

The Daedalus Project

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[\(\[HTTP://WWW.NICKYEE.COM/DAEDALUS\]\(http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus\)\)](http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus)

Daedalus Reflections

Illness and Reflection

As some of you know, I recently struggled with a [life-threatening medical condition](#) as I completed my graduate program. The experience has changed me profoundly. For me, documenting the experience was part of the healing process. It was a way for me to understand and try to make sense of what happened. And I share it with others not for pity but because it is important that others know I am no longer the person I used to be.

The Daedalus Project took form the summer before I started at Stanford. Prior to that, reports were presented individually and the findings were becoming disorganized. The blog backend allowed me to manage and index the material as well as allowing for community input. It has been about 4 years since I started the Daedalus Project and I have recently completed my doctoral program. For me, this is a wonderful moment in time for me to reflect on all that has happened.

I look back on the work that has accumulated here over the years, and sometimes I too forget how much I've managed to accumulate. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to create a line of research that I am passionate about and which many, many of you have also been interested in over the years. The Daedalus Project is the culmination of the thousands and thousands of responses from MMO players who have participated in the surveys over the years. It wasn't something that I could have done alone. This website is the culmination of a vibrant player community that wanted their voices heard without being distorted by researchers who had preconceived agendas. I am grateful to every one of the MMO players who took time out of their schedules to participate in the surveys. I am particularly grateful to those of who helped spread the word about the project especially as the number of MMOs grew over the years.

Crossroads

I'd like to describe in some detail an important confluence of events that occurred in the summer of 2005 where I was at a crossroads about the future of The Daedalus Project. That juncture produced many repercussions that are still unfolding today.

In spring of 2005, I accidentally ran across an article in the American Psychologist that referenced my online research. In a strange twist, I found both the draft and published versions because the APA somehow left both versions online and Google indexed both. Here is an excerpt from the draft version.

*In one sense, the Internet has democratized data collection. Researchers do not need access to introductory psychology classes to recruit subjects and often do not need grant money to pay them. The Internet has opened research to those with fewer resources. One consequence is that faculty at small schools, independent scholars, graduate students, and undergraduates can all potentially contribute to psychological research. For example, an undergraduate psychology major, Nicholas Yee, published findings about the psychology of playing online multi-player games ... However, a corollary of this open access is that those with minimal training and supervision can conduct and publish research, some of which might be of low quality. **Yee's research results, for example, are available on his own website (www.nickyee.com) but have not been published in any peer-reviewed venue. Regardless of the quality of this research, his intense polling of a single population has polluted this data source for researchers who may be more qualified.** In this sense, the tragedy of the commons now threatens psychological research.*

<http://www.apa.org/science/apainternetresearch.pdf>

http://www.ipmaac.org/files/apa_internet_research.pdf

Here is the same section (starting from the ellipsis) from the published version.

... However, a corollary of this open access is that those with minimal training and supervision can conduct and publish research, without benefiting from the quality control imposed by subject-pool supervisors, peer reviews, and funding agencies.

<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~kraut/RKraut.site.files/articles/kraut04-PsychologicalResearchOnline.pdf>
www.apa.org/science/amp592105.pdf
http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~mrbworks/articles/2003_APA.pdf

I am grateful to the editors and reviewers of the article at AP for heavily curbing the initially-worded criticisms in the final draft, but the damage had been done. I was incredibly hurt by those remarks. And that summer, the future of my online gaming research was at a crossroads. I began to seriously consider abandoning this line of work due to what I perceived to be a problematic reception of the emerging field in academia as well as the criticism directed specifically at my work.

DiGRA 2005

In that despondent mood, I attended DiGRA 2005 at Vancouver, presenting a factor-analytic study of player motivations. Lisa Galarneau moderated the panel and we got together to socialize afterwards. I had previously chatted extensively with Lisa on the phone about online gaming research and as we caught up, I mentioned the content of the AP article. Lisa's words of genuine support that chilly, rainy afternoon in Vancouver were what gave me the strength to carry on. Lisa, I want to you know how grateful I am to you for that. You made it possible for me to rededicate myself to the research I was passionate about by making me realize that I could not possibly allow one cold, cruel person to destroy my dream, that I was far stronger than that.

And I'm glad I have finally been given the courage to say the following. It takes a very small person with a cold, cold heart to feel that they can publicly criticize another researcher's work with such calculating callousness, especially when the remarks are from a university professor and are directed at an undergraduate student's personal project, an undergraduate student who had no means academically or psychologically of defending himself against those remarks. I may never figure out which of the 6 listed authors wrote those lines, but I have my suspicions. I hope someone will come forward to expose the author, and I hope the author lives with this shame publicly for the rest of their life. If you share my conviction here, I urge you to write to the APA Ethics Office to request a formal investigation (see end of article for contact details). If together we can stop this cold, cruel person from callously trying to destroy the dreams of just one other defenseless student, then we will have done our part in preserving academic integrity and the goals of the education system - to help students find and follow their dreams and to help each of them become the person they were meant to be.

“Qualified”?

And I want to point out that back in 1999 when I conducted my early surveys, very few researchers had the technical capability and cultural knowledge of online games to have conducted the research I did. The people who truly polluted the field were those "qualified" researchers who between 2001-2003 relentlessly bombarded the player community with surveys based on preconceived notions of deviant outcomes from game-play. Players became fed up with surveys because of the unrelenting use of long scales that unabashedly focused on depression, self-esteem, quality of life, and a naive notion of "addiction". Players became fed up because they had become annoyed by "qualified" researchers trying to force their agendas onto the player community. What's fascinating about online gaming has nothing to do with deviance and the player community knew this and they were tired of being baited.

There is no such thing as objective social science research. Researchers always bring their own agendas and assumptions into the work they do. The only difference is between researchers who acknowledge, and can therefore examine, their agendas and those who pretend they have none. There is nothing objective about a non-gamer forcing an agenda of deviance on a community they know nothing about and has no desire to learn about.

I am honored that the player community gave me the opportunity to diversify the range of academically-viable issues and themes in the online gaming research community. I feel that researchers obsessed with the violence, aggression, and addiction agendas are simply trying to find the red dots in a Pointillist painting. They are literally missing the entire point. Talking about dynamic communities in terms of one arrow between two simplistic variables doesn't help us understand much. It only furthers and builds upon entrenched assumptions.

To those of you who have participated in the surveys. Those of you who regularly come and read the articles here. Those of you who post polite and insightful commentary. Those of you who have helped spread the word about this work. I am forever grateful to every single one of you for allowing me to have built up something over the past 8 years that I am so proud of. I am forever grateful to the player community for giving me the opportunity to weave a richer and fuller tapestry of what online gaming is really about.

I have no intention of stopping what I've been doing. And I hope that you all will continue to participate and help spread the word. Together, we can help each other understand why online games are so fascinating.

Find the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct and Rules and Procedures at <http://www.apa.org/ethics/>.

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CNN Future Summit - Virtual Worlds

Watch me on CNN International's Future Summit - Virtual Worlds.

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On April 23rd 2007, I was part of a taped panel for a CNN program (Future Summit - Virtual Worlds) exploring the impact of virtual worlds on society. Because of the dissertation and my recent illness, I had forgotten that the planned air date for the edited program was mid-June.

The CNN Future Summit is being broadcast on CNN International globally this week. As you may or may not know, the CNN you get in the US is a separate channel altogether where, as my father eloquently explained, they replace substantive content with prettier anchors and juicier news for the American audience. Executives felt that CNN International would be perceived as bland by Americans and so they dumbed down CNN specifically for them.

Thus, the show is not being broadcast in the US, but 10 times this week everywhere else in the world, including Hong Kong, where my parents live. On Wednesday night, they recorded the program premier on DVD. They gave me a copy of the DVD last night when they arrived (for graduation on Sunday). I was awed by the editing, presentation, and content of the program, but was saddened that it would never be broadcast in the US.

I am honored to have learned how to edit videos from my experiences at Seriosity. I realized I could rip the DVD, edit the video down, and post it on YouTube. I edited the 50 minute program down to 8 minutes, focusing on the segments on online gaming and, of course, my responses. You can watch the 8-minute cut here on YouTube.

I began my research in online gaming 8 years ago when there was no academic support for studying online games (apart from the violence agenda). It was my adviser, Doug Davis, from Haverford College who inspired me with the strength and courage to fight for a dream, no matter how tremulous it seemed at times. Over the past years, a small band of colleagues and I have worked hard to carve out a viable field of academic study, dramatically shifting attention away

from agendas focused on deviant outcomes of game-play. The study of online gaming and virtual environments is now something that most universities are desperately hiring positions for. I am blessed to have been given the opportunity to change a part of this world such that others interested in studying online games no longer need to struggle the way I did alone for so many years. Over the past years, my colleagues and I have created a vibrant community of scholars spanning the fields of psychology, communication, economics, law, sociology, among others.

I hope you join me in celebrating this moment and cherishing the conviction that while the light will always be a burden to bear in the darkness, that the beauty of dawn will always be worth fighting for.

Seriosity/IBM Report on the Future of Leadership

In the summer and fall of 2006, I worked with a technology start-up, Seriosity, in Palo Alto that was working on a project for IBM. IBM was interested in exploring how leadership in virtual worlds may or may not be different from leadership in the physical world (i.e., traditional approaches to fostering and identifying leadership skills and attributes). At Seriosity, I worked with a small team to explore leadership in MMOs via game-play videos, open-ended surveys, and many internal discussions as to what was going on.

The Seriosity/IBM has just been released publicly and I'm glad I was a part of this project. I think many of the insights in this project will resonate with player's experiences in MMOs and also provide food for thought as to the future of corporate leadership.

<http://www.seriosity.com/>

<http://www.seriosity.com/leadership.html>

Note that there are two reports. The shorter one is the report for IBM. The second, longer one is Seriosity's full report on leadership in MMOs.

Dissertation - The Proteus Effect

In my dissertation, I addressed the issue of transformed identity in virtual environments. Below is the abstract and link to a PDF of the full text.

Abstract

Digital media allows us to make both dramatic and subtle changes to our self-representations with an ease not available elsewhere. These changes can greatly affect how we interact with others in virtual environments. For example, facial and behavioral mimicry can make us more likeable and persuasive. In addition to gaining social advantages, our avatars (digital representations of ourselves) can also change how we behave. This occurs via conforming to expected behaviors of the avatar - a process referred to as the Proteus Effect.

I conducted a series of four pilot studies that explore the Proteus Effect. In the first study, I found that participants in attractive avatars walked closer to and disclosed more information to a stranger than participants in unattractive avatars. In the second study, I found that participants in taller avatars negotiated more aggressively in a bargaining task than participants in shorter avatars. In the third study, I demonstrated that the Proteus Effect occurs in an actual online community. And in the final study, I showed that the Proteus Effect persists outside of the virtual environment. Placing someone in a taller avatar changes how they consequently negotiate in a face-to-face setting.

The two dissertation studies extended these pilot studies by attempting to clarify the underlying process that leads to the Proteus Effect. In the first dissertation study, I isolated and teased out the unique contribution of the Proteus Effect from an alternative explanation - priming. Priming is a process whereby visual stimulus (such as words or photographs) leads someone to behave in a semantically-consistent manner. In the second dissertation study, I extrapolated from existing theories of stereotype formation to examine the consequences of placing users in implausible bodies that fall outside the range of normal human variation (such as a very short or very tall body).