Animosity amongst World of Warcraft Players: An Analysis of The Instance Podcast.

TJ Redig
When *World of Warcraft* (WoW) was first announced by Blizzard in 2001, no one could have predicted the game would go on to become the massively-multiplayer online (MMO) powerhouse WoW is today. A game with a million subscribers would be considered a success in the massive multiplayer online game (MMO) world; WoW has long since surpassed the million player mark. WoW is the only western-developed MMO using a subscription model to have eclipsed one million active users (MMOGChart, 2008). As of December 23rd, 2008 Blizzard Entertainment, the developer of WoW, announced their subscription numbers had reached 11.5 million people (2008) and Bruce Woodcock, a games analyst, attributed 62.2% of the MMO subscription market to WoW (2008); calling WoW a success is an understatement. WoW is a social phenomenon no other video game developer has been able to replicate.

Along with the popularity of WoW, a huge and adamant fan community came to fruition. The WoW fan community has created a number of videos, comics, podcasts, and newsletters entirely devoted to the game. The academic community took notice of the popularity of WoW and began to dissect Blizzard’s success using numerous analytical tools spanning multiple disciplines in an attempt to comprehend the aberration that is WoW (Corneliussen & Rettberg, 2008, p. 9). “Animosity Amongst *World of Warcraft* Players: An Analysis of *The Instance* Podcast” is an analysis of the popular WoW podcast *The Instance* and the speech of the show’s hosts Scott Johnson, Randy Jordan, and (former host) Andrew Konietzky.

The specific goal of this study is to analyze animosity from the player community, specifically the hosts of *The Instance*, directed at either Blizzard Entertainment or players of WoW to determine what naturally occurring points of contention happen in a massively-multiplayer game community. The specific topics discussed are race, faction, class, sex, guild, player age, and type of realm.
Method

There were far more episodes of *The Instance* than the researcher had the resources (i.e. time) to listen to, so episodes were chosen randomly using a random number generator (http://www.random.org). Each episode was listened to twice and any inflammatory, discriminatory, or antagonistic comments were recorded. The total hours of podcast listened to were just below 94 after each episode was listened to twice.

A thematic analysis was utilized to classify different inflammatory, discriminatory, or antagonistic comments into meaningful groups for analysis. Prevalent themes included race, faction, class, sex, guild, age, realm, and other.

Data

**Note:** Some of these comments may not appear discriminatory or insulting, but if put into the context the comments were presented in during the shows the reason for documentation made more sense.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode # / Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Runtime</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 “Is the Scarab Gate gonna be a bughunt, or a stand up fight?!?”</td>
<td>1/26/06</td>
<td>28:10</td>
<td>Andrew- “That fact that you can pretty much get slapped and die as a mage.” Scott- “Yeah, exactly. The mage is not so tough.” Andrew- “[Murlocs] are the most hated mob of all time.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 “WOW Patch 1.10, fortified with MORE bugs!”</td>
<td>3/30/06</td>
<td>48:23</td>
<td>Freaky (Guest)- “You can only take so many gnomes running around naked before you just gotta</td>
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switch... you just gotta switch.”

Andrew- “Murlocs are like the most vile race.”

Scott- "The [priest] class gets no love in the game."

Scott- "the boards are full of idiots. Let’s just put it bluntly. There’s a lot of really lame people on there."

Scott- "[priest] is a class that is under sung and underrated."

Freaky- "I don't need some 13 year old shaman coming around and sticking the voodoo up my butt!"

Freaky- "A priest is really, believe it or not, one of the easiest classes to solo."

Andrew- "I would never recommend even a mage or a warlock for someone right out of the box. Especially someone that's never played an MMO before." Freaky- "Yeah, it can get pretty frustrating." (In relation to class mechanics).

Scott- "I think the reason I switched gears [from playing my priest] was because everyone was telling me ‘ah they're
weak, they suck, they're not powerful enough, you're going to be spending all day doing nothing but healing people."

Caller - "Paladins need to change a lot when you hit level 60 and you start doing raiding. They become a lot more of a buff-bot than anything else." Andrew - "Bubble boys."

Andrew - "I played a paladin to like five and I had more fun playing a warrior." Scott - "I didn't enjoy the paladin."

Andrew - "He is a gnome so no one really cares. And before we evil email for that my main character, my highest level character in the game is a gnome so..." Scott - "Yeah, that's true. Mine... will never be a gnome, but that's my problem I guess."

Scott - "It just seemed like this was being positioned as being an anti-Alliance kind of story arc. You know what I'm saying? It didn't seem like maybe the Horde would be so interested in dorking around with anybody associated with the Lich King because maybe, well I realize that the Forsaken are a little bit different and the whole story thing
kinda skews in a different way but I was just thinking Alliance only well maybe not..." Andrew- "It would be kinda cool if there was dungeons that you could only get into if you were Alliance.. but I guarantee if people ever started doing that people would be ticked off."

Scott- "Alliance of course. Bunch of pansies."

Chris (interview)- "You always need a priest and a warrior for anything you do."

Chris- "If you have a mage or a priest you only have a certain amount of time before you are useless." (Discussing warrior rage vs. mana).

Andrew- "Sounds nasty. You got a Tauren and you got a dead person." Scott- "Yeah, nothing good comes from that unholy union." Andrew- "Gnomes! That's how Gnomes are born, I think."

<table>
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<tr>
<th>16 &quot;Jawas, Blood Elves, and Sweet Love.&quot;</th>
<th>4/20/06</th>
<th>39:23</th>
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Scott- "[Starcraft] is like the national sport in Asia. Those people can't get enough Starcraft."

Andrew- "Intelligence that high, if you look across the board, it makes the Blood Elves the smartest race on the whole planet." Scott- "Even more than
their angry cousins, or their happy-go-lucky cousins the Night Elves.
Andrew- "Yeah, the tree-huggers." Scott- "The PETA activists, the hippies over there."

Scott (mimicking emails to show)- "Ahhh, you're showing Chinese gold farming ads." (Idea that all gold farming takes place in Asian countries).

Scott- "Well my big complaint about, um, this is sort of unrelated, but about the Undead is their whole area out there by the Undercity and Brill and all that, what a depressing hell-hole that place is. Seriously, it's so dank and dark and nasty and..."

Caller- "Hunters are a sissy class."

Andrew- "The [orc/ogre race] is ugly as sin."

Andrew- "If you're a centaur you don't get a damn mount!" Scott- "No, you are another person's mount." Andrew- "Once you hit level 60 you get sold to another player."

17 “CALL ME...anytime, you can call me, anytime!!!”

Scott- “[Theresa] has some thoughts for people that think hunters are only for sissies and kids.”

Theresa (Caller)- "You have to have brains in
order to play [a hunter] unlike a warrior and a rogue where you know 'Oh kill! Let's go kill!' With a hunter there is more control there."

Andrew- "I think most of the women that play hunters they like the hunters because you get a discount a PetSmart and you get a discount when you go to Penny’s, when you go to buy shoes."

Caller- "I can't play Alliance. I can't handle Night Elves."

Scott- "Cow race."

Andrew- "On my gnome rogue. You know, the race that Scott hates." Scott- "Yeah, midget rogue."

Andrew- "I think there are certain races that shouldn't be some of the classes they are now."

They discussed how not all of the race/class combinations make sense in regards to lore.

Andrew- "I had no idea that [Dranei] were going to look as cool. I was still expecting the froggie-people from the Swamps of Sorrows."

Andrew- "Because [Blood Elves] seem to be really made to be some sort of
mana using class."

Scott- "Well holy crap. [Blood Elves] are obviously major magic folk."

Andrew- "[Blood Elves] Mana vampires. They love mana so much. [Blood Elves] are walking Duracell batteries."

Veronica- "The [hunter] seems a little more difficult than playing the shaman."

Scott- "The Blood Elves, as far as I've heard."
Veronica- "Is an attempt to get more people to play Horde." Scott- "Yeah, they're a pretty race."

Andrew- "Granted you're a mage. D&D wizards can bump their head getting out of bed and die. So, I mean, you're supposed to be you know these amazing badasses that can trip and die. That's the way that [mages] are made. Look at Gandalf. He's a really cool guy but I bet if you caught him with a 2x4 he's not such a tough dude."

Andrew (sarcasm)- "Like it's fair for a priest to throw a bubble up and heal themselves in the middle of a fight."

Andrew- "From what I've
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<tr>
<td>8/27/06</td>
<td>50:20</td>
<td>Scott (in redneck voice)- &quot;[Paladins] are folks that need some more mana.&quot;</td>
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<td>Scott and Andrew- Discussed that the lore explaining how Blood Elves have paladins is ridiculous.</td>
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<td>Andrew- &quot;I'm gonna log in my gnome that Scott hates.&quot; Scott- &quot;Yeah, love the gnomes.&quot;</td>
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<td>Scott- &quot;Yeah, and if you take your gnome over there it'll be great. You'll really get a feel for what things look like because nobody can see your stupid little man as he runs read the shamans on the Alliance side and the paladins on the Horde side are going to be a little bit different than their opposite counterparts. Like the shaman on Alliance will be a little different than it normally is on the Horde. The only thing I can think of is that's going to create all kinds of new balance problems.&quot;</td>
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Scott- “Sorry. I mean sorry that he’s a gnome.”

Scott- “Sorry about the gnome again.”

Scott- “There are no gnomes involved, which I’m happy about.”

Myspace, Gamespy & Joystiq hit the motherload!”

32 “The Drums of War begin, Crusade leaks, and a farewell to Tony Jay.”

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through the weeds."

Andrew- "So essentially the Blood Elves are now pot-heads." (in regards to Bloodthistle in the Blood Elf starting area."

Scott- "Time to break out your midget rogue and play him again." Andrew- "Not a midget."

Scott- "I'm really glad the game lets you not [be just a healer] and I guess if you want to be that that's great, but that's usually chicks." Andrew- "Well some people are really good at that." Scott- "Like chicks."

Scott- "Only because he hates gnomes."

Andrew- “You know what would be funny? If GayBot was a gnome character of some kind.” Scott- “Yep, I guarantee it.”

Andrew- “The creepy doll is a female gnome.” Scott- “That is a creepy doll.”

Scott- "All you who love gnomes, keep your emails to yourself."

They talked about how all the races are nearly the same, ability-wise. Only differences are aesthetic.

Shawn Basic- "For the
most part selecting which race you want to be is not that big of a deal. There just aren't that many differences." "Which backside do you want to be staring at for the next 60-70 levels of the game?"

Andrew- "If you're going to be playing for 4 hours at a time who's butt do you want to be staring at? Do you want to look at some dumpy human in moist leather pants?"

Patrick- "The adult population seems evenly distributed [between Alliance and Horde], but the younger population looks like it has a definite preference for the nice and clean Alliance side."

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| 9/7/06 | 40:19 | Scott- "That stupid little gnome."
            Caller- "Hello my fellow Asians and no, I'm not a gold farmer." |
| 9/16/06 | 43:10 | Andrew- "There is a new paladin [mod] where all you do is hit one button and your guy bubble hearths away like a wuss." Scott- "Nice. Dude, I don't like paladins."
            Scott- “So the [Alliance] were yelling back in their dumb language.”
            Scott- "I don't do anything with gnomes." |
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<th>Time</th>
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| 38 | “Andrew’s Beta thoughts, Release date changes, CCG impressions.” | 9/22/06 | 57:32 | Andrew- “The Blood Elves have got to be the truly evil race.”
| | | | | Scott- "The gnomes, it turns out, are actually good for something."
| | | | | Scott (to Andrew)- “That was very gnomish of you.”
| 43 | “Cops, MUDs, and Azerothian Stomach Flu” | 9/27/06 | 41:06 | Andrew- "[gnomes] have small hands and smell like cabbage."
| | | | | Scott- "stupid night elf."
| | | | | Andrew (reading fan submission)- "I can't wait for the paladin's new tier 5 set because it makes him look like a purple power ranger."
| | | | | Caller- “You have as much right to play this game as anybody. Maybe even certain gnomes.”
| 53 | "Mucho Esta A Key!" | 2/18/07 | 1:03:02 | Andrew- "I can't believe I'm out here getting my clothes dirty planting trees for a cow."
| | | | | Scott- "Yeah, you never see whiny [blood elves]. Bunch of whiners... and they laugh like unholy, well I won't..."
"Yeah, if there is ever an evil laugh in the game it's from the blood elves."

Scott - "If you do /played on your gnome rogue regardless of if the time was lower than you thought or higher than you thought you still have to ask yourself 'I spent all that time playing a rogue?' or, I mean a gnome. I blew my own joke. If you're going to make fun of gnomes don't stretch it out for ten minutes."

Caller - "Recently I was kicked from the guild Divinity for one thing, my race. I'm an African-American individual and I was kicked from Divinity for that sole purpose."

Andrew - "The lunar festival has a nice Asian theme so it keeps all the gold farmers happy."

Caller - Female called in to inform male gamers to not treat females differently. They have already figured out how to play by the time they've reached max level in WoW. "Guys when you see a real girl in WoW. Not the guys that play night-elf females. Don't freak out." "Also, we aren't complete newbs. Many times I've had to punish males that tell me how to play."
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<th>Entry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54 &quot;This is how we ROLE!&quot;</td>
<td>2/25/07</td>
<td>1:07:47</td>
<td>Andrew- “I really like humans. I love the way they scream when you hold them down and begin skinning them alive.” Andrew- “There have been so many complaints about druids.”</td>
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<td>59 &quot;The Northrend Invasion!&quot;</td>
<td>4/1/07</td>
<td>36:08</td>
<td>Scott- “Those [dwarf guards] are like angry midgets on fire.”</td>
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<td>65 &quot;Just a Car&quot;</td>
<td>5/14/07</td>
<td>47:20</td>
<td>Randy- &quot;They say 'for the Alliance.'” Scott- &quot;That’s stupid!&quot; Scott- &quot;It sounds like a bunch of gnomes forgetting that they’re at the bottom of the food chain.” Scott- &quot;Do you see any Chinese people on this [gold]farm?&quot; Randy- &quot;[Druids] are always hiding in the trees.”</td>
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<td>70 &quot;DING!&quot;</td>
<td>6/3/07</td>
<td>58:20</td>
<td>Shawn Basic- &quot;I'm not grouping with a blood elf. Blood elves are ruining the Horde.” Scott- &quot;It seemed like to me, especially in the early 6 months of the game, maybe a year. Um, it seemed that everyone was complaining that shaman were too powerful. They were all powerful. They could cream anybody. They were way overpower, needed a nerf.”</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>“Get a Clue!”</td>
<td>9/22/07</td>
<td>1:00:56</td>
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<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>&quot;The Cure For What Ales You&quot;</td>
<td>10/8/07</td>
<td>58:02</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>“Feeling Headless and Horsey!”</td>
<td>10/22/07</td>
<td>1:06:16</td>
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<td>1:20:43</td>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>“If you’re not going to expand the gnome storyline you should just kick them out of the game.” Scott- “That’s what I say.” Randy- “They’re a joke, seriously”.</td>
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<td>Randy- “The whole game needs to be bombed and all the gnomes. Maybe they could introduce a gnome virus.” Scott- “Yeah, just only the gnomes would be susceptible. That would be great!”</td>
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<td>Scott- “Even a drunk dwarf wouldn’t touch a gnome with a 10-foot pole!”</td>
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<td>Randy- “There isn’t much a drunk dwarf wouldn’t do. I’m convinced that their inebriation leads to such a loss of inhibitions that dwarves could be talked into anything.” Scott- “Yeah, an undead even.”</td>
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<td>Scott- “My recommendation is to always skip Gnomergan (previous capital city of the gnome race). But, I’ve got my own bias and my own problems. It has nothing to do with instances.”</td>
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|          |      | Scott- "No one would have sex with a gnome."
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>1/26/08</td>
<td>1:20:20</td>
<td>Scott- &quot;DPS [Druids] are carrying a stigma that is two years old and that is that you stink at DPS and as a tank at holding aggro.&quot;</td>
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<td>Scott- &quot;I hate gnomes.&quot;</td>
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<td>Randy- “The gnome had no business being a warrior, it should have been a half-warrior.”</td>
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<td>Randy- “I don’t think gnomes should be death knights. I don’t think night elves should be death knights. I don’t think tauren should be death knights.”</td>
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<td>Randy- “My gosh, if blood-elves are such pansies that they can’t be warriors, then they shouldn’t be death knights.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/16/08</td>
<td>1:13:42</td>
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<td>No comments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>4/25/08</td>
<td>1:38:51</td>
<td>Curt Schilling- “I don’t like druids.”</td>
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<td>Scott- “and they’re dumb” (Referring to gnomes).</td>
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<td>Scott, in response to worst class/race combo in WoW- “gnomes in anything.”</td>
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<td>Randy- “There’s no reason for gnomes to have warriors.”</td>
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<td>106</td>
<td>5/16/08</td>
<td>1:23:18</td>
<td>Randy- “I can’t believe it. They really mean it. You’re really going to be able to make a gnome”</td>
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<tr>
<td>108 &quot;Don't Quit Your Day Job&quot;</td>
<td>5/30/08</td>
<td>1:10:59</td>
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<td>death knight!” Curt Schilling- “Stupid.”</td>
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<td>Scott- “Everything a gnome is dumb.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott- &quot;That's because Alliance are boring.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott- &quot;Where's that mod that tells me how many female orcs are in Orgrimmar at one time so I can nuke them?&quot;</td>
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<td>Scott- &quot;I know I've got problems with gnomes. I've got bigger problems with female orcs.&quot;</td>
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<td>Patrick- &quot;Rogues are overpowered.&quot;</td>
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<td>They discussed the EU realms taking down the boss Kil'Jaeden before the US realms. Brings up a new kind of discrimination and competition, realm vs. realm, country vs. country, and/or continent vs. continent.</td>
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<td>Scott (said sarcastically)- &quot;You U.S. people freaking suck.&quot;</td>
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<td>Curt Schilling- &quot;Is this not historic news? This is the first thing France ever won isn't it?&quot;</td>
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<td>Curt Schilling- &quot;I know how bad people suck that buy characters that are 70s.&quot;</td>
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| 109 "Even Home Depot Calls Us" | 6/6/08 | 1:15:18 | Scott- "You don't want to deal with French scalpers. They're all a bunch of mimes."
               Curt Schilling- "Suck it Alliance."

| 111 “You Can’t Stop the Signal” | 6/19/08 | 1:08:02 | Mean Jean- "So now you can disco without a druid."
               Scott- “There’s a lot of things we can do without druids.”
               Robot Voice from Macro Tip of the Week- “I hate night elf rogues.”

| 112 "We Want A Cereal Pet" | 7/3/08 | 1:30:24 | Scott- “The Seryers are all a bunch of pissants.”
               Scott- “It’s better than having to listen to all those night elves laugh.”
               Curt Schilling- “Do you realize where this show has gone? The French guy just called us pussies.”

| 115 “”En Espanol, But Not Really” | 7/26/08 | 1:19:03 | Patrick- "Maybe gnomes are going to feel silly, but that's because they're gnomes and not because they are death knights."
               Scott- "Correct Sir."

<p>| 116 &quot;More Random&quot; | 8/7/08 | 1:24:20 | Randy- &quot;It's gonna be all...&quot; |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pornography Inside Elevators</td>
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<td>Scott- “Real men prefer orcs.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10/3/08</td>
<td>1:32:51</td>
<td>Curt Schilling- &quot;Your website is in French. That sucks.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>122 &quot;Give back my honor!&quot;</td>
<td>10/3/08</td>
<td>1:32:51</td>
<td>Scott- &quot;Damn French. You and your...&quot;</td>
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<td>130 &quot;Torture My Armory Cover Song&quot;</td>
<td>12/5/08</td>
<td>1:24:55</td>
<td>Scott- &quot;Gerp's sitting there wondering 'why do these Trolls smell so bad?'&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hosts took the time to discuss their anti-Alliance rhetoric and explained that it is all made in jest and that they have (and continue) to play Alliance characters. They also stated that if their current guild Alea Iacta Est was Alliance then they would probably be making Horde jokes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133 “Reverse Hydrocution”</td>
<td>1/9/09</td>
<td>1:53:43</td>
<td>Patrick- “Gnomic activity is way worse than demonic activity”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scott- “The coatroom is spouting that [death knights] make terrible tanks.” Randy- “I don’t know that [death knights] make terrible tanks. I think it’s that most players make terrible tanks.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A graduate student called in to talk about how WoW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was filled with stereotypes worthy of study such as the Trolls being similar to a Caribbean islander stereotype and the Tauren being similar to Native Americans.

| 134 “Lake Wintergrasp Sounds Vaguely Canadian” | 1/21/09 | 1:24:28 | Mention age discrimination in discussion. Youngsters are often pushed aside in favor of more mature players. |
| 135 “Dabbling in the Arcane” | 2/4/09 | 1:39:01 | Scott Kurtz- “I’m amazed at how open minded the Horde are and how single minded the Alliance are.”

Scott Kurtz- “Every alliance quest is 'those fricking horde are back again we must wipe them out and eradicate them.'”

Scott Kurtz- “I was enjoying healing as a [restoration]-shaman until I started a priest and I found out what real healing was like.”

| 138 “Together again and live from the hot tub” | 3/10/09 | 1:39:10 | Scott- “It’s not manga style in the sense that everyone has huge eyes and goes ‘GAGAKAGAGA’.”

| 139 “Worldwide Hysteria, Free Addons, Mages and Horde Drinks for All” | 3/21/09 | 1:37:04 | Not fantasy-race related but Scott said “Indian-giver” but was berated by Randy for saying that.

Randy- “The Chinese are being completely shielded from the rest of the world.”

Randy- “[The mage] is not
They spoke of the Mage class being in decline in WoW because of the difference in game mechanics since WotLK. The main reason for the decline in Mage popularity is because the Mage is no longer the top DPS (Damage Per Second), there is no longer a large need for CC (Crowd Control), and creating portals and food is viewed as “servant’s work”.

Sergeant Daddio (Caller)-
“I especially hate gnome rogues. Those tiny, big-headed imps can go get stomped on by an ogre.”

Caller expressed difficulty with being an openly gay player. He had actually been kicked out of his previous guild after he came out to his guildmates. The hosts discussed that in their guild, Alea Iacta Est, no discrimination based upon race/sex/creed/etc is tolerated and anyone engaging in discrimination would be kicked from their guild.
Results

Animosity in *The Instance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faction</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guild</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Race (i.e. character race) was the common form of animosity found in episodes of *The Instance* with 70 instances of occurrence. Class was the second most prevalent with 33 instances of occurrence. Other (an amalgamation of difficult to classify themes) was the third most common form of animosity with 16 instances of occurrence. Faction was the fourth most common with 14 instances of occurrence. Sex (i.e. character gender) was the fifth most common with six instances of occurrence. Age of player was the sixth most common with three instances of occurrence. Guild and realm were tied for seventh most common with two instances of occurrence each.

Discussion

Data analysis was organized by topic in order to make wading through the large amount of information easier for the reader.
Race

When a player has created a new character in WoW one of the first things the player must do is decide what race to play as. Depending on what race the player has chosen, the player will be given a distinct look and a few unique racial abilities. Racial representation in video games has always been a touchy subject when analyzed by social scientists and WoW is no exception to the rule. Once a person has sunk a moderate amount of time into WoW, the origins of the different fantasy races become apparent: the races are euphemistic depictions of real-life racial groups. The trolls are based on black Caribbean people, the Tauren represent Native Americans, Humans correspond with the British and white Americans, and Dwarves depict the Scottish (Langer, 2008, p. 89).

The problem with using real-world stereotypes to represent races in a fantasy game is the line between fiction and reality begins to blur (Langer, 2008, p. 90) and one becomes unclear about whether discrimination of a certain fantasy race also corresponds with the real-life counterpart. If a person were to sneer in disgust at the easygoing mannerisms of the trolls in WoW, would the same person also believe Caribbean people to be lazy? One must wonder if Blizzard’s choice to base their fantasy races on real-life races and then placing those fantasy races in a war situation in which players battle each other could result in an exacerbation of racial tensions. Most players of WoW believe the connections between fantasy-race discrimination and real-life discrimination are harmless, but ignoring the possibility Blizzard has (hopefully) unintentionally created racist discourse is difficult once the union between fantasy and reality becomes apparent.
Johnson, Jordan, and Konietzsky, the hosts of *The Instance*, often made comments towards different races of WoW, but the majority of these malevolent statements appeared to be made in jest. Comments such as “no one would have sex with a gnome” from Scott Johnson (2007, Ep. 86) or Andrew calling the night elves “tree-huggers” (Konietzsky, 2006, Ep. 16) are hard to take seriously, especially when considering the context in which they were presented.

The interesting thing about considering discrimination in WoW is a large portion of the player community does not care about the lore involved in the game and so “many players are unaware of the tensions that the back-story creates, and indeed, these issues do not figure into their experience of the game” (MacCallum-Stewart, 2008, p. 59). Knowing the history of the night elves or having an expansive knowledge of the orcs’ rise from slavery is not essential to being successful or even enjoying WoW. With this in mind, it is no surprise true animosity towards different races in WoW is barely present. Race, as noted earlier, confers very basic abilities to each player and gives each character a distinctive virtual skin, but does not go any deeper than that. Most players of Orcs, whose rise from slavery is similar to the tribulations of African-Americans, do not feel a shared bond between other Orc characters; instead they see the other character as another player. The back-story of the different fantasy races is there for the players who want it and can be completely ignored by players who could care less. Fantasy race is not a significant target of enmity in the WoW community with exceptions being made overwhelmingly with humorous intent.

**Faction**

There are two distinct factions in WoW who compete with each other: the Alliance and the Horde. The Alliance is composed of Humans, Dwarves, Gnomes, Night Elves, and Draenei and the Horde is composed of Orcs, Tauren, Undead, Trolls, and Blood Elves. When a player
has chosen their race, the player is automatically assigned to a corresponding faction; there is no way to change which side the player is aligned to (though race changes are now allowed for a fee, so faction can be changed that way). According to MacCallum-Steward (2008):

The use of traditional fantasy races would seem to suggest that the Alliance are good, and the Horde are evil. However, this is specifically not the case. Within the game, the Alliance races are ecologically destructive, aggressive colonizers, whereas the Horde races live harmoniously with the land around them. Humans, dwarves, and gnomes are presented as technologically progressive, supported by their love of gnomish engineering, dwarven mining, and archaeology, and the farming communities of Redridge, Elywnn, and Westfall. Conversely, tauren, trolls, and orcs have backgrounds implying harmony with the land, collectivism, and ecology (p. 43).

We have already established players do not need to have a complete knowledge of the history of the Warcraft universe, so many players are unaware of why two distinct factions exist, but players are still able to play WoW. Castranova (2007) pointed out “it should be stressed that lore does not need to be imposed on the populace; indeed, it must not be imposed. The [Lore] must simply exist in the back-story, be a part of the atmosphere” (p. 165).

The hosts of The Instance (Johnson, Jordan, and Konietzsky) are members a Horde guild with over 2,700 members (WoWWiki), which has led them to make a large number of anti-Alliance remarks such as “Alliance of course, bunch of pansies” (Johnson, 2006, Ep. 14) and “Real men play Horde” (Patrick [a regular guest and contributor], 2008, Ep. 108). During one episode of The Instance, the hosts took time to address complaints of their anti-Alliance rhetoric and stated their discrimination boiled down to that since their guild, Alea Iacta Est, was Horde
based, the hosts were going to make fun of the Alliance and that comments were not meant to be offensive. The hosts went on to say if their guild had been created as an Alliance guild, they would be making similar jokes towards the Horde (Johnson & Jordan, 2008, Ep. 130).

Remembering “in the gameworld of Azeroth, we can explore, playfight, and enjoy ourselves, moving from one attraction to the next while forgetting or ignoring everything about the fictional world of the same name” (Aarseth, 2008, p. 119) is important and despising the opposing faction is not necessary for play and for players who do not participate in any player-versus-player (PvP) events, discrimination of the opposing faction is not typical. One interesting aspect of the opposing factions in WoW is because players are able to play on both factions, players are able to experience the dyseuphemization of the opposing faction into an enemy from both perspectives. Enemies in war, according to Robert Ivie, are typically dyseuphemized as being savage and ruthless (Hahn, 1998, p. 94) so the necessity of war is easier to accept for a potential solider. The ability to see that both factions are composed of rational and compassionate individuals may lead players to recognize the factional conflict in WoW as purely fictional and a mechanic of play. The very nature of being placed in a situation of two opposing sides has created a natural tendency for players to assume an attitude of dislike or competition with the opposing faction, but such animosity does not run deep.

**Class**

Once a player has chosen their race, they have to choose their class. The classes a player can choose from are priest, warrior, mage, rogue, warlock, hunter, paladin, shaman, and druid. Not all races can play as all classes though; an issue some players find fault with. When Blizzard added hero-classes (classes only playable once one of a player’s characters has reached semi-high level [Level 55]) in the *Wrath of the Lich King* (WotLK) expansion Blizzard allowed
any race to play as a death knight. Allowing every race to play as a death knight incited some commotion, because this change in policy did not fit with precedent (Blizzard Forums, 2009).

What class a player chose has a huge impact upon how the player will play WoW. If a player chose a healing class, then that player is socially expected to act in a way appropriate to that healing position, which typically entails keeping fellow adventurers alive. So “the rules of the game involving what a character labeled ‘healer’ can and cannot do are not determined only by the code of the game, but also by the norms of the users” (Castronova, 2005, p. 102) meaning if a person were to play as a healer and decide to not heal their companions, then the player would quickly be ostracized from the group and may have trouble finding people to adventure with at a later point. A group needs a well-rounded set of classes performing specific functions in order to function effectively. How well a player performs their duty in the group has a huge effect upon whether people will appreciate their presence or not. As stated before, “being healed by a fellow player with healing abilities is a good example of the way in which design choices also inform social behavior” (Klastrup, 2008, p. 148), but there are other examples such as warriors being expected to tank (i.e. keep the tough enemy’s attention on the warrior and not on the weaker members of the group) or the expectation of the DPS (damage per second) classes to do massive amounts of damage at a quick pace. Once a player has started to fall behind in their duties, they will quickly be labeled as incompetent and assumed to be a noob (short for newbie).

Everything discussed so far has assumed we are operating in a player versus environment (PvE) setting. Once we look at the same norms and expectations in a PvP environment, everything changes dramatically. If the player community has come to the conclusion a certain class is overpowered, there will be massive outcry for the Blizzard to change the actual game mechanics in order to make the class on par with everyone else (a.k.a. “nerf” the class). Nerfs
happens routinely as developers continually patch their games to fix errors and change the
parameters of play (Mortenson, 2008) and result in a constantly shifting power structure between
classes.

Johnson, Jordan, and Konietzsky (the hosts of The Instance) engaged in the class debate
as often as the rest of the WoW player community. A few examples of the hosts’ opinions on
certain classes were Randy saying “I have always considered [shamans] overpowered” (Jordan,
2007, Ep. 70) and Scott having stated “the priest class gets no love in the game” (Johnson, 2006,
Ep. 13). The class determined to be underperforming at the time of writing (May, 2009) in
WoW seemed to be the mage which was supported by Randy having said “[the mage] is not the
top DPS class” (Jordan, 2009, Ep. 139). The primary function of a mage is DPS and if the mage
cannot no longer perform their function, a problem has been created; both social and game
mechanic. A series of nerfs has made the mage become a socially perceived weaker class than
the rest of the classes in WoW and was a major topic of discussion during episode 139 of The
Instance. The mage’s abilities will probably be changed through a series of patches in order to
try and better balance the mage with the rest of the classes in the game.

The mage is not the first class in WoW to lose a portion of player appreciation (people
can always make a new character if they are unhappy with their current character) because of a
weak perception. Castronova noted “public demonstration in World of Warcraft by players
demanded attention for their concerns about the warrior class” (Taylor, 2006, p. 125) long before
the mage was ever considered downtrodden. Having a class perceived weak by the community
is socially damaging for the player. A player who chooses a socially perceived weak class may
have troubles getting into groups or guilds because of the assumed lesser value of their class.

Obviously, the issue of class imbalance has led to a large amount of animosity towards
Blizzard from the player community. Having one class too weak is going to upset the people playing that particular class and having another class too powerful is going to upset everyone else. No wonder “designers and the user community are in an endless tug of war about what the rules actually are” (Castronova, 2005, p. 101). Scott Johnson and Randy Jordan also seemed to be of the opinion not all races should be death knights. Randy’s stated “I don’t think gnomes should be death knights. I don’t think night elves should be death knights. I don’t think Tauren should be death knights” (Jordan, 2008, Ep. 94), which made Randy’s opinion very clear. Between the hosts’ opinions on death knights and the numerous discussions on improper class balance, one can safely say the hosts of The Instance did engage in class debate. Also, the hosts’ complaints regarding class balance seemed to have been more thought out than any other subject of animosity.

**Sex**

When a player has created a new character in WoW, the player has the option of choosing either male or female for their sex despite their real-life biological sex. Choice of sexual identity has led to countless amounts of research done by the academic community, but analysis at hand will only focus on the social implications of choosing one sex over the other in WoW. While some scholars do not find WoW to be a hyper sexualized game in terms of WoW’s female populace (Corneliussen, 2008, p. 72), the majority of social scientists seem to believe the female avatars (a player’s virtual representation) in WoW are highly sexualized.

Hyper sexualization of female avatars appears to be true for some races, but not for others. Most people would agree a female Orc is anything but attractive, but creating a Night Elf character that does not appear alluring to a heterosexual male is near impossible. Sheri Graner,
the author of *Gender Inclusive Game Design*, pointed out “male avatars are not hyper sexualized in the way that female ones are; they do not walk around with erections and signal constant sexual receptivity” (Taylor, 2006, p. 118), but female avatars are constantly presented in a sexual manner. One example of hyper sexualization is the amount of cleavage a female character shows off regardless of what clothing the player chooses for their character to wear. Female characters in WoW, for the most part, are presented in a highly sexualized manner.

Scott Johnson, Randy Jordan, and Andrew Konietzsky (the hosts of *The Instance*) did not say much about sexual representation in WoW. The lack of sexual identity discussion may be explained by the assumption the player community has by now figured out that just because someone’s avatar is a sexy female Night Elf does not necessarily mean the player is a sexy female, or even a female. If a player were to make the assumption female character equals female player, there is a high probability a number of socially embarrassing situations could occur. The comments the hosts made were mostly humorous in nature, such as Andrew saying “I think most of the women that player hunters [do so] because [they] get a discount at Pet Smart and [they] get a discount when [they] go to Penny’s, when [they go to buy shoes]” (Konietzsky, 2006, Ep. 17) and Scott having stated “[hunters] are all girls” (Johnson, 2007, Ep. 83) even though Scott’s main character in AIE is a hunter and Scott is certainly not female.

Because of the inability to accurately determine whether a particular player is male or female the player community has, for the most part, steered away from making judgments about one’s real-life sex and their ability to play the game. Since we have no way of accurately measuring the male to female ratio (such information is confidential) in WoW and no way of knowing which class each sex prefers, there is no way for the player community to make
rationale, informed statements about which sex is better or worse at playing certain roles in WoW.

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**Guild**

Once a player has progressed their character through the levels of WoW, the player will come to the realization that in order to experience the most difficult and rewarding content of WoW, players must form into organized groups; a subject which was touched on earlier. A typical group consists of five people, but there is content which requires even larger numbers of players known as raids. Raids are usually organized beforehand since spontaneously getting large numbers of people together (raids can be up to 40 players) of appropriate level/skill/class is unlikely (Blizzard has steered away from making context with high player requirements since the inception of WoW). Joining a guild (clubs composed entirely of players) is often the easiest way for payers to find players with similar goals and play styles. Since high end game can in large part only be achieved via the help of others, joining a guild with similar ambitions is often a player’s best avenue of achieving their goals in game.

**Note:** Guilds do exist for functions other than raiding. There are guilds entirely devoted to role playing, PvP, creating a family friendly environment, and just for social enjoyment. However, raiding guilds are the focus of our present analysis.

If a particular guild is discriminatory in nature towards certain people, some players may find themselves without the means of conquering high-end content.

Scott Johnson, Randy Jordan, and Andrew Konietzsky (the hosts of *The Instance*) are members of a large guild in WoW. The hosts’ guild, Alea Iacta Est, stated in their policy section that their guild “encompasses many play styles and areas of interest” and “the guild provides a
community of mutual respect and courtesy in which a member may choose whatever mode of play they wish and can explore different modes of play that they find interesting or unfamiliar” (AIE, 2008).

Keeping in mind Alea Iacta Est’s policy, one should not be surprised that when a listener of the show called in and said he was "recently kicked from the guild Divinity for one thing, my race. I'm an African-American individual and I was kicked from Divinity for that sole purpose” (2007, Ep. 53) the hosts’ response was that the particular people in that guild were despicable and that the discriminated-against player should move on to find another guild. Similar fans have told the hosts they have been discriminated against based upon sex and sexual orientation, to which the hosts responded in a likewise manner. There was no discriminatory rhetoric made by the hosts of The Instance found in relation to guilds; Alea Iacta Est seemed to be open to any player, of any type, looking for any play style.

**Age**

All sorts of people play WoW and a good number of those players do not act according to what most would consider a civil manner. As Castronova pointed out “if you call people ‘nigger’ or pressure them for kinky sex and you get caught, you can be banned from the world forever with no compensation” (Castronova, 2005, p. 31), but the risk of being banned does not stop everyone from daring to push accepted social norms in WoW. Those who feel themselves discriminated against in real life may find the virtual world to be a more accepting place (Castronova, 2005, p. 77), which puts the mollification of aggrieved persons in the developers’ best interest; if those who are discriminated against in real life are likewise discriminated against in WoW, then there is no reason for harmed players to continue playing. The one type of
intolerance players are allowed to display without fear of being banned is that of age
discrimination. There are numerous guilds that only open their doors to adults and exclude
players below a certain age from joining and many groups will not allow a member in if the
group determines the potential member is too young to be a mature player.

Scott Johnson, Randy Jordan, and Andrew Konietzsky (the hosts of *The Instance*)
participated in little intolerance toward the younger population of WoW, but a few instances did
occur. Patrick, a frequent contributor and guest host of the show, noted “the adult population
seems evenly distributed [between Alliance and Horde], but the younger population looks like it
has a definite preference for the nice and clean Alliance” (2006, Ep. 34) and another guest host
to by the name of Freaky said “I don’t need some 13 year old shaman coming around and
sticking the voodoo up my butt” (2006, Ep. 13), but besides that there little in regards to player
age stereotyping or discrimination by the hosts.

There is some scholarly evidence to back up why players prefer not to associate with
younger players. Hagström noted “one informant believes that ‘a person who has the name
xxxBadAssxxx is probably a person who doesn’t care about the game itself but plays it just
because everyone else does.’ He says it ‘also feels like the people who have those names are
younger players’” (Hagström, 2008, p. 276), but that is just one player’s assumption equating
unimaginative naming with the age of a player. Regardless of whether or not young players
really are immature, the hosts of *The Instance* rarely engaged in any discrimination of players
based upon age and on a few occasions praised young players for their unusual skills in WoW.
Realm

The first thing a player must do, even before a player can choose their class, sex, or race of their character, is decide what type of realm they want to play on. The choices for realms are player versus environment (PvE), player versus player (PvP), role playing (RP), and role playing player versus player (RPPvP). Once a player has entered one realm, the player cannot move to another (with some exceptions such as paying to have your character moved). Which realm a player has chosen has a huge impact upon the type of game the player is going to experience.

If a player has chosen a PvP realm, the opposing faction can, by default, attack the player no matter where they are; there is no sanctuary. Constant threat is not the case if a player has chosen a PvE realm, where a player must opt to participate in combat with the opposing faction. Ever-present danger makes playing in a PvP realm far more dangerous and difficult, which has lead to an increased sense of prestige for players who have chosen participation in PvP realms, since dying by the hands of another player not only sets a person back, but also imposes a form of social humiliation (Klastrup, 2008, p. 158). PvP realms are more cut-throat than any other form of realm.

Scott Johnson, Randy Jordan, and Andrew Konietzsky (the hosts of The Instance) play on a role playing realm called Earthen Ring. Keeping the hosts’ choice of realm in mind, it is not surprising the hosts rarely suggested playing on a PvP realm meant a player was, in any way, elite. Scott did, on a few occasions, state he is not a skilled PvP player and was often beaten in battlegrounds (areas in which PvP can take place on any realm). Curt Schilling (the former Boston Red Sox pitcher), also stated he was often beaten in PvP matches and did not particularly care for playing directly against other players. The hosts did not appear to believe playing on one realm over another meant a player was superior to any other player.
A few surprising comments came through while analyzing the episodes such as numerous references to gold farmers being Chinese. A gold farmer is a person who spends their time harvesting gold to sell to players for real-world currency. Buying gold is often looked down upon in the game and getting caught buying gold has negative social consequences for players (Mortensen, 2008, p. 216). The worst consequence for buying gold that a player could suffer would be banishment from WoW, making all their time invested a complete waste. The least painful consequence a player could suffer would be the social ramifications such as being kicked from their guild or turned away by a group. Exactly where the stereotype of gold farmers all being Chinese came from is unknown (at least to me), but the Chinese gold farmer stereotype seemed prevalent in The Instance.

There were also a number of comments making fun of the French and Americans. Why these two groups of people were made fun of made sense once one has realized that one guest hosts of the show, Patrick, is from France and the rest of the hosts are from the United States. The hosts’ comments about France were not serious.

Limitations with Research

If more time had been available, I would have analyzed every episode of The Instance, however doing so would have taken up far more time than I had to offer. Listening to every episode of the podcast would have allowed me to obtain more accurate results. There are, as of September 26, 2009, 163 episodes of The Instance with most episodes ranging from one to two hours in length. Listening to every single episode would have been an extremely taxing task for
one researcher and listening to every episode twice, like I did for the episodes analyzed, was infeasible.

If more than one person had taken part in this context analysis project, the results may have differed greatly. Not only would more instances of discrimination have turned up, but arguments over what was inflammatory would have occurred; what qualifies as animosity is subjective. Being able to compare finding from each episode with other researchers would have been interesting, but was not an option.

**Conclusion**

*The Instance* is one of the most popular podcasts devoted entirely to WoW and, as such, the hosts, Scott Johnson, Randy Jordan, and Andrew Konietzsky have the ability to make huge impacts on the WoW player community. My analysis of the hosts’ and guest hosts’ speech has delved into the areas of race, faction, class, sex, guild, player age, and type of realm.

While the hosts of *The Instance* did engage in some heated discussions during the episodes analyzed, the majority of their dialogue remained calm and levelheaded. The one area which seemed to generate the most conflict was class balance issues. Future research should further examine how class balancing creates a constantly shifting power structure for players and is a source of frustration for both players and developers.

If I could give the hosts of the *The Instance* advice as to how they could potentially increase their listener numbers, I would recommend the hosts refrain from castigating other players based on the player’s choice of fantasy race; though most listeners should be able to tell
the hosts’ of *The Instance* were kidding when they joke about fantasy races, there could be players who simply turned off the program when their chosen race was made fun of.

WoW is ridiculously popular and the largest MMO played on the planet (Guinness, 2009). As long as WoW continues to enjoy huge numbers of players, the academic world will continue to take interest and participate in research in an attempt to better understand this juggernaut of a game.
References


