interpretation, morality, and power - have been outlined within Giddens' work. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2008) we use rules to guide our actions and those rules "tell us how something should be understood (interpretation), what should be done (morality), and how to get things accomplished (power)" (p. 236). Power and structure have an interdependent relationship, "power relations are always two-way; that is to say, however subordinate an actor may be in a relationship, the very fact of involvement in the relationship gives him or her a certain amount of power" (Giddens, 1979, p. 6). This notion suggests that people have some degree of freedom to act on their own will. Even if it seems like one's actions were dictated by outside forces, the intentionality is always present.

In the context of smaller groups, which online community falls under, structuration theory has been adapted by Scott Poole. Poole (1983) views groups' decision making as a process during which members strive to reach agreement and, in doing so, structure their social system. This means that group members intentionally adapt rules and resources to make a decision, and simultaneously shape their future work together. However, rules and resources do not always amend the structure: "if the structure of the group stays the same, it is because members are acting in such a way that the same structure is created and maintained with every act" (Poole, 1996, p.86). Structuration theory is functional in the context of small group, since it "considers how group activities are constituted through members' actions, explores the process by which the production and reproduction of groups occurs, and identifies the factors that influence these processes" (Arrow, Henry, Poole, Wheelan, & Moreland, 2005, p. 347).

The theory proves to be valid for studying how information systems "create a greater understanding of the underlying structures that emerge from collaboration using new technology" (Evans & Brooks, 2005, p. 215). By monitoring online discussions it has been noted that one's everyday actions not only involve conduct from the individual, but from others as well. This notion is consistent with Giddens' (1984) view of individuals as actors who "not only monitor continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also routinely monitor aspects social and physical, of the contexts in which they move" (p. 5).

2.2 Research Design

2.2.1 Conflict Management Styles

The purpose of this study is to examine the outcomes of online conversations that include elements of conflict. It has been hypothesized that one of the possible outcomes for the use of online messages will be conflict. While examining conflict it is important to note that "conflict management can be understood only through analysis of the interaction process by which outcomes are attained" (Poole, Holmes, & Desanctis, 1991, p. 928). Thus, not only the utterance itself should be taken into consideration, but the larger context as well, including nature of the conversation, community and culture of the interactants, responses received, etc.

The three common behaviors that people engage in while in conflict are avoidance, cooperation and competition. Avoidance strategies are used when people seek to flee from the situation, they choose to disengage and leave it as it is. Cooperation or integrative strategies allow parties to work out their differences, share their viewpoint and promote open communication. Finally, with competitive strategies each party pursues their own goals and viewpoints through opposition. According to Sillars (1980a) each of these behaviors is expressed by using different strategies. He codes avoidance behavior with the use of (a) *denial and equivocation* (direct denial, implicit denial and evasive remark), (b) *topic management* (topic shifts and topic avoidance), (c) *noncommittal remarks* (abstract remarks, noncommittal statements, noncommittal questions, and procedural remarks), and (d) *irrelevant remarks* (joking). Cooperative behavior was recognized through (a) *analytic remarks* (description, qualification,

disclosure, soliciting disclosure and soliciting criticism) and (b) *conciliatory remarks* (empathy or support, concessions and accepting responsibility). Competitive conflict management style was coded with the use of *confrontative remarks* (personal criticism, rejection, hostile imperatives, hostile questioning, hostile joking or sarcasm, presumptive attribution, and denial of responsibility). Acknowledging these coding schemes, the researcher set out to analyze online forums and develop conflict management coding schemes present in observed interactions.

2.2.2 Content Analysis

The study is designed to utilize content analysis method on computer mediated talk via World of Warcraft forums. Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as "an empirically grounded method, exploratory in process, and predictive or inferential in intent" (p. xvii). The method has been around for years and is used for examining "data, printed matter, images or sounds – texts - in order to understand what they mean to people, what they enable or prevent, and what the information conveyed by them does" (p. xviii). Content analysis has developed its own methodology that critically analyzes the results.

Text as a unit of analysis has several advantages. It allows the researcher to revisit the particular moment in the conversation over and over again. With the online forum discussion, the text messages posted by others are publicly accessible. Thus, the researchers can examine the texts without author's awareness, and "study the texts of a person whom they would likely never meet or be granted the opportunity to interview" (Keyton, 2001, p. 259). Krippendorff (2004) emphasizes that the difference between the

text "and what other research methods take as their starting point is that the text means something to someone, it is produced by someone to have meanings for someone else, and these meanings therefore must not be ignored and must not violate why the text exists in the first place" (p. 19). The method of content analysis has been gaining popularity among scholars as a useful "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18).

2.2.3 Grounded Theory

Coding textual data was done by implementing a grounded theory approach. The key idea of this approach is that the theory used in the study "does not come 'off the shelf,' but rather is generated or 'grounded' in data from participants who have experienced the process" (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). The explanation of the process of online forum discussion was grounded, since this type of theory-building "seeks to ensure that the theory emerging arises from the data and not from some other source" (Crotty, 1998, p. 78). This approach will involve the process of "inductive theory building based squarely on observation of the data themselves" (Crotty, 1998, p. 78). The knowledge gaining technique is similar to conversation analysis, when the researcher "works inductively by first examining the details of actual conversations – many conversations – and then generalizing possible principles by which the participants themselves organize their own talk" (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 81). The important characteristics of grounded theory research design have been outlined by Lindlof and Taylor (2002):

> (1) Theory is grounded in the relationships between data and the categories in which they are coded; and (2) Codes and categories are mutable until late in the project, because the researcher is still in the field and data from new experiences continue to alter the scope and terms of his or her analytic framework. (p. 218)

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) distinguish two kinds of coding that could be applied to a text - *open coding* and *in vivo coding*. They define *open coding* as unrestricted coding of data when the researcher "goes through the text (fieldnotes, transcriptions, documents) line by line and marks those chunks of text that suggest a category," thus "it is through the process of open coding that categories are built, are named, and have attributes ascribed to them" (p. 219). Done at the same time as *open coding, in vivo coding* refers to the "terms used by the social actors themselves" (p. 220). In this study the open coding technique was used for coding data in major categories.

2.2.4 Data Collection

The observation period was anticipated to last two weeks. The original intention of observing the conversations on three different websites did not yield the expected results. The difference in usage of the websites served as a deciding factor to focus on an official World of Warcraft forum powered by Blizzard. Observed unofficial WoW community forums (WoWWiki.com and WorldofWar.net) showed lack of popularity among users. There were only a few original postings made during the designated observation period on those forums. These few threads quickly died out due to the lack of responses.

After careful observation an official WoW forum was selected for content analysis. This forum showed consistency in usage and the frequency of postings was relatively high. A new thread was created almost every minute, which led to an overwhelming amount of data. In addition to being popular, an official WoW forum contained the minimal number of "spam" postings in comparison to other forums originally considered for data collection. Threads characterized as spam contained highly irrelevant information to the forum (e.g. advertisement, asking for monetary contribution, etc.). If a spam thread was started on the observed forum it was promptly reported to the officials of the website, who also served as moderators, and was removed.

High popularity of the official WoW forum led to an enormous amount of postings within the two week period. In order to reduce this vast amount of data to a manageable number of threads the criteria were redefined. Focusing on the general discussion category instead of off-topic category insured that the conversations were relevant to the WoW game and community in general. Another criteria for data collection was that the postings had to be originated on a selected day (the beginning period of data collection). Only those postings that were originated on the randomly selected day (12/28/2010) were observed for two weeks. The researcher did perform inter-rater spot checks, observing forum discussions on other days. This ensured that randomly chosen date for data gathering was not misrepresented.

In order to be part of the data the online conversations also had to meet a certain criteria for the number of replies. Having observed the forum for a sustained period of time, it was noted that the optimal number for responses in the thread is anywhere

between eight and twenty. The original posting on the forum is numbered "0" in the thread. Thus the eight replies to the thread will actually include nine speaking turns. Since the goal of the research is to analyze conversations that contain elements of conflict messages, the main criteria for data collection would be the presence of conflict in the particular thread. Eight replies to the original posts have been determined as a minimal requirement for the thread to be included in the data.

The decision for the number of observed speaking turns within the thread was informed by conversation analysis method. Littlejohn (2002) describes conversation analysis through examination of actual sequences of talk, focusing on "interaction in discourse – the back and forth, turn-taking moves that communicators make and how they manage to organize their sequences of talk" (p. 80). This turn-taking is important to consider when analyzing online conversations. In order to code a particular statement or post the researcher needs to consider the response and reaction of other individual involved in the interaction. Thus, in a conversation, whether online or not, one will acquire at least three utterances for meaning making: first speaking turn, reaction of another discussant, and feedback from the individual who spoke first. In a forum these three turns could be presented as an original post, the first reply from a forum member and a follow-up from the original poster (OP). The first reply to an original post will remain provisional until the first speaker (in this case an OP) reflects in one way or another on what the opponent had to say or do. Since conflict rarely escalates from the very first three-utterance cycle, and since frequently the OP will receive responses from more than one person, it is safe to assume that including one posting cycle (original post,

response or comment and follow-up by the original poster) into the data is not sufficient for the purpose of my study. From preliminary observations and thread analysis it has been determined that three speaking cycles should be the minimal qualifier for a thread to potentially contain conflict messages. Hence, the three turn taking cycles has been translated into minimum of eight responses to a particular thread.

Twenty responses were determined to be a maximum number of responses to be included in the data for this project. Twenty replies together with the original posting yield twenty one speaking turns or seven speaking cycles. Preliminary observations showed that threads tend to get redundant or shift topic at around this number of responses. The nature of the forum is such that some regular participants tend to fall into a pattern when a certain position is stated; it is followed by the series of other positions that most likely have been already discussed. Discussions with long-time community members confirmed this observation. The last criteria used for data collection is the presence of a conflict element in the thread.

Chapter 3: Results

3.1 Conversation Outcomes

Sixty-nine threads met all of the established criteria. These threads had (a) anywhere between eight to twenty responses, (b) originated on the set date for data collection, (c) were posted in the "General Discussion" category of the official World of Warcraft forum, (d) contained conversations relevant to the game, and (c) had a conflict element present in them. In order to answer RQ1 (What are the outcomes of online conversations that contain elements of conflict?) the threads were categorized for an overall outcome of the conversation. Such analysis resulted into the outcome of five threads categorized as avoidance, nineteen ended with competition, while the outcome of forty five threads was cooperation. Thus, cooperation conflict management style was far more dominant in a particular community.

Data were sorted into three categories in accordance with the conflict management strategy used to influence the outcome of the thread. Each thread was believed to fall somewhere on the continuum from cooperative to competitive behavior. This enabled the researcher to categorize the thread despite the differences in level, intensity, and exposure of conflict management strategies. The threads were categorized as cooperative if they used strategies that allowed parties to work out their differences, share their viewpoints, and promote open communication. Competitive conflict management behavior was characterized by each party pursuing their own goals and viewpoints through opposition and/or confrontation. Since intensity of cooperative and

competitive behavior was viewed as a continuum, the midpoint of this continuum signified a lack of both competitive and confrontative strategies. In the case of online forums, the midpoint of the continuum was another category, characterized by disengagement and represented avoidance behavior. The avoidance category served as a last-reserve category, since most of the threads fell on the continuum somewhat closer to cooperation or competition. Only five threads were categorized as exhibiting avoidance behavior. Having a predominant amount of competitive, cooperative or avoidance codes was not a deciding factor in categorizing threads according to a conflict management behavior. The outcome of the conversation (avoidance, cooperation or competition) served as the determining factor.

3.2 Conflict Management Verbal Tactics

The coding schemes for each conflict management style (avoidance, cooperation or competition) were developed, thus answering RQ2 (What verbal tactics represent avoidance, cooperation and competition conflict management styles in online forum conversations?).

3.2.1 Avoidance Category

The open coding content analysis technique allowed for selecting categories after the coding of data was completed. The avoidance category was determined by the use of codes of procedural remarks and topic management. In the threads, *procedural remarks* were used to manage the process of interacting in the forum. These included explicitly stated rules for responding to a particular thread - for example, "no flaming," "feel free to make constructive feedback," "no saying how/why Blizzard sucks and they would never

do it." Frequently stated at the beginning of the thread, the function of such rules was to avoid conflict in the discussion. Some procedural remarks were used in response to a particular post that either deteriorated from the original topic or were perceived as a flame. For example, the comment "haters will be reported in this thread" was an indirect avoidance technique after an insulting comment was posted. The flow and outcome of the conversation were managed by statements like "let me know if this is helpful" and "if you don't want this thread locked like the last one, then remove @ from the title."

Many procedural remarks were written in a command format: "/end thread," "/discuss," and "/end rant." The symbol "/" was used with the intent of an order or command. This did not necessarily mean that the user who made such a command post had more authority in the forum than others. Neither did this technique seem to trigger a power struggle. The use of this slash symbol before a written command phrase or word has its significance in the rules and resources of this particular forum. Since the forum is for WoW players a technique of using a command remark, such as "/discuss," is rooted in the game mechanics. Players use a slash-command combination to control their avatar in the game. Thus, if the player types "/dance," her avatar will start dancing, while "/wave" will prompt the avatar to wave at other players and so on. Of course, such slash-command combinations are not unique to the game of WoW, but are used universally for programming purposes in other games and regular computer tasks. However, due to the forum space being populated by WoW players it is safe to assume that other users will read such slash-command remarks as a programming tool. Thus, the person posting the "/end thread" command wanted to "program" other users to stop responding to a thread,

to end it. The procedural remark "/discuss" could be used at the beginning of the thread by an original poster commanding other users to start the discussion process. In this instance the remark is not an example of avoidance behavior. However, if the user writes "/discuss" after introducing a new issue to a thread not related to the OP, such a remark gets coded as topic management.

The remark "/end rant" could also serve multiple procedural functions. It could be used with the intent to end the conversation entirely, just like an "/end thread" remark is used, or it could mean that the user is trying to manage the flow of the conversation and would like to stop the rant, argument or angry outburst, but would like for the original conversation to continue, which would also serve as a topic management technique.

The statements coded as *topic management* were the remarks used to change, maintain, or disengage from the original topic. For example, the comment "another one of those threads" was used to express lack of engagement and interest in the thread and its topic. Replies that did not correspond to an original post or comment and introduced, questioned or stated a new issue were also coded as topic management statements. The threads in which the topic shifted considerably in a different direction were more likely to get restarted with their own title or moved to a different category. For example, if the thread originally intended to pose questions or comments on some aspect of WoW, but the responses were off-topic, shifting in multiple directions, such a thread was most likely to be moved into the "off-topic" forum category.

3.2.2 Cooperation Category

The cooperation category was coded with a use of: (a) clarifying questions and statements, (b) sharing personal experiences, (c) description, (d) disclosure, (e) conciliatory remarks, and (e) the use of common ground. The first cooperative technique noted in the data was *clarifying.* Such remarks asked for a more detailed explanation and had been observed through statements like: "Does this make sense?", "Mind telling us why?", "What they mean is..." and "don't get me wrong I'm all for a new world event, as long as it doesn't faceroll [sic] the continent it takes place on." Not all clarifying questions and comments were coded as a cooperative strategy in the forum. Statements such as "I'm not sure what you are complaining about" and "I'm asking for advice on how to beat one, not some comment about how overpowered they are" were more likely to trigger negative reactions and lead to competitive conflict management behavior. Some clarifying questions were phrased as an ultimatum and contained competitive strategies such as name-calling, sarcasm, and questioning one's knowledge or skill (e.g. "How so? Tell me how to make it better or I shall know you as a troll, a fail one at that").

The postings that described one's own experience with the issue raised in the original post were coded as *shared personal examples.* Endemic to the forum's environment, sharing one's own experience is desired by other members. The game players who interact online are precisely interested in what happened to other players in a particular raid, dungeon or quest. Experience-sharing in the forum might be the most common way to learn about the techniques of WoW gameplay secondary to an actual

computer game engagement. Many threads originate from the user asking for the advice of other players, encouraging others to share their stories, experiences, or techniques. Statements like "Any help and tips are appreciated. I just want to enjoy the game and see it from a new perspective" and "If I am the only one that feels this way I understand, but if not please speak up" invite others to tell how they feel about a particular issue, answer questions, and share knowledge and tips on how to advance within the game.

Experience-sharing also functioned as a collaborative technique in the instances when one's own experience was used in order to establish credibility. In those cases players shared their stories, sometimes accompanied by links to screenshots (a snapshot of the game that preserves whatever was displayed on one's screen in a particular moment). In the thread "I just soloed H Utgarde Keep :O [sic]" (see Appendix #2) the OP boasts of having conquered a certain dungeon without anyone's help. In order to prove that the accomplishment did occur, the OP adds a link to a screenshot. Players use phrases like "IMO" (in my opinion) and "in my case" in order to emphasize that the statement or response in the posting is based on their opinion and/or personal experience. This technique defends responders from being blamed for a wrong reply or suggestion. In addition to describing an actual situation as part of experience-sharing, some users use the technique to simply state agreement with the other person such as: "I know the type of tank you are talking about, experienced them." The short remarks that reveal one's encounter (or lack of it) with similar issues have also been noted within this category such as: "I never run into this problem," "I like it, I play both WoW and Aion," and "I

say 'deeps.' It's like saying 'lawl.'" Sometimes statements of personal experience overlapped with the examples of disclosure or use of description.

Frequently, in order to argue a certain point, players used *description* technique. In this case they provided an explanation to why they were convinced towards one way or the other. The user Crymsin argued his (gender of the avatar, could be different in reality) point by stating:

> This system is in no way "unfair." What would be unfair is giving classes with multiple roles an advantage because not only are your queue times short when you're the tank, but then they'd also be short when you are damage. Also, pure damage classes would have to actually wait LONGER because they're getting cut in front of… (see Appendix #1 for game overview)

In this example, Crymsin uses an extensive explanation of what he considers unfair in the game. In order to validate his argument against allowing classes that perform multiple roles in the groups (i.e. heal, tank and DPS – see Appendix #1) to get in front of the line when grouping, Crymsin describes a possible situation from different angles, as a tank and as a healer. In this disagreement, just stating "this system is in no way 'unfair'" would most likely be challenged by the other user, and possibly spiral into a competitive dispute. However, through describing an issue Crymsin gives others an opportunity for critical challenge that will involve a back-up argument from the opponent, and not just a statement of disagreement. Some users draw a parallel between a previous chain of events and what is asked by the player. For example, in the thread "Patch 3.4." (see Appendix #2) the OP is inquiring about the release of a new patch (a downloadable

update for the game). Margamanthak (screen name) uses description to answer the OP's question: "since wrath [Wrath of the Lich King] was first announced halfway through BC, blizzard [sic] has touted that icecrown [sic] is the final raid of expansion, and every major content patch brings with it a [new] raid, so therefore, no new major content patch." His argument references the previous chain of events, explicitly concluding that there will be no new patch released. The use of description was coded as a cooperative tactic, since by using it the players invited others to view the issue the way they do.

Coded as *disclosure* were the statements in which the users did not just share their examples and experiences, but revealed something personal, including emotions, feelings, personal characteristics, etc. Disclosing something about oneself was used as an integrative technique to deal with conflicting situations and comments. It also allowed users to influence to some degree the views of others about themselves (e.g., "I'm not like that. I prefer having to have a skill to win and to have a chance"). Hence, in the comment where the user says that he or she "is not like that" the intention is to alter one's perception of the user.

A vivid example using the disclosure category was found in the thread "Too afraid to lfg [sic]. Which faction on Garrosh?" (see Appendix #2). Here Delenda shares with other forum users that she is afraid to group up with other people. World of Warcraft is a social game and one reaches the point when no advancement in the game can be accomplished without collaborating with other players, participating in dungeon and raid groups. Delenda confesses that she never grouped up with other players randomly, since so far she had received "a lot of freebie runs" (help from more

experienced players). She reveals that whenever offered to join a group, she logs off from her character and "runs away to a different toon" (another character). She is uncomfortable playing with others, since she heard many stories about how cruel some people are, and since she has "general nervousness of dealing with people." Delenda is asking others which faction (Alliance or Horde) is kinder, explicitly stating that success or popularity of a faction do not matter to her, merely how welcoming the environment is. Through disclosing her fears, Delenda hopes to get valuable suggestions from other users. Such an approach did yield cooperative behavior from other players, which was presented through invitations to join guilds (see Appendix #1), supportive comments from others, and suggestions on how to behave in the group in order to be treated respectfully.

Other disclosing statements were used as collaborative strategy when they revealed one's feelings ("I like you"), personal information ("I was away last week, and in a place where the internet is too fail [sic] for WoW..."), aspects of personality ("I'm currently struggling through a bad case of 'Yes man'") or even self-criticism ("I'm probably not the best Shaman around"). However, not all disclosure remarks were coded as cooperative. There were some instances when use of disclosure was merely a pretext to statements of disagreement ("I'm not usually the one to complain, but if says it's an ability to remove all impairing movement effects, I'm pretty sure being frozen in place is movement impairment") or criticism ("Now I'm not usually one to say this but… that was way too much reading for an idea that's really terribad [sic]").

The use of *conciliatory remarks* in the postings also served as a cooperative strategy. Those remarks were used as compromising statements, most of the time stated after a flaming comment. This after-conflict placement of conciliatory remarks gave them the function of peace-making: "It's just an idea, wherever it is lacking it can be patched" and "well my druid friend, it's called satire :)." This shows that after being challenged or criticized the user is choosing to cooperate with other responders, and is not going to continue the spiral of competitive conflict. Conciliatory statements were also made by a third party (not an OP and not a flame-thrower) in the disagreement. Consider the comment, "To the OP, be aware that the above is not the normal response you see on the WoW forums." In this example the poster tries to make peace, after someone else posted an offensive response. The attempt is made to explain to the OP that he/she should not focus on a single negative comment, and continue to compose discussion with others.

Conciliatory remarks were also used by someone accepting responsibility for their actions or comments. In those cases the user reconciled or revisited the original point of view, and took accountability for the posting: "I realized acopypaste [sic] thing, it was just an error" and "That's right. I shouldn't have to instruct anyone." Some conciliatory remarks had a stronger influence on the outcome of conversation than the others. In the case of a user accepting responsibility for a wrongful statement, conflict management behavior was more likely to shift from competition to cooperation. However, other conciliatory remarks did not always have a great impact on a thread flow. Short comments like "I doubt its fake," "I miss epic events," and "props to good DPS" simply

function as showing agreement with a particular issue; they did not influence the competitive outcome of the thread.

Another coding category representing cooperative behavior was *common ground.* This was commonly used to show support for one's actions and statements. The comment "Thank you. I feel like such a bad player when I pull threat" describes common ground between the user and OP. In this instance the user, just like one OP, feels bad when he pulls threat (the role that should be performed by a tank – see Appendix #1). Using the phrase "I feel" in the post could also be an example of disclosure category. However, in the case described above, the rules used for phrasing the entire post ("thank you" followed by explanation) are the reasons why the statement was coded as common ground not disclosure. By pointing out the commonality, a responder engages in a collaborative strategy, which places both players as equal, at least in one aspect of the game. Referring to common ground lets the players see that they are not alone in their experience. This becomes especially helpful if someone else has encountered the same problem and knows a solution, in combination with experience techniques.

3.2.3 Competition

The competition category was coded with the use of various confrontative remarks such as: (a) assigning derogatory characteristics with negative connotation, (b) rejection, (c) name-calling, (d) profanity, (e) personal criticism, (f) questioning one's knowledge or skills, (g) metaphor, (h) sarcasm, (i) prescription, and (j) variety of verbal tactics for making emphasis. Coded as *derogatory characteristics with negative*

connotation were statements that expressed a low opinion about the user or the thread. For example, the remark "I came here to make fun of troll, not to read a book" implies that the player is not satisfied with the thread, and particularly he or she has a low opinion about the length of original posts and replies. Phrases like "stop being cheap" and "expecting people to be a bit more intelligent with their choices" are examples of using derogatory characteristics with a negative connotation. The main function of such statements is to ridicule, demean and belittle others.

Coded as *rejection* were simple (i.e., not clarified) statements of disagreement or denial of what was said by others. Since frequently open rejection led to confrontative behavior, such statements were categorized as competitive conflict management strategies. Rejection statements were phrased with different levels of negativity that influenced the outcome of conflict. Thus, the statement "you're 100% wrong" was more likely to trigger competitive responses than the remarks of lesser impact: "loool [sic]. But sorry no," "Sorry. It's still a nerf" or "No thanks." Rejecting one's idea without an explanation elicits more negative behavior than rejection statements that provided some reasoning. For example, compare the statements: "No to playing in windowed mode, and no to having to buy a second monitor… And no, I'm not going to go buy another desk" to "You can't make heroics more difficult though. They're supposed to be entry level." The first example harshly rejects the proposed idea without justification. The author of the statement uses repetition of the word "no" which puts emphasis on an unmitigated denial. The second example also refuses an offered idea, however it contains a short

explanation for this refusal: "They're supposed to be entry level." Such attempts to justify one's rejection could be a step towards cooperation with the other side.

Through its World of Warcraft Community Forum Guidelines, Blizzard Entertainment (2010) discourages players from the use of inappropriate language, as well as vulgar and obscene words in the forum conversations. Such language is defined as statements that "bypass the mature language filter" and could include references to human body parts and their anatomic functions, making pornographic connections and viewed as objectionable by others (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010). Despite those guidelines, players still choose to use profane or unsuitable for the community language. Unsurprisingly remarks coded as *profane language* generally illustrate competitive conflict management style, and include swear and cuss words and sexual reference language. However, some sexual reference language could be viewed as flirting, in which case it is an example of cooperative behavior.

Of course open use of profane language in the forum gets noticed by the moderators, or flagged by other users fairly quickly, which leads to prompt removal of such postings. Thus, the users mask their profane language with different characters: "b5^&*#", "who the %@#! cares", "source or I call bull@#$%%", "F*** it." Special characters are used to conceal parts of the cuss word or to substitute it entirely. In the posting "to all of you people posting about the 'greatness' of TBC/Vanilla go %%!* yourself, F'ing rose colored glasses" the first swear word was entirely masked by the use of special characters ("%%!*") while the second cuss word still had the first letter and the ending, with an apostrophe used for substitution. Another way to make profane language

discreet was the use of acronyms, such as "gtfo" and "stfu," which stand for "get the fuck out" and "shut the fuck up." Those two acronyms seemed to be very popular in general discussion forums and their meaning or function was never questioned.

In addition to disguising profane language, some remarks used profanity openly. Since they remained in the thread for the two week observation period, it is safe to assume that those few instances of profane language use were not caught by moderators, and were never reported by other players. One could also assume that profane statements not filtered from the thread were examples of mild offensive language ("a pain in the ass," "don't give a crap about who's carrying who," "whooping your ass," "all of you totally swallow for $15"). No matter whether profane language was discreet, open, mild or strong, when used, it contributed more to the destructive conflictual nature of the discussion.

The coding category that often goes with inappropriate language use was *name-calling*. Like other competitive conflict management techniques, this strategy was used when the users intended to offend the other side, hurt their feelings, and emphasize dislike of a person or an idea. Most frequently name-calling was directed as an insult towards another user: "I think you are a troll," "you're an idiot," "you failure to launch loser," "moron." Some name-calling remarks were indirect; for example, the phrase "DPS is usually a bunch of morons" is not specifically directed at another person, but rather at the group of people who are DPS (damage per second) class. However, if placed after a question, statement or a comment made by a DPS player, such a remark could be viewed as an insult to this particular DPS player. Other indirect name-calling

examples included comments like: "People are such douche bags these days it is sickening" and "how dumb people are."

In some instances it was unclear whether the author of a name-calling remark referred to someone in particular, or to the group of people in general. For example, "ignorant, unlearned morons, who don't read the info about the game" could be used to criticize a specific person, or could also convey that there are many people who do not follow news about the game, and all of them are "ignorant" and "unlearned morons." In this case it is useful to point out another verbal tactic that added negativity to the post – the use of adjectives. If the author of the post just said "morons, who don't read the info about the game," the impact of the statement would have been much lower than specifying morons as "ignorant" and "unlearned." The use of adjectives and adverbs conjointly with the nouns would be coded as part of verbal tactics used by players to emphasize lack of agreement.

Name-calling disclaimers, such as "don't be a douche" and "stop being an idiot" were also illustrations of conversations spiraling into a conflict. Such comments were interpreted as not only an insult, but a command from the user, assuming power over those who were viewed as "idiots" and "douches." Thus, the competitive behavior triggered by such phrases was both confrontative and domineering. Calling someone a "troll" was viewed as an insult in this forum: "Obvious troll is obvious" and "yeah except it was the alliance who ganked [sic] and started it all…but nice try troll… next time why don't you post on your alliance toon chicken." As discussed earlier, trolling is an online

forum practice similar to flaming. It implies the practice of misleading others, and raises the issue of credibility.

Another coding category of confrontative remarks was the use of personal criticism together with questioning one's knowledge or skills. These two categories were coded separately, but very frequently overlapped with one another. *Personal criticism* was observed when the player, in providing feedback to others, criticized, and such criticism was not perceived as constructive. Thus, there were no useful suggestions given on how to improve, and the player was criticized personally. In a way it was not an idea or a question that received attention from the users, but the players themselves, their personalities, abilities, and/or knowledge. This is why the category of *questioning one's skill and knowledge* was adjoined to personal criticism of the players.

In the thread "You cannot ignore any more players" (see Appendix #2) the OP warns others that there seems to be a bug in the game. One's ignore list somehow gets linked to one's friends list with a combined maximum of fifty people. Thus, if one has forty two friends he or she can only ignore eight players before the message appears stating that one cannot ignore any more people. However, if one has fifty players on the friends list, the game will not let them ignore anyone, since somehow those two lists get linked. To her inquiry about why this is happening, the OP Aellia, received a response that "maybe you should take a look at yourself for a moment if you are really ignoring that many people, maybe the problem is you." Such a response is an example of personal criticism. Not only did it not answer Aellia's question of whether the system is bugged

or not and how to deal with it, the response was turned against her and criticized her personally for ignoring that many people.

Personal criticism puts blame on or ridicules a person instead of arguing an idea or providing a suggestion such as: "If you try, you won't make it though. Playing a pally has spoiled you," "If you're upset that you can be attacked on the ground on a PVP server, then you don't belong there," "People like you are the reason horde can't win anything anymore," and "It's even funnier coming from a rogue of all this." These comments are used to critique personalities, one's avatar, class, and other identity-related aspects. The last remark ("It's even funnier coming from a rogue of all this") implies that one's class (rogue) is being ridiculed. This comment was a reply to a rogue user saying that everything was handed on a platter to death knights (DK) (see Appendix #2, "Why there no str [sic] ashen verdict ring?"). The death knights class is generally the most powerful in the current version of the game, but before this expansion the rogue class was considered the most powerful. Thus when a rogue made a comment about DK (Death Knights) being overpowered it was immediately turned against him and Akiko (a rogue who posted a comment) was personally criticized for his class.

Criticizing and questioning one's skills or knowledge was also a popular flaming technique. Comments like "How much did it cost u [sic] on Ebay?" and "You're coming from FFXI and having a hard time? Were you carried in FFXI or what?" assume that one had not advanced their character on their own, but rather paid someone to do it or received assistance from others. In the case of questioned knowledge, not only are one's skills suspected, but also the value of his or her opinion. In the comment "the majority of

arena population are so incapable of understanding the concept of 'strategy'" one not only questions the ability of arena population to strategize, but also discards further comments from representatives of this arena population due to the lack of skills and knowledge.

The use of metaphorical language was prominent on WoW forums. Of course, such language was not always an example of competitive behavior, but when used with negative connotation, *metaphors* were coded as strategies for competition. Metaphors are used to draw comparison between two things (e.g. "The faction had about as much depth as a puddle in the first game," "I wanna [sic] feel like a special flower too," "made them weep like mama's little boy"). In such instances the author of the post implemented symbolic comparison of an object, feeling or action in order to accentuate it. In the first example the author described a faction as shallow, since it had "as much depth as puddle." Referring to a faction as shallow, the user implies popular myth of Horde faction as forces of evil and Alliance as forces of good. The use of metaphorical language in this and other examples made the remark more dramatic and interesting.

In the thread "lvling [sic], all quests are too high" (see Appendix #2) the OP is asking advice on where to find the easy quests (Appendix #1) for a new player in a particular area. One of the comments says that a particular area is full of red (harder) quests, describing it "like the color red threw up, slipped, cut itself, and bled to death on that island." The user could have simply said that the place had many red quests; however that would not have the same effect on the OP and other players as the comment with metaphorical language. Metaphors used as insulting comments and name-calling

also lead to competitive conflict management styles: "dps [sic] prima donnas," "nostalgia trippers," "second rate citizens," "cancer sucking leeches," and so on.

Humor is a good collaborative strategy, but when used with negative connotation it turns into sarcasm. The use of *sarcasm* was one of the most frequent coding categories for competitive behavior. Sarcastic comments were used by players to make fun of other players and were phrased with wit, irony, and disdain. Some sarcastic comments were used to make mockery and critique of others: "with a maturity level in this game school is needed, forget individual instruction" and "stop visiting pr0n [sic] sites."

Many comments could be perceived in both negative and positive ways, but based on the context, a sarcastic undertone was apparent. In the thread "Which horde race for a rogue?" (see Appendix #2) an OP would like to know which talent he should develop with his rogue class character. However, he never received a direct response; the users got wrapped up in posting irrelevant comments and shifting topic. In order to express dissatisfaction with this turn of events the OP wrote "I'm glad you guys are so helpful." Of course the statement was viewed as sarcastic, since the users knew they did not provide helpful comments. The competitive conflict technique of the OP's sarcastic statement was challenged by conciliatory remark of Bunnyslicer:

> In all honesty OP, they were very helpful because they gave answers to your question. No need for sarcasm. You should have been more specific in your question if you wanted these fine people to answer your question in a more detailed manner.

However, the use of sarcasm led the conversation to take a competitive undertone.

Bunnyslicer not only acknowledged that OP's statement was in fact sarcasm ("No need for sarcasm"), he also gave an explanation of why the OP did not receive an anticipated response. What is more interesting, Bunnyslicer's response to OP's comment could also potentially be viewed as a sarcastic comment ("these fine people").

The technique of pointing out a particular phrase or word in the post and mocking it using sarcastic comments seemed to be prominent in the forums. In the case when the user made a spelling or grammatical mistake, those mistakes were pointed out in rather a mocking way. In one of the threads the user made a grammatical mistake of repeating the same word twice: "No one was removed from the group. #2 DPS and 28% heals probably [sic] was probably sufficient to keep me I'm guessing." One of the responses to this comment read: "You're probably probably [sic] right." The response was a way to mock the user who made a mistake without saying it directly. Even though indirect, the intention of such sarcastic remarks is to make fun of the other users, a strategy far from cooperation and avoidance.

Forums provide users with an excellent opportunity to build their responses and comments based on what was said previously. Some view forum conversation as a direct response to the OP's question, suggestion or comment. However, forum conversation is in many ways similar to a conversation with a large (or small) group of people. Since every user has the ability to view and respond to prior replies and not just the original post, many replies are sequential in nature, therefore such conversation is called a thread. The same idea applies to the use of sarcasm in the thread. The users of the forum build their sarcastic responses upon other statements. For example, in the thread "please,

PLEASE, check your spell ranks!" the OP starts out by saying that at least 20% of people had not been using their highest ranking spells in the battlegrounds (see Appendix #1). The very first reply to this thread reads "89.4% of statistics are made up." The sarcasm of the comment is exemplified a few posts later with the remark "50% of the people on these forums always call it 'duel spec.'" The thread ends with a comment "110% of people who use the '% of statistics are made up' line are new and original." One can see that sarcasm in this thread has been carried throughout. However, in this particular example the use of sarcasm did not lead to disagreement. On the contrary, such shared sarcasm created common ground for the users and the thread ended in cooperation.

Another coding category for competitive behavior was the use of prescription. *Prescription* was viewed as statements that instructed solutions rather than provided constructive feedback. In many cases those solutions indeed were ways to solve the problem described by the OP. However the way prescription statements were phrased gave them a negative character and a shift towards confrontative strategies: "Really. Read the post. Ignore the avatar," "Do harder raids or do heroics naked," "Just stop. You aren't going to survive. Just go stand next to the boss and die," "if you can't pull that 3k on every fight, then maybe it's time to work more on your main, and less on your alts." The instructive tone of prescription statements made it seem like the person prescribing had power over those whom the statements were directed at. In one of the threads a user was asking other members about an MMORPG similar to WoW- Aion. The OP wanted to know what the game was like and whether it was comparable to WoW. One of the responses was "go play it and find out what its [sic] like." Such a response

surely provides an answer to the original question, but the prescriptive style of the response made the comment confrontative and negative in general.

The last coding category for competitive behavior was the use of *verbal tactics*. Those included as mentioned earlier, adjectives and adverbs, typing in all capital letters, and bolding or italicizing. The purpose of all verbal tactics was to emphasize a particular word, phrase or post. Such emphasis was viewed as competitive, since the party that used these verbal tactics was more interested in imposing his/her point of view on others than listening for what others have to say. Adjectives and adverbs were used to depict something more vividly. Consider the example "ridiculously, laughably and insanely easy to make." Such phrasing lets the reader know that an item was not simply "easy to make," but "ridiculously, laughably, and insanely" easy. The use of capital letters is widely regarded as "shouting" in CMC. In the post "All I read was BAAAAAAAAAWWWWWW I'M STILL MAD THAT DK'S [sic] WERE ON TOP FOR THE FIRST SEASON OF WRATH IN ARENA!!! BAAAAAWWWW!" the user types in all capital letters to transfer shouting into written format. Bolding and italicizing is another commonly used CMC feature that puts emphasis on a particular phrase or word. The goal of such verbal tactics is to show a particular part of a post that looks visually different (bold or italicized) from the rest of the post. Thus, the part that stands out is supposed to draw more attention and be particularly important in the comment.

Despite Deutsch's (1949) belief that cooperative tactics will lead to collaboration between interactants, and competitive tactics will result into conflict escalation, the findings of my study were different. Coded for overall outcome, conversations that

contained elements of conflict did not follow the presumed model of a certain conflict management behavior based on the avoidance, cooperation or competition tactics used in the interaction. Thus, the use of procedural remarks or topic management statements (code of avoidance behavior) did not always forecast an avoidance of conflict outcome. The cooperative tactics (clarifying questions and statements, sharing personal experience, description, disclosure, conciliatory remarks, and common ground) did not necessarily lead to agreement among users at the end of the thread. The same results were observed for competitive tactics (derogatory characteristics with negative connotation, rejection, name-calling, profanity, personal criticism, questioning one's knowledge or skills, metaphor, sarcasm, prescription, and emphasizing verbal tactics). The number and intensity of confrontative remarks did not serve as a predictor to conflict escalation.

3.3 Rules and Resources of Community

Analyzing conflicting interactions enabled the researcher to answer RQ3: what rules and resources shape World of Warcraft community. The structure of the forum was examined with the use of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). As mentioned earlier, structuration theory describes human action, in this case online interaction, as the process of drawing from rules and resources which produces an action, simultaneously reproducing guidelines for future interaction. Littlejohn (2002) outlined two ways in which structures relate to one another. They can mediate or contradict one another. In the first case "the production of one structure is accomplished by producing another" (p. 153). For example, the forum users produce a communication network, but in doing so they establish individual roles. The second alternative is that structures relate through

contradiction. This happens when "the production of one structure requires the establishment of another structure that undermines the first one" (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 153). The second example of structural relationships was especially apparent in the study. Since contradictions in structures lead to conflict, and conflicting conversations were the ones analyzed in the study, several of these contradicting structures were highlighted. It is important to remember that according to Giddens structures are intervened with one another. They formulate larger structures, they mediate other structures and, in the case when they contradict each other, they are subject to modification.

3.3.1 Contradicting Structures

The main two contradicting structures were the game of WoW and the official forum observed. The forum has been allocated as an additional resource to the players to discuss issues of game play, ask questions, share experiences, communicate with others, and get to know other players. Such a forum as a social structure is constrained by another structure – the game of WoW itself. Even though anyone can read postings on the forum, only those who have WoW account can reply to and originate the posts. Thus, the ability to post on the observed forum is constrained by the game play itself. The structure of the game is also constraining, since it does not allow players to engage into the same discussion as the forum does. The game chat is mostly used by players asking for help with quests, sending notifications to others (e.g., warning that the enemy is close) and engaging into small talk (e.g., simple questions, item trade, role play conversations).

Forum allows players from different guilds, factions and servers (see Appendix #3) communicate with each other, thus bridging the social capital.

3.3.2 Anonymity

Anonymity was sought through the manipulation of players' personae. The structure of the game and forum posits the duality of one's avatar and real identity. Taking Giddens' approach, it could be noted that one's real persona is in one way or another influenced by one's created avatar and the other way around. The more thorough explanation of one's representation of self and impression management could be found in the work of Goffman (1959). For the purpose of this paper, the focus was on the constraining relationships between one's avatar and real identity. The anonymity feature of CMC (Kahai, 2009; Lee, 2008) allows those who post in the forums to remain relatively unidentified. However, since one's postings are linked to one's WoW account the avatar does not remain fully anonymous. It is important to mention here that a single WoW account could have as many as fifty avatars. This means that one player could create, explore, play and post on forums under multiple avatars. Other forum users are only able to see a single avatar's profile at a time, which reveals such identifiable information as one's armory, guild, faction, and server. Every player has at least one main character; many also choose to have additional avatars, referred to as alts (alternate character) or toons (originated from the word "cartoon," refers to an avatar being fictional). While participating in the forum conversation, the player can choose which avatar he or she would like to post as. Again, only that avatar's identifiable information is available to other users.

The practice of posting under alt one was very popular in the observed forum. Some players choose to create an alternative character for forum postings instead of interacting under their main avatar, thus separating their forum persona from their character identity. This identity manipulation provides players with relative protection in the sense of anonymity. Rains (2007) believes that the anonymity feature of CMC results in more honest opinions from group members, reduces fear of being ridiculed, and creates an environment safe for group discussion.

Not only did players seek anonymity, they sometimes used this resource to enable negative behaviors. As anonymity provided above, trolling is a practice similar to flaming, when the user of the forum intentionally posts misleading information in order to spark an argument (Herring et al., 2002). Uninhibited behavior in the forum, such as trolling or flaming, could be a product of forum's structure. In the particular community, trolling practices have not been favored by users, they contradict community expectations. When structures contradict or conflict with one another, system calls for change. The statement "I would ask the folks that maintain our forums to take action, and enforce our spam/trolling rules" shows that community would like to change trolling practice. However, by discussing it they reinforce trolling practice in the forum. For example, in the thread "Tanking in PvP" (see Appendix #2) Nuba makes a sarcastic comment "general section of WoW forums are known as the 'Trolling Forums.'" This remark was intended as a conciliation to the OP, who received many negative responses. Moreover, the comment was an indirect insult to the trolls and other users in the thread. Nuba might have intended to ridicule trolling practices by stating that the general forums

are known as trolling forums, however by making that comment she also reinforced the notion that general forums are trolling forums.

3.3.3 Credibility

The concept of identification seemed to be of great importance to the forum users, and was connected to credibility. In the thread "Catch 22," (see Appendix #2) the OP posted a question about gear score. Gear score refers to a summative score of one's in-game items that in a way represent one's experience (the player with the highest gear score has probably killed the most difficult monsters in the game). In this example, the OP posts a question using a level one character. An interesting dynamic is observed in this thread when the forum users reply not to the question posted, but to who posted the question. Just like in a face-to-face conversation, people take other cues into consideration when communicating (e.g., one's appearance, gestures, facial expression, posture, tone of speech and expressiveness) in online forum discussions, players are looking beyond the posted question. Thus, one of the replies reads: "Sheesh, only level 1 and already worried about gear." This comment shows that the responding user was replying to the OP's avatar (level one character), not the question in itself. Further in the thread the similar comment - "Don't worry little L1 alt, you have at least 79 levels of content to go before you ever hear anyone say 'gear score'" - triggers the discussion of whether forum users should respond to a question posted or read between the lines, and take into consideration identifiable features such as the level of one's character, hence experience in the game.

Indeed the structure of the game is such that level one is the lowest character in the game, but that does not necessarily mean that the individual playing that level one is the least experienced. As discussed earlier, one can start a new character after he or she leveled their main character. Such access to multiple avatars (resource) contradicts the rule that the lowest level character (alt 1) is the least experienced and is just starting out the gaming process. The contradicting relationship between those two structures bring change to the way forum users respond to a level one asking a question about something that should be a concern of a higher level character. In this case the change is represented with questioning the OP's credibility, by stating: "the situation you describe never actually happens" and "My point still stands. The situation described by OP cannot happen."

A second indicator of credibility drew upon rules used in the larger social system. In many situations a lack of grammar and spelling knowledge took away from the writer's credibility and lead to confrontative remarks, specifically sarcastic statements and personal criticism. Those who failed to write in coherent English language were called out on it. In fact this was one of the most frequently used rules in the observed forum - the use of correct grammar and spelling in the thread.

In the thread "Kara Nubs" (see Appendix #2), discussing old raid instances, the OP made several spelling mistakes and was criticized for that. Such lack of compliance with socially learned rule of error free writing led the OP to encounter personal criticism in a comment: "meh, you try and sound all professional and then go on a nerdrange [sic], you're going to get called on." In this thread, the issue of credibility escalated further

with the OP making a counter argument: "pointing out a spelling mistake as a valid argument is the same as me saying your input is invalid as a level 1 for level 1s do not raid." Here again the level of one's character contradicts the level of knowledge. Due to the structure of the game, only the players who spend some amount of time playing the game can perform certain actions, such as raiding (grouping up with other players to kill monsters in the game). Since the user who originally challenged the OP's credibility posted the comment under the level one profile, she was counter-challenged with the issue of credibility - lack of experience.

3.3.4 Adapting to the Rules

An observed forum did not have a character or word count limitation for a single post. Thus, the length of the comment is fully manipulated by the user. Despite the fact that the structure of the forum allows for lengthy messages, they were not welcomed by the community. Multiple threads with lengthy comments received the TLDR (too long did not read) critique from others. The players explicitly stated that the length of the post was not acceptable, and prevented them from reading the statement: "I would have read what you wrote but it was too hard on the eyes." This resistance to lengthy postings has created an interesting change. In the thread "AFK on my Flying Mount in Cataclysm" an OP Coldbear summarizes his post at the very beginning, labeling the paragraph "TLDR." This shows that Coldbear knew that his posting was considered long, but he was interested in receiving feedback from others. He summarized the main question for those who were not interested in reading an entire post. In this case the forum rule of keeping

posts relatively short was compromised by Coldbear, but he created a change in the thread by providing a summary for TLDR convenience.

3.3.5 Group Norms through Interaction

Studying group norms in CMC, Postmes, Spears and Lea (2000) use a social construction theoretical viewpoint to explain how norms are maintained among group members online. Their belief that such norms are formulated through interaction, which is "both the source of norms and the place to observe them at work" (p. 346) is consistent with Poole's (1983) adaptive structuration approach. In the General Discussion forum users produced and reproduced their group norms through explicitly stating and implicitly following them. The data revealed several threads in which the users discussed normative rules that govern group members' behavior (Kenneth, 2006). In the thread "Dear Tanks, Healers and DPS" (see Appendix #2) Fairadey explicitly states the rules for communicating in WoW groups:

> Say hello to start. Say thank you at the end. . .Let's show new players some respect by actually either not saying anything or being helpful in a kind matter. . . Give people time to loot and skin and herb and mine. If you don't, then don't complain about the damage someone has done or if you don't get heals. When you join a random group, you have to realize it's no longer all about you, no matter what your role is. . . If there is a specific play style you prefer, form premade groups; when you get random players, you can't expect them to confirm to your idea of whet an instance run should be. . .

Even though Fairadey's phrasing could be perceived as "prescription" by some, most of the users agreed with the stated rules. The thread continued with other members adding to the discussion on importance of following the norms for effective communication in groups, some members also shared personal stories and provided examples of what happened when those norms were not followed (i.e. players were vote kicked from the instance groups).

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Conclusions

Through viewing WoW forums as structures, the author was able to find out more about the nature of online discussions, examine a virtual community, its rules and resources, analyze conversations that contain element of conflict, and learn verbal tactics used for communicating avoidance, cooperation and competition. Even though the outcome of online forum discussions that contain elements of conflict could not be foreseen through the use of avoidance, cooperation or competition verbal tactics, an interesting observation could be made about the structure of the forum and the game of WoW itself. The duality of structure of the WoW forum lays in the notion that the verbal tactics used in interactions are both the medium and the outcome of the discussions.

4.1.1 Conclusion One

With the team environment of MMORPGs, forum users predominately develop cooperative outcomes to conflictual interaction. When looking at outcomes of the conflictual interaction overall, 65% were cooperative. The threads could also end with competition or avoidance. Exploration of the verbal tactics showed that the majority of the competitive interactions (see Sillars, 1980a; rejection, personal criticism, sarcasm) ended with the users working out their differences. This clearly contrasts to Deutsch's (1949) proposition that competitive tactics will result in an escalation of the conflict. Perhaps it is that the forum members work together to play this game and that creates a

strong motivation to work things out in the forum interaction, maintaining a collaborative/positive environment.

4.1.2 Conclusion Two

In the General Discussion forum certain verbal tactics of conflict management were produced and reproduced through members' interactions with each other. The cooperation, competition, or avoidance conflict management behaviors were products of consistencies in forum discussions. For example, the use of slash-command remark (/end thread, /discuss-coded as procedural remarks) was unique to a particular forum, and was consistently used by members. Such frequent use of slash-command remark and the shared meaning in the particular community served as a recipe for future interactions. The symbolic use of the procedural remark was not only deeply embedded in the gameplay of WoW, but had its significance in the WoW forums – it was dual in nature. Similar to Postmes, Spears and Lea's (2000) study on group norms in CMC, the consistent use of particular verbal tactics was "both the source [...] and place to observe them at work" (p. 346).

4.1.3 Conclusion Three

Players effectively use resources to adapt to or manipulate the rules in the forum environment. Consistent with Giddens's (1984) view of an actor as a person in charge of his/her actions, the players had some degree of freedom to act on their own will. It appears that they chose to adapt to or contradict the rule for personal or community reasons.

Blizzard Entertainment (2010) encouraged all forum users to read and comply with World of Warcraft Community Forum Guidelines, but those guidelines did not become normative rules in the forum until they were produced and reproduced within the structure. Hence, each actor personally had to decide on whether he or she was willing to follow an explicitly stated rule, such as "no flaming" (see Appendix #2, "World Event: The Well of Despair"). Since the anonymity feature (resource) allowed forum members to "get away" with breaking the rule some player's chose to engage into flaming practice. Since the community did not approve of flaming, many users adapted to this rule in their interactions. Forum users did not just state that flaming was not tolerable in that environment (explicitly stated rule), they also reproduced this notion by "punishing" or stating dissatisfaction with those who continued flaming practice (implicitly practiced rule). Over time General Discussion group members were expected to experience behavioral change (i.e. stop flaming).

4.2 Limitations and Future Research

The use of content analysis as a research method has both strengths and weaknesses. The benefit of this method is that it allowed the researcher to become a removed observer. Forum users were not aware that they were being studied. The computer medium provided for unobstructed access to data. Lack of participant awareness was viewed as an advantage in this project. Unlike in observer ethnography, survey research or interviewing, the participants could not alter their behavior due to the fact that they were being observed.

Analyzing forum discussions as computer mediated is also a strength of the study. Living in times of rapid technological development, it is important to study the relatively new communication media that are slowly becoming preferred ways of communicating with others. Verbal tactics that were recognized as examples of avoidance, cooperation and competition conflict management style should be considered by other researchers who are interested in examining expression of trolling, flaming and conflicting behavior online. The theoretical framework used to examine the structure of online forum could serve as an alternative view to popular social constructionism and interpretivism research contexture.

As with any content analysis study, reliability and validity could be both strength and weakness. The validity of the chosen research method has been discussed by Krippendorff (2004), who emphasizes that content analysis "is concerned with bodies of text that are meaningful in relation to a chosen context" (p. 318). The context of the WoW community was important in this study. The verbal tactics used to express avoidance, cooperation or competition conflict management styles are indivisible from the context they were used in. Thus, the validity of the context analysis of the WoW forum can only be assessed in that particular context. Reliability of the study has been exemplified in a few ways. First, several community insiders (regular WoW players) were asked to code certain massages within the thread as examples of avoidance, cooperation or competition. This interrator reliability check ensured that the researcher, being a non-player, did not miscode a statement due to its game context. Another reliability check was performed by community outsider, who was able to categorize

conflict management style used in the thread without going in much depth of game mechanics.

The major limitation of this study is the lack of reassurance that the researcher, and individuals who performed interrator check, interpreted and coded written statements in the way the user intended them. In researcher's defense, there is no accurate way to learn about one's intentions. Analyzing the forum's content (structure, rules and resources) as well as responses and feedback from other users provided support for reliable interpretation of one's statement.

Based on the limitations discussed above, future studies should implement a different research method for data gathering and analysis. It would be interesting to see how WoW players view themselves and others in online forums, and whether that perception changes their conflict management behavior online. As an alternative to content analysis method, one could interview regular WoW forum users, conduct questionnaires and run statistical testing. Comparing the results from the following study to similar studies that utilize different research methods is one way to increase validity and reliability of the research project.

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Appendix #1: Game Overview

World of Warcraft (WoW) is a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG) manufactured by Blizzard. In this world there are two factions that are always at war with each other: the Horde and the Alliance. Within the two factions a player can choose between ten distinct races, in accordance with the chosen faction (*Alliance:* Draenei, Dwarves, Gnomes, Humans, or Night Elves; and *Horde:* Blood Elves, Orcs, Tauren, Trolls, or Undead). The initial entrance to WoW grants the player a limited number of abilities, based on the chosen class: Death Kight, Druid, Hunter, Mage, Paladin, Priest, Rogue, Shaman, Warlock, or Warrior. The players can also engage in multiple professions, as well as build up their talents

The player starts out at level one and progresses within the game (levels up) by questing. Questing is comprised of talking to designated non-playing characters (NPCs) and receiving different tasks from them. The quests varies from killing monsters or enemies to finding a certain item hidden in a town or even delivering items or resources to another NPC, which in turn will start another quest. This process is known as a quest chain. The completion of a quest rewards the player with experience, which helps in leveling one's character, along with gaining gold, gear and statistics (i.e. stats). If a quest chain is too hard or overwhelming one can look for a party – other players who are interested in completing the same quests and are willing to receive and provide assistance to others. A party of approximately five players is easily formulated by posting "looking

for group" (LFG) in the game's chat channels. The party with ten, twenty five or forty players is called a raid.

As with any game, harder challenges lead to better rewards. Those rewards could be gained by fighting in dungeons. A dungeon is a maze where the monsters have stronger abilities, higher health and drop the best loot (reward for killing a boss) called epics. An epic piece of gear has higher stats like stamina (health), intellect (resource of magical power used by castor classes, also known as mana), higher armor, and higher attack power. Epic gear can also increase certain ability based on one's class.

The preferred method of raiding a dungeon is by working together as a group. In this case each player takes on a certain role, in accordance with their avatar's class. The three main roles in a dungeon are tanking, healing and damage per second (DPS). A tank is commonly well armored, possesses the highest health (stamina) and is frequently viewed as the leader of the group. The player who performs the role of a tank receives the majority of hits from the monsters or mobs. A tank's role is to absorb and direct all of the damage done by monsters on him/herself. Essentially their main task is to control damage. Four out of ten classes are capable of performing tanking role.

Damage per second is the highest amount of damage one can do based on the talent specialization that is allow within specific class. Those who perform DPS roles in the group generally let the tank attack the enemy first and then engage into attack in order to help kill the enemy with their high damaging abilities. All ten classes can DPS in the dungeon.

The healer's sole purpose is to make sure that party members don't die. This is accomplished by casting spells that absorb damage or regenerate lost health. Hypothetically, if everybody in the group performs assigned tasks and nothing else goes wrong, tanks would be the only ones in need of healing.

A quick way to find players for dungeon groups is to ask one's guild members for help. A guild is a relatively permanent fellowship that shares the same name and crest, and has similar interests or goals within the game. The guild's hierarchy is based on a ranking system with guild leader assuming the highest status in the guild, closely followed by officers.

Besides questing and dungeon raids, a player can also enter battlegrounds. A battleground is where the two factions fight against each other in series of mini-games, such as capturing the flag, or controlling opposite faction's base for a longer period of time. This environment is a player vs. player (PvP) setting, while dungeons and questing are considered a player vs. environment (PvE) setting.

Appendix #2: Data Summary

The tables include summary of the context in the particular thread and examples of coding categories that were present in that thread. All quotes were taken directly from the threads without editing punctuation, grammar or spelling.

Avoidance

1.	**In-game browser** - not much of conflict - received responses to the issue interested - topic shifted	• derogatory characteristic with negative connotation: "stop being cheap" • rejection: "No to playing in windowed mode, and no to having to buy a second monitor… And no, I'm not going to go buy another.." • metaphor: "massive security hole for the game" • conciliatory remark: "Very cool. Many kudos to you, sir/ma'am"
2.	**So, we don't get an explanation for (ICC)** - discussing lore - outcome of the thread is not clear	• prescription: "stop whining and overthinking it" • procedural remark: "/end thread" • conciliatory remark: "or maybe I am thinking of someone else" • "Who are you calling a moron?" " Me"
3.	**Pre-TBC Raiding Guild** - guild recruitment - multiple updates on recruiting, lack of interest from others	• questioning one's gaming skills: "I take it you never played vanilla" • derogative characteristic with negative connotation: "no sane person" • criticism from others • repetition: "trash of MC, trash of BWL, and super trash of"
4.	**I need a good name** - searching for a name that will piss people off -ended thread abruptly	• sarcasm: "add a couple more ols to your own name" • procedural remark: "/thread"

5.	**WoW Magazine/Future US Scamming**
	-sharing personal experience with WoW
		• strong feelings: "now I am frustrated"
		• TLDR:
		  ○ "wall of text"
		  ○ "learn to use Enter/Return button"

	Magazine not providing good customer service - problem with updating shipping address -TLDR - thread died out due to no clear formulated question	○ "would have read… too hard on the eyes" • looking for understanding: "put yourself in my shoes, how would you feel?"

Cooperation

6.	**Just got hacked..** - OP is quitting WoW due to getting hacked and losing gear - encouragement from others to stay and contact Blizzard in order to return gear	• sarcasm: "stop visiting pr0n sites" • conciliatory remark: "Let's not go too far here"
7.	**Enforce the spam/trolling rules suggestion** - member complaining on troll posts - given a solution - troll posts were removed	• rejection: "And yet, doing so will not bring about the changes you seek" • conciliatory remark: "I for one am very happy"
8.	**So, still no regular green drake mount** - OP did not receive the mount he wanted yet - others share their experience	• clarifying: "His use of the word 'regular' here indicates 'non-proto.' He's complaining about the lack of rideable descendants of Ysera, not the drop rate." • profanity: "b5^&*#" • sharing personal opinion: "I'm not sure you'd want to ride a non-proto green drake.." • use of humor: "All the green drakes suffered a horrible accident during the filming of 'Greek Drakes and Ham'"
9.	**"You cannot ignore any more players"** - ignore list linked to friends list and allows 50 max	• procedural comments: "Let me know if that helped ya" • IMO: "I think this addon just hides them from chat" • personal criticism: "first maybe you should

	- discussing bug and possible solutions	take a look at yourself for a moment if you are really ignoring that many people, maybe the problem is you" • conciliatory remark: "yes a very valid point"
10.	**I see what you did there, Blizzard** - OP believes that Blizzard ripped off WoW from another game Chrono Trigger - challenged due to the lack of knowledge about the other game	• prescription: "get it right, or don't quote Chrono Trigger again" • bolding: "**dark ages, middle ages**" • conciliatory remark: "..you are correct, there isn't a link between CT and WoW"
11.	**Catch 22** - Alt1 question about gearscore - needs higher gearscore for instances, in order to get into instances need high gear score - response to the avatar, not a question - reference to trolling	• avatar related comment: o "Sheesh, only level 1 and already worried about gear" o "Don't worry little L1 alt, you have at least 79 levels .." • assumption: "Maybe.. just maybe.. they are talking about their level 80 main…" • trolling reference: "..and since this forum is full of trolls that love to point out flaws in gear.." • prescription: "Really. Read the post. Ignore the avatar." • clarifying question: "Oh? Tell us a story Uncle Erin." • sarcasm: "Did the bad man ask for a higher gear score than the instance requires" • bold, italics: "***form your own groups***" • sarcasm: "Maybe, just maybe, I was making a little joke." • metaphor: "Pull the stick out before poisoning the pen" • concession: "I'm a pompous jackass at times"
12.	**Cataclysm and flying in old Azeroth** - OP asks upfront to keep replies in the thread civil	• procedural remark: "and honestly, if you don't want this thread locked like the last one, then remove .." • all caps: o "THAT" o "I'd like ny PVP ON A PVP SERVER BACK< PLEASE."

		• personal criticism: "If you're upset that you can be attacked on the ground on a PVP server, then you don't belong there, so no."
13.	**Facebook app** - discussion about WoW application on Facebook that can track achievements - one member did not want to associate his WoW alt with his real life	• rejection: "World of Warcraft isn't a facebook game" • conciliatory remark: "I understand that . It was just a funny thought.." • name-calling: "Don't be a douche.."

14.	**Damn you damage meters**
	- sharing personal negative experience with damage meters
	- support from other members
	- everyone learned something new, thus coming to agreement
		• profanity: "who the %@#! cares"
		• statement of agreement: "I couldn't agree more"
		• conciliatory remark:
		  ○ "Of course I don't know the full situation"
		  ○ "Well it's easy to get confused"
		  ○ "Yay! We all learned something today!"
		• accepting responsibility:
		  ○ "I'll cop to being an ignorant dumbass and not looking at things closer."
		  ○ "My apologies"
		• prescription: "Go back and yell at the mages"
		• metaphor: "cosmic justice"
		• disclosure: "I like you"

15.	**To all you ret paladins out there**
	- the issue of players que in as tank and proceed as DPS
	- personal examples and differences in opinions discussed
		• personal criticism: "someone sure is biased"
		• sharing personal experience: "I never run into this problem"
		• prescription: "Just don't check what talent and gear your pally healer has!"
		• IMO:
		  ○ "I don't think I'd care as long as the heroic in question.."
		  ○ "I don't care as long as you can beat my threat."
		• metaphor: "I'd probably be too busy having a heart attack to click ready"

16.	**That Friend…** - OP's real life friend acts indecent in WoW -affect of anonymity discussed -trolling reference -questioning one's identity	• disclosure: "I'm currently struggling through a bad case of 'Yes man'" • clarifying question: "Is this really a friend of yours or are you just venting?" • name-calling: "I think you are a troll" • conciliatory remark: "Sadly, I wish I was trolling. But nope, this is all one person"
17.	**DK Tanks need some love** - argument on whether DK tanks are still overpowered, or are in the need of buffs - definition of "nerf" - members agreeing that it is hard to heal DK tanks, thus they do need some buffs	• rejection: o "DK's are still overpowered" o "DKs don't need love they need an overhaul" o "Sorry. It's still a nerf" • definition statement: "Nerf-A change that has a negative impact on a class or race" • personal criticism: "Please don't argue slang. It's really, really stupid" • statement of agreement: o "I agree from my Resto Shaman's perspective." o "DK tanks seriously need some buffs."
18.	**Duel-Specialization? For PVP and PVE?** - commenting on misspelled words - asking for blues to respond	• pointing out misspelling: o "DUAL" o "As long as people don't spell it 'Qued" • all caps: "GAH BLIZZARD RESPOND PLZZ.." • conciliatory remark: "SORRY FOR MISSPELLINGS"
19.	**Aion online** - discussing another MMO -WoW competitor or not? -asking for credible source	• sarcasm: "Well, looking at these dismal and deserted forums while waiting in the middle of Undercity with no one else in sight" • prescription: o "Go play it and find out what its like" o "Log in to a random server and watch a tumbleweed go by" • all caps: "HAHA" • sharing personal experience: "I like it, I play both WoW and Aion" • profanity: "source or I call bull@#$%%" • metaphor: "the game is hard to stomach"

20.	**Mana using DPS**
	- not enough time for healers to renew their mana
	- giving suggestions on how to communicate/act in a group
		• prescription:
		  ○ "So sit and drink and catch up when you're done"
		  ○ "Just get over it and move on to the next group."
		  ○ "Just don't run out of mana…"
		• metaphor:
		  ○ "tanks I've pugged with are prima donnas"
		  ○ "manajaculated"
		• sharing personal experiences

21.	**Too afraid to lfg, which faction on Garrosh?** - OP is not comfortable grouping with people - multiple suggestions on how to overcome fear of grouping, as well as communicate with others in the game in general - introverts vs. extroverts players	• disclosure • invitation: "You are quite welcome in our guild" • sharing personal experience • prescription: "Don't let it bother you. Start grouping with people." • metaphor: "I'd bite a bullet"

22.	**How to increase the amount of tanks**
	- minimum tanking requirements set by community
	-what is easier: to meet the requirements or change the community?
		• profanity: "a pain in the ass"
		• personal criticism:
		  ○ "Your name made my brain explode"
		  ○ "People won't look at you as the 'best' healer in the guild. But you also won't necessarily get kicked.."
		• rejection: "Not sure why people keep claiming there is a tank shortage. There really isn't one.."
		• sharing personal experiences
		• name-calling: "People are such douchebags these days it is sickening"
		• conciliatory remark: "True, but it is easier to provide gear than make the community a touch better"

23.	**Point of Hand of freedom … to FREE** - pally can't use hand of freedom on frost trap spell	• disclosure: "I'm not usually the one to complain.." • sarcasm • questioning one's knowledge: "the majority of arena population are so incapable of

	- discussing which spells count as movement impaired and which not
	-reference to OP's armory
		understanding the concept of 'strategy'.."
		• metaphor:
		  ○ "face-roll their way through arenas"
		  ○ "are having a massive e-gasm"
		• self-criticism/metaphor: "Yeah, that was a dumb comment fired from the hip"

24.	**Is there going to be maintenance tomorrow?** - discussing absence of maintenance the previous week	• confrontative remark: "How on earth would we know this now?" • disclosure: "I was away last week, and in a place where the internet is too fail for wow.." • all caps: "WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED?" • metaphor: "only a skeleton crew manning the ship"
25.	**Poison's WOTLK Review** - TLDR - some members believe that it is too late for the review and no one cares - OP received praise for extensive review - pointing out importance of credibility and solid argument	• rejection: "No one cares" • personal criticism: "You mean, besides various people (including you) that responded to this topic.." • threat: "We can ignore you and never see you in LFD ever again" • self-criticism: "I understand my review is long and intimidating.." • inviting opinions of others: "I'm curious to see a few reviews from the rest of the community☺" • positive feedback: "I think you wrote a very nice review.. I thought you backed up your opinions well, and your overall writing style is rather readable"
26.	**Warlock, Warrior, Shaman or Druid** - discussing benefits and drawbacks of multiple classes	• inviting opinions of others: "Any help and tips are appreciated" • personal criticism: "If you try, you won't make it though. Playing a pally has spoiled you" • all caps: "NO HEALING" • conciliatory remark: "Fair enough"
27.	**Raptor Mounts?** - OP saw a raptor mount would like to know how to get it - reference to the lack of knowledge	• questioning one's skills/sarcasm: "How much did it cost u on Ebay?" • conciliatory remark: "It probably was the one you're talking about"

28.	**Why? A Low Level tank Situation**
	- OP made a suggestion to a tank in a raid and got harsh response
	- inviting others to share their experiences with low level tanks
	- tanking, DPS and healer roles
		• metaphor:
		  ○ "a lack of retardation on their part"
		  ○ "warrior was a dps prima dona"
		• sharing personal experience: "I know the type of tank you are talking about, experienced them"
		• agreement: "Ah, yes, that definitely is a problem"
		• accepting responsibility: "I think our expectations are way out of line now"
		• name-calling:
		  ○ "tanks your level are idiots"
		  ○ "DPS is usually a bunch of morons"

29.	**Coming from FFX I**
	- tips to a newcomer
	- trolling reference
	- unwelcoming comment, challenged by other members
		• supporting/welcoming comments:
		  ○ "Welcome to wow"
		  ○ "I am in awe of anyone who could carve out a home for themselves in FFXI"
		• questioning one's skills: "You're coming from FFXI and having a hard time? Were you carried in FFXI or what?"
		• prescription: "if you want to keep playing, please avoid using forums. All you will find here in General, is trolls, fanboys, people with IQ's under 55, and what have at you."
		• conciliatory remarks: "To the OP, be aware that the above is not the normal response you see on the WoW forums"

30.	**Please, please, check your spell ranks**
	- mocking OP's use of statistics
	- pointing out spelling mistakes
		• sarcasm:
		  ○ "89.4% of statistics are made up"
		  ○ "50% of the people on these always call it 'duel spec'"
		  ○ "110% of people who use the '% of statistics are made up' line are new and original"
		• procedural comment: "/end of topic"
		• statement of agreement: "Yes, please do as the OP says"

31.	**lvling, all quests are too high** - newcomer asking suggestion on where to find yellow quests	• metaphor: "like the color red threw up, slipped, cut itself, and bled to death on that island" • sharing personal experience • statement of agreement: "I agree with the

	- spelling mistakes reference	poster who suggested..”

32.	**Heroic DPS expectations**
	- disagreement about the level of skill
		• metaphor: “dps god”
		• prescription:
		  ○ “So please get over yourselves and stop trying to act like you are some kind of dps god..”
		  ○ “if you can’t pull that 3k on every fight, then maybe it’s time to work more on your main, and less on your alts”
		• all caps: “EVERY SINGLE MOB”
		• confrontative remark: “Clever.. did you think that up all by yourself or did your mommy help you?”
		• sharing personal experience
		• sarcasm:
		  ○ “my mommy can do more dps than you”
		  ○ “You’ll live. Why? Because it’s a game. That’s why.”
		• statement of agreement: “Other than that, I fully agree with you, my fellow DK☺”

33.	**Shaman cannot beat Paladin 1v1**
	- asking for suggestion on how to defeat a pally
	- personal examples shared
	- appraisal of provided feedback
		• disclosure:
		  ○ “I’m probably not the best Shaman around..”
		  ○ “I’m not like that. I prefer having to have a skill to win and to have a chance.”
		• asking for opinions of others: “If anyone can enlighten me on what I’m doing wrong, or any helpful tips would be greatly appreciated”
		• clarifying comment: “I’m asking for advice on how to beat one, not some comment about how overpowered they are.”
		• comment evaluation:
		  ○ “That comment doesn’t help me at all”
		  ○ “Thanks, that’s the kind of info that I was looking for”
		  ○ “Thanks for those tips too!”
		• sharing personal experiences

		• accepting responsibility: "I thought that I was doing something wrong and that's why I'm asking for help." • metaphor: "made them weep like mama's little boy"
34.	**Anyway to manually teleport to instances?** - the OP got the response from MVP - considered the response "rude" - talking about MVP's personality (identity reference) - didn't care much since the question was answered	• profanity: "What's with all the #@!#ishnes.." • comment evaluation: "That was a surprising negative post by Palehoof" • conciliatory remark: "ya I thought the response was a little rude too, but I don't really care"
35.	**Help me, general forums!** - searching for reassurance that blackmail is OK - witnessed selling account - showed signs of remorse for blackmailing	• personal criticism: "You are just looking for reassurance. You know what you are doing." • conciliatory remark: "but then that little voice kicked in" • rejection: "entirely irrelevant. Its still blackmail" • agreement: "my fellow gnome has it right"
36.	**Do you think we'll see loss of class?** - making fun of OP for such proposition - one member supporting OP, applying the users are too lazy to read (TLDR) - raising a question about importance of proper English to establish credibility	• sarcasm: "I don't know what you are smoking but can I have some?" • asking for clarification • making it personal: "says the blood elf paladin" • use of arguments to prove the point • strong feelings: "that would piss off a looooot of people" • TLDR, grammar
37.	**Battleground badges at 60 with exp capped** - calling on a blue post - solution suggested	• conciliatory remark: "I understand.." • inviting cooperation from others • making it personal: ○ "B does not care about..or people who take it serious"

		○ "I fail to see why Blizzard should spend money on you" • metaphor: "they hardly have enough care in their cup for.."
38.	**Death Knights-Unholy tanking?** - calling on blue posts - OP never returned	• procedural remarks: ○ "/discuss" ○ " if blue can respond" • arguments to prove the point • making it personal: "from the look on your gear" • sarcasm: "wish you could be around to hear the wails and moans.."
39.	**My only REAL problem with the new LFG** - repair cost caused by inexperienced players - the only talking in game is complaining - complaining on whining in game - using serious of examples to back up the argument	• sharing personal experience on helping out new players • complaining on repair costs • sarcasm: "I was prepared to find something that is not a real problem. My preparations were justified" • metaphors: ○ "people are tools to cause" ○ "get off your high horse" ○ "a back seat driver" • profanity: "don't give a crap about who's carrying who" • sharing personal experience • instructive/directive feedback: "Do your job and stop being.." • namecalling: "badge monkeys suck" • use of clarifies: "I am not asking to never run with newer players, just to make it less expensive • use of adjectives: "ridiculously, laughably and insanely easy to make"
40.	**If I buy WotLK is there any reason to buy BC?** - asking whether BC is needed for installing WotLK - console gamers vs MMORPG- what is cheaper?	• sarcasm: ○ "wants to be a wannabe nerdy gamer" ○ "tru wannabe gamers always get their moms to buy .."
41.	**Bring the Player not the Class?**	• idiom: "give them an inch and they will take a mile"

	- multiple roles of Druid, Pally, Shammy and Priest - asking for content where one doesn't need to save spots for those classes	• metaphor: "not important enough to stack classes ala sunwell" • conciliatory remarks: "you made it sound like I am angry Palehoof" • use all caps: "NOT FREAKING COOL" • clarifying: "What they mean.."
42.	**Must there or must there not be a new LK?** - someone deleted posts - lore discussion - not much of a conflict - accepted invitation to discuss lore	• statement of agreement: "I agree that.." • inviting other replies: "anyone else perplexed" • trying to establish credibility: "because I took psychology 101" • use of sarcasm: "why we don't give Arthas damage or/and make him a cripple..or just arrest him" • defiance: "just wait you all gunna feel really silly when yau're all dead.."
43.	**Patch 3.4** - arguing about the date for a new patch - idea that those who follow game related news are more knowledgeable	• name-calling: "ignorant, unlearned morons, who don't read the info about the game" • use of description to back-up the argument: "so therefore no new major content patch" • sarcasm: "I am totally sure you've gotten every achievement..I am sure"
44.	**Why do tanks pull so slow?** - name-calling towards OP - use of many personal examples	• confrontative remark: "another useless post, one that has been done already. Try again, snowflake!" • shared pers exp: "in my case.." • use of humor • name calling: "cry baby"
45.	**Tuesday Maintenance** - not much conflict - topic shifted rapidly - use of unrelated humor for community building purposes	• questioning one's knowledge: "You do know that Blizzard operates independently from them right?" • topic shift: "Hi, I'm Chris Hansen from Dateline NBC.." • procedural remark: "I like how the first couple of posts don't care about the priest using mistletoe on the altar boy"
46.	**Dear Tanks, Healers and DPS** - the OP only made original post, never	• rules on how to communicate in groups, teambuilding • metaphor: ○ "Pushing someone deeper below the

	returned to discuss further - conversation shifting to discussing skills (and lack of them) of DPS and healers	mud won't get you above it. It will just make you above the person that may be the key to digging you out when you are in it" o "there should be no pmsing over this system" • metaphorical comparison: "like a mad man" • name-calling: "emblem monkeys" • IMO • sarcasm • strong emotions: "this is quite absurd" • description of personal exp
47 .	**I just soloed H Utgarde Keep :O** - OP posted a link to a snapshot where he soloed Utgarde - was challenged with the issue of credibility due to the image being edited by Paint	• questioning one's skills: o "Fake, there is a different name on the pally" o "I understand that H UK is soloable… but come on dude H hoL? don't get over exaggerating now." • conciliatory remarks: o "do not underestimate prot palading" o "I doubt its fake" o "I realized acopypaste thing, it was just an error.."
48.	**New patch too easy?** - OP says that the new feature where the player is not required to read the quest in order to do it makes the game too easy - called nostalgic - others argue that this feature was available previously as an add-on and from other website references - sharing valuable arguments pro and against the feature	• metaphor: o "was going to rip you a new one" o "just puts me speechless" o "you give them an inch and they take a mile" o "nostalgia trippers" • metaphor: "Nostalgia trippers are immune to logic" • sharing personal experiences • conciliatory remark: o "as someone else said" o "I guess you can always find something to complain about • profanity: "F*** it" • asking for point validation: "If you want to argue… I'd like to see some statistics"
49.	**Warning: DI and Deathbringer Saurfang** - QQ thread	• sarcasm: "I would expect a hotfix to this soon if you keep talking about it" • clarifying questions:

	(complaining) - due to the use of a certain spell OP did not get an achievement like everyone else in the raid - discussion whether the use of such game mechanics should be encouraged or punished	○ "Hotfix for what?" ○ "Why should it be fixed?" • metaphor: "I wanna feel like a special flower too.." • description • questioning one's knowledge: "I am sorry nobody in your guild, even the paladins, understand what DI actually is and does"
50.	**Cartographer replacement** - conversation about cartographer and carbonite - carbonite spamming others	• procedural comment: "/end rant" • questioning one's knowledge: "You do realize that any communication with players can be disabled, right?" • prescription: "You need to read what I wrote" • use of caps: "OTHER PEOPLE" • bolding: "**I do not run Carbonite**"

Competition

51.	**Let's make heroics … heroic?** - OP would like to make a boss fight more challenging - met resistance from others - sharing personal opinions (IMO) - members discussed other possible options for making heroics more challenging	• joking: "they would have to make epics epic" • rejection: ○ "No thanks" ○ "Making bosses scale with gear would make no sense for this game" ○ "You can't make heroics more difficult though. They're supposed to be entry level." • conciliatory remark: "It sounds great, in theory" • prescription: "Do harder raids or do heroics naked." • questioning one's skill: "So, you play the game not for a challenge, but because you can faceroll your way threw it?" • sarcasm: "I missed the point where 'Challenge' was defined as 'repeating a task you have completed an uncountably large number of times'" • clarifying comments/questions: ○ "Does this make sense?"

		○ "How is 1 random heroic per day farming?"
52.	**Sylvanas is going to be the new "lich king"** - lore discussion - gender argument - disregarding Sylvana's abilities due to gender roles	• name-calling: ○ "how dumb people are" ○ "Nelf=new blonde" • rejection: ○ "Complete and utter misconception. Not *all* of the Forsaken want to remove all life.." ○ "it is also speculation" • personal criticism: "A rather horde-centric approach, ignoring the same conversations happens.." • gender reference: ○ "Geez you just can't trust women with any serious matter" ○ "She is busy in the kitchen" • metaphor: "drop a table" • all caps: "CORECT. IT WILL ONCE AGAIN BE LORD KIL'JAEDEN AHAHAHAHAHAH THE POWER WILL BE BACK WHERE IT BELONGS!!"
53.	**The official remove DK's from the game thread** - DPS conversation - strong feelings against DK - topic shift - responding to the avatar of OP, not original comment or question -"DK hate" met with resistance - members argued their point by making fun of OP	• name-calling: "Hater" • metaphor: "these cancer sucking leeches" • presumption: "Sounds like someone got out dpsed by a DK" • rejection/sarcasm/all caps: "HAHAHAHAHAHAHHAHAHAHAHAH no" • sarcasm: ○ "Does that mean we suck out and this removes the cancer? Or do we suck like cancer?.." ○ "The Official remove from the forums any 'remove DK thread' thread ○ "Sucking cancer would be beneficial" • questioning one's skill: "Or are you just a terrible druid who needs to learn to play?" • insulting comment: ○ "Yeah, screw these guys and their 'half asked DPS'' ○ "I am getting really sick of hybrids thinking they can perform as well as

		pure classes"
		• personal criticism:
		  ○ "People like you complained we were OP and we got our tanking ability destroyed."
		  ○ "I don't ever want to see you in a raid.."
		  ○ "Since your rant is one big DK bashfest, my guess is you were going for an insult."
		• conciliatory remark: "BTW, if you really don't like DK's that much, can I suggest that you don't roll one?"

54.	**Which horde race for a rogue?** - few procedural remarks - OP complaining on responses not being helpful	• accepting responsibility: "I was youthful and naïve" • procedural comment: "A humorous response. Answer accepted!" • sarcasm: "I'm glad you guys are so helpful" • prescription: "You should have been more specific in your question if you wanted these fine people to answer your question in a more detailed manner"
55.	**Kara Nubs** - discussing old raid instances - spelling mistakes - trust/credibility issue	• profanity: "to all of you people posting about the "greatness" of TBC/Vanilla go %%!* yourself, F'iing rose colored glasses" • pointing out spelling mistakes: quote 'serpant', quote 'vesuven' • accepting responsibility/sarcasm: "Yesh I dod mate a lot of speeling miscakes and I apologize" • personal criticism: "Meh, you try and sound all professional and then go on a nerdrange, you're going to get called out" • argument: "pointing out a spelling mistake as a valid argument is the same as me saying your input is invalid as a level 1 for level 1s do not raid"

56.	**Where do you mine primordial saronite?**
	- question/answer
	- talking about sarcasm
		• sarcasm:
		  ○ "use a time machine and mine the normal saronite.."
		  ○ "from the lich King's used underpants"
		• conciliatory remarks:
		  ○ "to make it easy for you.."
		  ○ "witty and unique, you get cookies!"

		○ "yeah… sarcasm in text doesn't work very well, unless /sarcasm is put at the end" • procedural remarks: "..thus adding nothing to my point"
57.	**AFK on my flying mount in cataclysm** - provided a summary of a post for TLDR convenience - listed arena rating and admitted that his/her gear sucks to prevent personalized references by respondents - thought-out response and explanation	• prescription: "flame on" • name-calling: "haters", "you're an idiot" • confrontative remarks: "Haters, gtfo, please. You will be reported in this threat." • profanity: "gtfo" • strong dislike: "I hate your idea. It just doesn't matter mainly" • questioning one's skills: "the only way you can win?" • sarcasm: ○ "I am LOLing now imagining you standing for hours below an AFK player hovering on a mount just out of your reach" ○ "ITT: I want to gank any AFK players because I can't kill them in a fair fight"
58.	**You know whats FRUSTRATING?** - an OP tank wants to move ahead in line if he/she wishes to dps - proposes an "Emblem of the Carrier" as a reward	• sarcasm: "Yet another WoW player that believes only their own time is important, not anyone elses" • sharing personal examples • description: "This system is in no way 'unfair'. What would be unfair.." • rejection: "loool. But sorry no" • metaphor : ○ "this 'carrier' nonsense" ○ "pulling the number out of my ass here" • prescription: "If you want to play DPS then get in line and quit whining" • verbal tactics/use of all caps: "HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT THAT THERS MORE DPS THAN TANKS AND ITS CROSS REALM?" • conciliatory remark: "I am not saying it's not fair. You're misunderstanding."
59.	**Isn't 5.3K DPS good enough for Gundrak?**	• sarcasm: ○ "Mr winky won't get larger because of that 2% increase in all stats"

	- many spelling/ grammar mistakes by the OP - received criticism for that from others - TLDR - lots of hostility	○ "Maybe incoherent sentences are what got you removed from the group?" ○ "A$$umptions will get you many places. Generally none of them are good" ○ "yeah, they cause idiots like you to make useless posts in these forums. definitely not a good place to be" ○ "You 're probably probably right"- reference to the earlier post when the OP made a mistake of writing 'probably' twice • clarifying statement: "I'm not sure what you are complaining about" • personal criticism: ○ "he was last in dps, didn't give appropriate buffs, and wonders why he sucks" ○ "Wow-what a fool I would feel if I had written the above" • rejection: "As was clearly stated…" • metaphor: "within the plain English text" • confrontative remarks: "are you slow?" • conciliatory remark: "While I agree with the things you've said, my overall response .." • name-calling: "idiots like you"
60.	**What's the point of pvp gear?** - reference to OP's armory - referring to another member by name ("Morg") -variety of verbal tactics (repetition, adjective, adverb)	• sarcasm: ○ "Your use of math, as well as posting on the character with both pve and pvp achievements has convinced me" ○ "…oh, I get it. You're walking into a BG in full PvE gear expecting to melt faces when PvP gear are whooping your ass. Gotcha." • profanity: "whooping your ass" • verbal tactic: ○ "That was some uber pwnage right there" ○ "..that was just ridiculous" ○ repetition: "what if.. what if.." • prescription: "Get to 80, get a full set of PvP gear. Then maybe you can make stupid comments."

		• conciliatory remark: "that may be true" • challenging: "Name me one class that is now broken in pve due to pvp changes. There isn't one."

61.	**How to deal with DPS/healer qq as a tank**
	- discussing que waiting time
	- many negative comments
	- one member took offense at a previous comment
	- communication rules in groups
		• conciliatory remark: "You sound bitter. Do you need a hug?"
		• metaphor:
		  ○ "tanks have become the new divas of wow"
		  ○ "some of you tanks suck wind"
		  ○ "second rate citizens"
		• prescription: "Get over yourself"
		• negative connotation: "Its too big of a role to have a total idiot at the reins"
		• profanity:
		  ○ "I'd tell them to stfu or gtfo"
		  ○ "All of you totally swallow for $15"
		• personal criticism/sarcasm: "This game is all about you. Everyone pays their subscription to have the honor of grouping with you in your dungeon, in your group, and chance to have a few of your drops. Because they're, as you say 'second rate citizens.'"
		• personal example
		• offense: "Fine, solo the heroics yourself. You obviously do not need us healers or dps for anything, sorry we are slowing you down. Good luck."
		• personal criticism: "I know you don't deserve an honest response.."
		• description

62.	**Why is there no str ashen verdict ring?**
	- OP discourages armoring him/her up front due to getting hacked
	- using 'blues' (Blizzard) reference as a technique for establishing credibility
	-"hate" towards DK
		• derogatory comment: "..expecting people to be a bit more intelligent with their choices"
		• use of all caps:
		  ○ "instead of LOLSTRENTHRING!"
		  ○ "EVERY.SINGLE.TIME."
		  ○ "All I read was BAAAAAAAAAWWWWWW I'M STILL MAD THAT DK'S WERE ON TOP FOR THE FIRST SEASON OF WRATH IN ARENA!!! BAAAAAWWWW!
		• rejection: "not every dk is stupid"

		• name-calling:
		  ○ "don't be an idiot"
		  ○ "And yet I lose upgrades to these retards?"
		• personal criticism: "It's even funnier coming from a rogue of all this"
		• topic shift: "The internet is not just for porn!"
		• metaphor: "absolute bottom in trash DPS"
		• clarifying question: "You really believe the itemization is better for ret than warriors?"
		• prescription: "shut up get off the bandwagon dk hate is old"
		• procedural remark: "Oh good. Another one of these threads"

63.	**World Event: the Well of Despair**
	- OP provided rules for constructive feedback
	- rejecting OP's idea without constructive criticism
	- trolling reference
	- lack of argument for idea rejection
	- TLDR:
	  • way too much reading for an idea that's really bad
	  • wall of text
	  • a book
		• conciliatory remarks:
		  ○ "I miss epic events"
		  ○ "It's just an idea, wherever it is lacking it can be patched"
		  ○ "don't get me wrong I'm all for a new world event, as long as it doesn't faceroll he continent it takes place on"
		• derogatory comment:
		  ○ "I read it all, it sucks, just flat out sucks"
		  ○ "that was way too much reading for an idea that's really terribad"
		  ○ "I came here to make fun of troll, not to read a book"
		• questioning one's knowledge: "do you even know wow lore at all?"
		• rejection:
		  ○ "either way your idea is bad. yes I liked the AQ world event, no I don't like yours"
		  ○ "It's bad all around."
		• name-calling: "Obvious troll is obvious"
		• metaphor:
		  ○ "just reeks of fail"
		  ○ "wall of text"
		• clarifying question:
		  ○ "How so? Tell me how to make it better or I shall know you as a troll, a fail one at that."

		○ "mind tell us why?" • disclosure: "Now I'm not usually one to say this but…"
64.	**Why horde hates the alliance** - lore reference - one member's arguments contradict lore - when questioned about it, takes hostile approach - relationships between horde and alliance	• name-calling: ○ "yeah except it was the alliance who ganked and started it all…but nice try troll… next time why don't you post on your alliance toon chicken ○ "you failure to launch loser" • conciliatory remark: "Pretty sure he's talking about WC1 bro" • prescription: ○ "You really should read up on lore" ○ "either you have time to read lore and respond, or else you shut up. The don't read but make sarcastic responses about how someone who did read is wrong is bad choice." • rejection: "You're 100% wrong." • metaphor: ○ "The faction had about as much depth as a puddle in the first game." ○ "Get of your high horse" • personal attack: "don't mention my father and you in the same sentence again. he is a hero. a soldier. you are nowhere near the caliber man my father is so dont you dare speak of him and you in the same sentence you failure to launch loser" • proceduaral comment: "And this thread will now max out……" • personal criticism: ○ "You show remarkable love for your own faction and enjoyment of RP for someone with such an apparent distaste for the lore" ○ "People like you are the reason horde cant win anything anymore" • topic shift/irrelevant remark: "A dark skinned human stole mah bike"
65.	**Take a page from WC3 about LFD** - OP wanted to avoid	• clarifying question • questioning one's knowledge • use of all caps: "EXTREMELY easy"

	certain maps - not supported by others - received solution - did not agree	• confrontative remark: "Do you think before you type?" • grammar

66.	**Tanking in PvP**
	- general forums known as Trolling Forums
		• use of profanity
		• confrontative remarks:
		  ○ "this is ridiculous"
		  ○ "that's stupid"
		  ○ "I don't care about your opinion"
		• conciliatory remark: "though I haven't really read much.."
		• procedural remarks: "that's my rant. Flame on!"
		• use of sarcasm

67.	**I'll tell you why there is a tank shortage**
	- multiple topic shifts
	- used forum for venting, no particular question asked
	-"DPS are morons" theme
		• name-calling: "idiot dps," "greedy idiot"
		• topic shifts:
		  ○ "this thread is now about healers.."
		  ○ "this thread is now about pizza"
		• strong emotions: "for the love of God"
		• procedural remark: "/discuss"

68.	**Why we hate you?**
	- called on DPS mistakes
	- strong dislike towards "deeps" word by other member
	- bad grammar and spelling reference
		• conciliatory remarks:
		  ○ "props to good DPS"
		  ○ "That's right. I shouldn't have to instruct anyone.."
		  ○ "well my druid friend, it's called satire☺"
		• name-calling:
		  ○ "moron"
		  ○ "the elitists are huge darshes who should stfu.."
		• constructive feedback
		• Deeps comment
		• strong feelings : "I just hate"
		• offensive language: "were you dropped as a child?"
		• use of adverb: "insanely idiotic"
		• rejection: "satire is actually funny"
		• sharing personal experience: "I say 'deeps.' It's like saying 'lawl'
		• common grounds: "Thank you. I feel like such

		a bad player when I pull threat..” • sarcasm: “with a maturity level in this game school is needed, forget individual instruction”

69.	**@ people without wipe prevention**
	- talking to those who die in raids
	- OP used the word “sheesh” and was ridiculed for it
	- discussing the significance of skills in WoW
		• prescription: “Listen. Just stop. You aren’t going to survive. Just go stand next to the boss and die.”
		• questioning one’s skill:
		  ○ “if you die because you used it too soon that is your fault…”
		  ○ “you are not doing it right”
		  ○ “If I adopted your philosophy I would spend all my money on repair bills”
		• metaphor: “I’ll make damn sure I heal you if I can and die on top of you”
		• all caps: “SKILL”
		• changing topic: “Wipe prevention is all about eating a high fiber diet and staying well hydrated”
		• confrontative remark: “You fail.k thnx bye”

Appendix #3: Glossary

Alt - alternative character, an avatar on one’s account that is not the main character. One can have up to fifty alts on one account.

AFK – away from keyboard

Aggro – launching of fight between a monster and a player. If someone is aggroed it means that the monster noticed him/her and is going in attack mode.

Armory – a collection of one’s weapons and shields

Avatar – online character

BC – Burning Crusade, a first expansion to the game that came out in 2007, introducing new content to the game, including two new races (Draenai and Blood Elves)

BG – battleground, see Appendix #1 for definition

Buff – a spell that is casted on a player or a monster, and is in some way beneficial (e.g. increases one's attack abilities, or rebuilds stamina faster)

Caster – a character that casts spells; is one of the roles performed in raids. Generally a caster will stay in the back, away from the monster and cast spells in order to defeat the enemy, or help out healing team members.

Cata – short for Cataclysm – the third expansion to the game, expected to come out in November 2010.

DK – Death Knights – a new class introduced with Wrath of the Lich King expansion.

DPS – damage per second – one of the roles in the raids.

Dungeon – a location of a raid; players gain experience and better gear by accomplishing dungeons that require grouping up with other players – form a raid.

Epic – a level of item quality received for accomplishing certain tasks (i.e. raid, profession development), varies from "rare" to "legendary"

Faction – the side of war one chooses when creates a character. There are two factions: Horde and Alliance.

Guild – relatively permanent hierarchal group (see Appendix #1)

Heroics – heroic mode of a dungeon, increased difficulty.

ICC – Icecrown Citadel – the name of a raid instance

IMO – in my opinion

Instance – an area of a raid, when the group does not have interference from other raid parties and players, and is able to execute a dungeon privately.

ITT – (1) in this thread; (2) I think that

LFD – looking for dungeon

LFG – looking for group

LFM – looking for more, used when the players are trying to form a group, but still need more people to join in

LOL – laughing out loud or lots of laugh, also spelled as "lawl" and "loooool"

Loot – the "treasure" one receives for accomplishing something (i.e. killing a monster, or finding a chest)

Lvl - level

MMO – massive multiplayer online

MMOG – massive multiplayer online game

MMORPG – massive multiplayer online role-plating game

MOB – mobile object block – characters controlled by computer

MVP – most valuable player – a player recognized by Blizzaerd for valuable contributions to forum community

Nerf – to downgrade, have certain ability taken away or changed for worse

Newbie (newb, n00b) – a new player in the game

NGL – not gonna lie

NPC – non-player character – character controlled by computer

OP – original poster – a person that starts a thread

Patch – a downloadable update for the game

PvE – player vs. environment – a type of realm, where one is playing against environment (computer controlled monsters)

PvP – player vs. player – a type of realm, where one is playing against other players.

PUG – pick-up group

QFT – quoted for truth

Raid – a party formed from up to forty players working towards the same objective.

Realm - a different server, necessary due to the high population of WoW subscribers.

Roll – a way to decide who should get an item (rolling a number)

Screen shot – a capturing of a player's screen in a particular moment

Server – same as realm

Tank – a role performed in a group rate. A tank is well-armored character, whose goal is to absorb damage from the enemy.

TLDR – too long did not read

Toon – a character

Vanilla – an original World of Warcraft game, pre-expension version

WotLK – Wrath of the Lich King

WoW – World of Warcraft

XP (Exp) – experience

Zerging – attacking an enemy with a large group of relatively weak players. The goal is to conquer not through the use of skills, but through the large number of players who resurrect when die.