

# LEARNING THE ART OF HERDING CATS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERS IN MMO GROUPS

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*The Development of Leaders in MMO Groups*

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## **Extended Abstract:**

Digital games, in particular games that require cooperative online play, are increasingly a social phenomenon that is shared by people in many different stages of their lives. These men and women engage with social structures of different types; clans, guilds, teams, corporations, and even empires. As they engage with these groups, they find themselves in a position of social and goal-oriented obligation to an organization (Chang & Zhang, 2008; Chen et al. 2008). They may feel social ties to others within the group and the need to help other team-members in order to pursue goal tasks. At the same time, research into leadership in online games indicates that players performing leadership tasks online also learn out-of-game skills for engaging in teamwork and bureaucratic structures (Reeves, et al., 2008). In working with their organization, then, the individual is engaging in social self-improvement that can be applied to situations in other social contexts besides gaming. Even in situations where the player feels like they do not wish to engage in leadership roles, the sense of obligation to their social relations within the organization can cause these players to “step up” and learn these skills (Bos & Shami, 2006; Butler, 2007). As the level of engagement increases, so does the impact that these different game-based interactions on the development of new generations of citizens and workers who will engage in social action and shared social experience.

Digital games research is an active and developing field, and this project lies within it. There have been many works on player demographics and personal goals and experiences (Yee, 2006; Moore, Ducheneaut, & Nickell, 2007), on organizations online (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2012; Nardi & Harris, 2006), and on social problems in these games (Bergstrom, 2012; de Zwart, 2009; Carter & Gibbs, 2013). The value of this work lies in its connection to studies of leadership (Weber, et al. 2001) as described above. This project is based on a series of long semi-structured interviews with leaders of in-game organizations in the online games EVE Online and World of Warcraft. These two-hour long interviews focus on the reasons for why an individual entered a leadership position and how they interacted with others in their group. The participants were 8 individuals in different leadership positions – in WoW, they consisted of guild leaders, raid leaders, and “supporting” officers. In EVE, they were an alliance leader, a corporation leader, and the leader of an EVE Alliance Tournament team (an EVE esports system). Two of the participants were women, with 6 being men. Specific focus was made to ask about how leadership skills were gained and whether the role of leader was a teaching

moment for their lives. The interviews were performed over Skype, TeamSpeak, Discord, and in two cases, in face-to-face interaction. Interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards.

Analysis is performed through a combination of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959), using a grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) approach. This means that there was not a core theoretical construct or hypothesis at the start of the analysis, and the other analytical approaches, as well as identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009), were used due to their applicability. This project finds that leaders of these online groups find themselves taking on a different mentality and sense of sociality the longer they engage with others within the group. They start to use different language, focusing on specific goal-oriented speech (Milik, 2015), and ensure to use “in-speak” with members of the group and socialize new members through this organizational language use (Weber, 1995). These habits increase cultural unity, but also causes the leader to feel more accepting of norms through structuralization. Even certain qualities of the organization that they thought were problematic before (recruitment policies, “baddies” in the group) were described as less problematic or at least something worth engaging as leadership became an active identity for these individuals.

In many cases, the actual role of leader is seen in a negative light; there is a large time commitment and very little reward seen in a voluntary form of entertainment. Many of the respondents describe in detail how much happier they would be with the game if they were able to participate without the “need” for leading. Despite this, they also worry that their organizations could be unstable or at least less successful if they did not perform these tasks. Due to the social bonds they’ve formed as well as the practical interest in engaging end-game content of their game, they feel that the extra work is necessary. In addition, the actual job of having to work with people and organize a large group of anonymous and online-based relationships (described by one as “herding cats”) is seen as a learning opportunity to engage in leadership roles that they were able to use as a basis for career advancement or as a talking point in interviews. In many of these cases, the fact that he leadership happened in a game is not mentioned, but the actual skills are transferrable enough that they are helpful to the individual in these contexts. In the end, the feeling of obligation towards others in an online organization is creating a situation where an individual learns important life skills and improves their social and economic position. This can serve as an example of how digital games, when structured to allow for organizational systems and player engagement, can be valuable tools in helping people to learn important qualities and behaviors that help them outside of the game.

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## INDIGITALGAMES AND THE REPRESENTATIONS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES BEYOND TOMAHAWKS AND HEADDRESSES

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NAITHAN LAGACE

Digital identity has become an influential aspect of Indigenous representations in the 21st century. With the rise in popularity of social media, blogging sites and other social platforms, identity can become skewed or assimilated in digital media. The Indigitalgames.com project wants to show the complexities and various factors that contribute to representations seen in video games throughout the decades. Initially, the plan was simple, examine images similar to those seen in other media forms like Hollywood Western movies, or Western comics. As I began to investigate more diverse genres of games, there were multiple types of representations involving Indigenous people that didn't follow the Noble Savage characteristics. Not all representations wore headdresses and threw tomahawks. This discovery allowed me to examine other images seen in video games and compare the tropes and stereotypes. As technology continues to develop and expand concepts of space, people use said space to inform, to connect with others over long distances and to explore ideas and values that otherwise would not be accessible in the physical area. By using technology like blogs, social media outlets, and cellular devices, local space becomes intertwined with technology, often, used as a starting point for discussions and relationships. This paper will discuss the complexities that digital media has on Indigenous identity and by using Indigitalgames.com to show video games like *Until Dawn* and *Assassins Creed 3*'s complex tropes of Indigenous cultures can be used to counteract negative representations of Indigenous people through digital content aimed at educating multiple generations of peoples on video game stereotypes.

Digital media can reshape the way people perceive cultures, and communities as generations of younger people continue exploring this media through technology. Digital technology is an interest for many Indigenous communities who wish to pursue etiquette ways of including their cultures into newer forms of technology. Perceptions surrounding space and the importance of physical space come into question as more Indigenous peoples rely on digital space for connecting with their communities. As younger generations of Indigenous peoples continue to move away from their traditional homelands, the higher the reliance on digital media to stay connected with family back home becomes. Messaging, however, can consistently change within digital spaces as there becomes more input from people sharing similar backgrounds, experiences, and relationships. For many communities, this becomes a concern when representations within digital media become intertwined traditional roles and other information associations. As Joshua describes in his book; *No Sense of Place*: