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CREATING MULTI IDENTITIES AND GENDER IN VIRTUAL WORLD: A STUDY OF
SECOND LIFE

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ABSTRACT

CREATING MULTI IDENTITIES AND GENDER IN VIRTUAL WORLD: A STUDY OF SECOND LIFE

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This study aims to investigate the possibility of creating a virtual world. In this respect, this thesis seeks answers to following questions: How is virtual reality different and similar to real life or does virtual reality has peculiar features of it? How do the users create identities through avatars in virtual world and then how and why to create multiple identities? Is it possible to talk about a peculiar identity for a person in virtual reality? Why do users need to create multi identities or does it come from a need or a choice? As a result of creating multiple identities, is it possible to create different genders from real life and virtual gender? Research area of this study takes place in Second Life which is a 3D online virtual game and the answers to all these questions are given both through personal observations and experiences in Second Life as a player and through writings studied on these issues.

Key words: virtual reality, cyberspace, multi identities, gender, real life

ÖZET

SANAL GERÇEKLIKTE ÇOKLU KİMLİK VE CİNSİYET YARATIMLARI: SECOND LIFE ÜZERİNE BİR ÇALIŞMA

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Bu çalışma sanal dünya yaratımlarının mümkün olup olmadığını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, çalışma şu sorulara cevap bulmaya çalışmıştır: Sanal gerçeklik, gerçek yaşamdan (çevrimdışı) nasıl farklı ve o yaşama nasıl benzer, ya da sanal gerçekliğin kendine özgü özellikleri var mıdır? Kişiler, sanal gerçeklikte avatarlarla nasıl kimlik yaratırlar ve sonrasında nasıl ve neden çoklu kimlikler yaratılır? Sanal gerçeklikte kişiye has bir kimlikten bahsedebilir miyiz? Kişiler çoklu kimlik yaratımlarına neden ihtiyaç duyarlar? Bu bir ihtiyaçtan mı kaynaklanır yoksa bir seçim midir? Çoklu kimlik yaratımları sonucunda, gerçek yaşamdan farklı cinsiyet yaratımları mümkün müdür? Bu çalışmanın araştırma alanı üç boyutlu, çevrimiçi sanal bir oyun olan Second Life'tır. Bu yüzden, bu soruları cevaplamak amacıyla hem Second Life'ta yapılan kişisel gözlem ve deneyimler hem de bu konu üzerine yazılmış yazılar çalışmaya aktarılacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: sanal gerçeklik, siber uzam, kimlik, cinsiyet, gerçek yaşam

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INTRODUCTION

All levels of technological digitization have been linked to the development of internet and thereby to the development of virtual culture. Computer mediated communication had started before the invention of computer firstly through the invention of telegraph, which later led to internet, the invention of radio and telephone lines which brought us not only voice but also data just like cable television. By the invention of the first computers which were designed only for military purposes and governmental issues in England and the United States in 1945, the development in digital technology has started to increase greatly. Even though computers were used for governmental statics and making scientific calculations, computer technology made a great progress through the use of technological devices on the process of using computers, and the field of using computer technology (Levy 2001). In addition as Levy states using microprocessors in information technology improved the usage areas of modern computer since people started using computers in commerce, physics and electronics except for military and governmental issues. As a result, the purpose of using computers took new shapes and enlarged. Just like what happened during the development and overspread of computers, using internet has obtained several different purposes for different people such as effective communication, remote access, searching information, making research, experiencing a new life on the internet as a space, creating new identities, using it as a technological device and many others since the invention of it. In addition, through the spread of internet, computer has become one of the components of the universal computing network instead of being the center of the system. A computer without

internet means being incomplete nowadays. In this respect I can say that internet is not only in the center of universal computing network, it is also in the center of everyday life which people always desire to be a part of it in every minute. Therefore, it has become a medium where people can live in. In addition, internet has become more and more common space for people because of easy access to information and innovations, expressing and representing themselves as parts of this space. Internet, in other words cyberspace, provides different forms of interaction and communication because people are both the participants and the developers of many different spaces which are parts of cyberspace. Users become a part of another life which resembles to actual life and somehow different through internet. While cyberspace is the internet in a general sense, virtual world is a world in which people live on the internet with 3D environments that are simulations of actual environments and life styles and with some technological vehicles. Moreover, virtual reality enables people to create and live different lives in simulated worlds on the internet. In this respect this thesis has been an attempt to study on Second Life, a virtual world, in terms of avatars and multiple identity creation, and creation of virtual genders.

In this respect, this thesis develops an idea of the terms cyberspace and virtual reality which have been developed through the use of internet and debated by philosophers nowadays. What these terms mean and in what conditions we use the terms cyberspace or virtual reality, how people create a world for themselves except for the real world; however, which looks like a real world or simulation of the real world, a hyper reality. Therefore, this thesis tries to give an answer to the question of the possibility of creating virtual environments in which people can create new communities and new ideologies, the creation of new identities and multiple genders. As a result, this thesis will touch on the possibility of creating a virtual life peculiar

to cyberspace. As a main idea of my thesis I will enlarge the idea of creating new identities on virtual reality through examining an online 3D virtual game Second Life where I have made several journeys and had several experiences. I will speak about how to create multiple avatars and how these avatars turn into multiple identities in virtual world. In this respect, this thesis will be about what to experience as a result of having multiple identities at the same time. In addition, I will discuss why people need to create new identities, how to create several identities or the possibility of having a hidden identity, alt avatars, in virtual environments as a result of my own experiences in Second Life. Except for the creation of new identities, the possibility of forming virtual genders will be my research subject in this thesis.

First chapter of this study touches on the relationship between cyberspace and virtual. This chapter introduces the basic terms and it illustrates Second Life as a virtual world and an online 3D virtual game in which people can produce, interact, teleport, and be telepresent. As Hardey (2001) claims that the Internet has an empowering characteristic because users are not only the receiver of information but the producer of it via the Internet as well. While users both receive and produce in cyberspace, they live in virtual realities by receiving and producing. As a result, the users of Second Life not only live what is given to them, they also empower the living conditions and living environment they have by building or adding new parts and innovations to this virtual world. In this way, people create their own lives as they want and shape it according to new conditions. As a result, this study states that while cyber space the internet in a broad sense, virtual reality is the simulation of the actual reality into internet in which people can do most of the things they can in actual world.

The first chapter goes on with the idea of simulacrum which was put through by Baudrillard. Through the idea of simulacrum this thesis states in addition to being the simulation of the reality or actual world, it also represents the reality on its own. Therefore it is virtual reality which means the reality in the internet. If the virtual worlds are the simulations of the reality, it is obvious that people reflects the actuality into virtual. For this reason the users create spaces which look like their own spaces or they give the actual building names to virtual buildings. Users do not get shocked if they come across well known places and buildings of actual world in virtual worlds. In this respect, Second Life is a virtual environment where people can express themselves and create a living area which is either similar to or different from the actual world, but in every respect it will be the simulation of actuality.

Since Second Life is a virtual environment people can experience whatever they like from education to sexual life, they want to be present and virtual in this space. To be able to express themselves virtually, they need to have virtual embodiments which are called avatars. In Second Life, creating avatars does not require any obligations. However; it is limited with the venue for the first time. Later, users can change their appearance either through buying with Linden Dollars or through free appearances, skins, hair, face and clothes. It is possible to change the appearance of the avatar anytime the user wishes. Because the avatars are the representations of the users, their appearance and behavior turns into the virtual identity of the users. As several scholars state users mostly prefer having virtual avatars which do not resemble their actual identity through having different appearance, living a different life or behaving differently. In this respect, through creating several different avatars and appearance, users can create different multiple virtual identities in Second Life. The users choose having different identities at the

same time for experiencing different virtual lives. In this respect, chapter two mainly focuses on identity, social identity creation and gender identity creation. After that the chapter goes on with multiple virtual identity and examples from Second Life. As chapter two puts through, one reason of creating multiple identities is the users' desire of being present in several different virtual communities. As being one of the users of Second Life, I have one main avatar and two alt avatars which I use for different purposes. I do not have a house in Second Life therefore all my avatars wander around the areas where they were situated lately. In this respect, I use my main avatar for communicating with experienced residents in Second Life and for domestic reasons. I use my alt avatars from time to time for being present and research in different communities such as Turkish groups or LGBT communities. Many other users have different virtual identities in order to be acceptable from different communities. Therefore, users have multiple identities in order to cope up with multiple loneliness of real life, to socialize virtually and to be accepted among communities.

As a result of creating multiple avatars virtually, the problem of creating and owning or not owning virtual genders arises. Therefore Chapter three touches on online gender and gender identity. In Second Life, even though there are just two sexes in the beginning of the registration and it has a system which carries on actual world's gender norms, the users do not have to obey these standards. The choice they made in the beginning does not change but they can change their preferences by changing their appearances and behaviors, in other words they change their genders and identities at the same time. On the other hand, it is evident that most of the users are present in Second Life with the reverse gender that they own in actual life. Also, it is almost impossible to detect the number of these people who own reverse gender

due to the ambiguity of virtual gender. In this respect, just like why people own multiple identities or change identities for several times, people want to change their genders according to situations. While the users sometimes want to have a different gender distinct from the actual one because they want to experience different genders and find out the convenient one for themselves, they sometimes swap their genders for they cannot live their genders as they like because of the pressure in actual communities. As a result, this chapter states that Second Life constructs opportunities to the users for living as they wish with the most convenient identity and gender. However, while trying to make a genderless environment, Second Life forces its users to create multiple genders in order to be present in different manners in different environments.

Second Life is a virtual world which consists several different virtual environments in which people can create, publish and express themselves. Second Life illustrates actuality in virtual. After a long experience period, I find out that people prefer living in this world as if it is the actuality rather than accepting its being virtualized. In this respect, Second Life provides its users different options such as being telepresent here and there whenever they want, and owning several different identities and different genders as they want or according to the situations and conditions they have virtually.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This thesis aims to investigate creating multiple virtual identities and gender in a virtual world, Second Life, as a result of created virtual lives. In this respect, main issues of this thesis are the need of creating multiple identities through avatars in virtual environments either as a representation of their identities or as new representations of themselves, and the need of gender identity creation which arises due to the reflection of real life. Since gender identity creation is a complicated issue and this creation has similarities with the virtual world's gender identity formation, this thesis aims to look for and find out the reasons of why people need to swap their genders, even it is impossible to detect if the user's gender is real or not, and how the users manage to survive in a virtual world like Second Life with their multiple gender identities through swapping them in accordance with the communities.

How people create virtual avatars as embodiment of themselves, why people need to have multiple identities in Second Life, how multiple avatars of a user turn into multiple identities of the user, what a user can do with multiple identities, how gender identity arises from identity formation and why people need to have multiple gender formation in a virtual environment are the questions I look for an answer. In this respect, I took part in Second Life to do researches on multiple identity and gender identity creation with the aim of finding out that even if identity and gender identity formation in a virtual world might seem similar to real life formations of them, they have several different aspects in terms of the reasons of identity and gender creation, and the problems of credibility and reliability that arises from the multiplicity of the identities and genders of a person in several different communities.

Methodology for Multiple Virtual Identity and Gender Creation in Second Life

Second Life is an online Virtual World in which people can find several different interests similar to their real life experiences. Even though it is a well known medium used in great amounts, I came across with Second Life within the context of a course on digital learning environment delivered at Istanbul University. They are using Second Life as a convenient medium for educational purposes in addition to its virtually socializing contributions. Even though Istanbul University use this medium for educational purposes just as most of the colleges around the world, the scope of it varies from art, painting, engineering, entertainment, education, research and so on. I use Second life to do researches on multiple virtual identity creation and gender identity creation at the same time. In this respect, I have studied on how and why people construct or need to have multiple virtual identities in especially Second Life. As a part of identity creation, gender identity which arises from gender creation is also a part of my study. In this respect, this part of the thesis illustrates the methodology of my research in Second Life.

As Aarseth puts through there are three methods to do research on cyberspace or in virtual environments. Either the researcher only uses literature review on virtual environment which is studied or the researcher becomes a part of the virtual world and expresses his/her observations and experiences integrated with the literature review. The last one is that the researcher becomes a part of it, makes interviews and observations only in that medium. In the end the researcher expresses only his/her study in the virtual world (1997). In qualitative studies there are a few methods for

studying. Because I am studying on a virtual world, Second Life which is free to join for everybody, I choose to participate and become a part of this world. In order to be able to do research, I signed up Second Life in March, 2014 with just an avatar. While being present in Second Life, firstly I observed around and tried to have friends in accordance with my research on virtual multiple identity and virtual gender creation. I, personally, experienced multiple identity creation with my three avatars, as well, for I needed to have multiple avatars. My first avatar is my main avatar as a researcher and the others are used for getting friends on from different communities. I interviewed with my friends in an unconstructed way through texting instant messages. I become a part of Second Life even though there are a number of limitations in my respect. The first one is that I do not have a house in Second Life because I have not wanted to pay for it since it was available to be present without an accommodation. The limitation of it was that I could not have neighbors as the other researchers did before. The other limitation I faced occurred when I was searching and trying to have a talk on gender and sexual relationship in Second Life. In some communities, especially the ones for lesbian, gay and transsexuals, there are strict rules to be a part of it. First of all, you need to pay to enter them. Then, you need to have an appearance relevant to theirs. The other one is to respect all those avatars which is not a limitation actually. In one community that I tried to experience sexual relations according to gender preferences, the owners excluded me from their communities because of their irritation of my questions.

As a result of the analyses of my observations, experience and interviews in Second Life, I find out that the users have multiple avatars to be present in and a member of more than one communities because as a limitation of Second Life the others can see which communities and groups the avatars are a member of from the

profiles of them. The structure and design of virtual world allows its users freely explore many facets of personalities in ways that are not easily available to them in real life (Cabirla 2008). Therefore, except for privacy issue, the users want to experience the things that they cannot experience in real life because of social norms and rules or requirements that they should perform. In this respect, Second Life is a convenient medium to experience everything once. Furthermore, a person might be a member of Second Life in order to compensate for the lonesome in real life. In addition, some users want to learn what acceptability is from others. Instead of being other, through avatars, users experience being a member of somewhere, as a result socializing in virtual communities through different multiple avatars, which later turns out to be the identities of the users. As Denis Doyle states “the body has a mind of its own. It is interesting to note that there is an emphasis here on the relationship between the body and the minds, and then the mind does not exist without the body” (2011: 102). According to my experiences in Second Life, firstly, the mind of the user becomes the controller of the avatars, and later user and the body created in Second Life becomes two indispensable parts of the identity. Avatar turns into the virtual embodied version of the user. In this respect, “identity, after all, refers to the sameness between two qualities, in this case between a person and his and her personas” (Turkle 1997:103). As a result of multiple identity creation, gender swap through appearance create multiple gender identities of the avatar throughout their experiences in Second Life.

I collected data from my experiences and observations in Second Life and supported these data with literature review, particularly with cyber ethnography. Therefore, I used the second approach of Espen Aarseth which is collecting data by being a part of the virtual world through experiences and combining them with

literature review for this thesis. Except for it, I used unconstructed interviews, and observation that I experienced in Second Life as methods while writing this thesis. As a result of combination of the study in Second Life and literature used in this thesis, the thesis reaches out that Second Life is a virtual world which serves variety from interests, lifestyles to experiences. In this respect people create multiple avatars, which later turns into multiple virtual identities that blur the boundaries between actual and virtual, in Second Life to escape from the realities of everyday life and to create their own other virtual realities, to live whatever they cannot live in their real life experiences, to socialize in different communities at the same time with different embodiments, to compensate for their lonesome in real life through socializing in virtual groups with several different activities. While socializing, and compensating their lonesome, people create multiple virtual genders, either different from their actual genders or the same as it, in order to be present in particular communities, to experience different genders which might not be available in real life.

CHAPTER ONE

CYBERSPACE AND VIRTUAL WORLD

In this part of the thesis I want to focus on Cyberspace and Virtual Reality in order to put out the relationship of these terms. What is cyberspace and in what circumstances do we use the term cyberspace? What is virtual reality? How do cyberspace and virtual reality affect our everyday life?

1.1 What is Cyberspace

Throughout the development of Internet, people generated various terms in order to express their ideas and experiments. Cyberspace is a term that flourishes with the growth of Internet. Cyberspace originally derives from Greek word *kyber* which means to navigate (Dodge and Kitchin 2000). Therefore, literally it means navigable spaces. It is a space where people interact and navigate from computer to computer which are accessible to each other and through digital spaces and networks. On the other hand, cyberspace is compilation of various spaces different from each other. Interaction among people occurs as they navigate through spaces in other words from one web to another. In other words cyberspace is a compilation of many different spaces. Those spaces create a whole when they interact among themselves and create many other spaces. In addition, throughout the development of Internet Technology cyberspace has been changing its form and the type of communication it creates among people who take place on the internet. As such improvements occur people are now not only the participants of the cyberspace they are also a part of cyberspace as the creator and developer of webs. As Jan Fernback stated “cyberspace has become a new arena for participation in public life” (1997: 37). Nowadays, people have started a living in cyberspace. People might be thought as being alone in front

of their computers but they are participatory in some form of public life on cyberspace. People can easily do shopping, chat with friends; play games and even fall in love (in front of the computers) on the internet as a result of the created interaction and communication. Also, people do not have to participate into cyberspace publicly; two people can easily argue about something or talk about private issues by using private message systems on the internet. Therefore, cyberspace provides different forms of digital interaction and communication to the people both as participants and developers by using many different spaces.

1.2 What is Virtual Reality and Relationship Between Cyberspace and Virtual Reality

With the development of technology, a new term has been come out except for cyberspace: Virtual Reality. Cyberspace and virtual reality may seem similar to each other. They have several relationships between themselves. First of all, virtual means reality but not physically. However, we cannot say that virtual reality is related to the reality in our thoughts as an idea.

When we talk about virtual reality, we have to keep in mind that it is indeed a technology, not simply a nebulous idea. It is not synonymous with illusion or mirage or hallucination. Virtual reality is not a state of consciousness or a simulated drug trip. Virtual reality is an emerging field of applied science. But because virtual reality belongs to contemporary culture, it expresses and reinforces many of the broad experiences we share as members of a common culture (Heim 2000: 5).

Virtual Reality is simply related to the technology or science which covers our experiences as much as we share with other people. In addition, this term is

related to technology not only in the sense of using internet but also in the sense of using computer or other devices which we think ourselves as being a part of the world we see and experience on the internet. Virtual Reality requires a capacity to reflect the real through computers in other sense through technology. While a person plays a game such as Second Life on the computer connected to the internet, he/she may feel and think as a part of this game and as a person who accommodates in this life because it provides a great number of various opportunities to everybody. People can experience whatever they can in real life through Second Life. As a simplest thing, a person can marry to someone in Second Life. A person may think of herself or himself as a part of it. In this sense firstly, virtual reality has immersion. Immersion comprises devices which makes the senses isolated in order to make a person feel transported to another place as I give in my example with Second Life. Secondly, Virtual Reality creates such a fast and convenient environment that they can change the scenes as fast as they can change their physical position and perspective. In order words, VR is interactive; it can create the same effects as real life as a result of the interactive qualifications of it. Thirdly, Virtual Reality reflects the intelligence of real life to its scientific features such as the functions of telepresence and other artificial entities (Heim 1998).

Telepresence takes its roots from Greek word "*tele*" which has a complex meaning like being remote but at the same time being presence. While sitting in front of a computer to access a virtual environment you would be supposed as being remote because of the distance where you are and where you want to be. However, when you access to this virtual environment, you became present in this virtual area as a virtual idea. Presence in actual life turns into telepresence in virtual life. With all these features, people can create virtual environments which look like much more

real than the actual environment through using computers. Jay David Bolter summarizes what Heim wants to express by stating “Virtual Reality operates most often under the logic of transparency... The immediacy of VR comes from the illusion of three dimensional immersions and from the capacity of interaction” (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 162). Virtual Reality takes its transparency from real life as being a part of it. Therefore, it can be thought that virtual is not the imitation of the real, it represents another parts or manifestations of the real.

Even though Virtual Reality and Cyberspace seems different to each other, they represent similar ideas. As a conclusion of all these explanation, cyberspace is the internet in a broad sense. Virtual realities are parts that cyberspace gets into and embrace. Therefore, cyberspace consists various different virtual realities and worlds in it. Internet creates various spaces and people take part in those spaces by creating and living in there. Virtual reality and environment comes into existence when people start living in cyberspace just like they live in actual life. Virtual becomes a reflection of actual and sometimes a continuation of actual life by making the users mentally present in virtual life through creating an artificial connection with 3D simulators and technological devices.

1.3 Second Life: Real Life Simulation in Virtual Reality

PLAY is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing. We can safely assert, even, that human civilization has added no essential feature to the general idea of play. Animals play just like men. We have only to watch young dogs to see that all the essentials of human play are present in their merry gambols (Huizinga 1980).

Digital games have been evolving and changing structure throughout years. According to Huizinga the roots of plays go back to the ancient times, before the birth of humans. Even though animals were playing according to some rules because of their instincts, humans put rules on plays by using their rationality. There are no such differences and changes in the Huizinga's structure of plays even today. As a result of the historical background of plays games have passed through some different phases. Plays are stated as digital games in a broad sense in the field of game studies without any change on some of their structures and rules from the concepts of play which Huizinga defined. As Aphra Kerr (2006) states that digital games has been defined as computer games, video games and electronic games since the mids of 1980. Later, online games, and online simulation games has become a part of digital games. According to Huizinga play can sometimes be simply a need for relaxation and for fun. While people are playing a game they pretend as if it is the reality even though they are conscious of play's being only a pretention. In addition, pretending does not reduce the credibility and seriousness of play. Johan Huizinga states plays as an independent function which exceeds the needs of life and gives meaning to the movement. Therefore, each play contributes valuable meaning to the

lives of the players (1980). In addition to having an independent function “all play is a voluntary activity. Play to order is no longer play: it could at least be but forcible imitation of it” (Huizinga 1980: 13). Play is not a part of ordinary or real life “it’s rather a stepping out of “real” life in a “temporary” sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own” (1980: 8). When the real life simulation games are taken into account it is evident that while these games seem as a temporary sphere it turns into a real life environment as a result of imagined real life simulations. Since the players are volunteer parts of plays, they continue to play as long as they get pleasure from the plays (24). Players of real life simulation game join into games as volunteers either for pleasure and fun or for a need of change in their lives. In addition, the pleasure may sometimes come from accomplishing the given duties in a game and sometimes comes from just being a part of the play and the community in the play. Whether a game is a part of virtual life or a part of arcade games, all of them have similar qualifications in terms of their structures and rules.

Second Life is a 3D online virtual game for some and virtual life for others developed by Linden Lab which is a developer of digital entertainment that inspires users to create, socialize, share and have fun. It is considered as a real life simulation game, too. Second Life has been released in 2003. Ever since it has been released, millions of people are still using Second Life not as a virtual game but as a world in which people can escape from the realities of everyday life and live out their own created realities and fantasies. Second Life is a social and creative environment which serves lots of virtual possibilities. Once people log into SL, they create a space for their presence in a virtual environment- in other words they create a new space in a space. Second Life is based upon the idea of user created content so, people can create the living area and all the other contents by themselves (Second Life).

According to this statement “virtual world is any computer generated physical space that can be experienced by many people at once” (Castronova 2005:22). Millions of people are becoming online at the same time in front of the computer screen just being present in one space in Second Life. In contrary to other games, people do not have to have a purpose such as getting a reward or as coming the first. Second Life, as being an online virtual community, is a non-ludic environment because the users create their own rules in the online groups or communities they founded (Ensslin and Muse 2011). Because both users can create their own environment in this world and can find various different functions for different purposes, Second Life is an attractive and livable world for most of the users. People are becoming online just for living their second lives in a virtual world. Second Life is considered as virtual with its construction of buildings, avatar and gender choice, life style, having an occupation, and it is considered hyper real or simulation with all these virtual features and with all the fantasies and joys experienced in Second Life.

In order to be present in virtual life, a person must create or find a space in cyberspace as a second life. In order to demonstrate their presence in this space, a person must create interests in cyberspace. Second Life gives the chance to live in virtual reality which is similar to actual life by making people create a space in there related to their lives or different from their lives in this virtual reality. Second Life is a medium in which many organizations, brands and universities have buildings and activities. Second Life is a medium in which many countries and cities has taken territory in this virtual space with the most fascinating or important buildings of them. Since I am a user of Second Life, I touch on my experience in this world. After I logged into Second Life, I wanted to visit Red Square in Moscow, Russia. I teleported myself into Red Square because it is one of the places that I have always

wanted to visit and what I saw was a perfect replica of St. Basil's Cathedral. The popularity and the crowd in Red Square in Second Life were just the same as the real. In addition, I could get in touch with my friends in Turkey's territory by just teleporting myself to my own country (Second Life 2014). The countries do not have to have the same amount of land in Second Life as they have in real life. It is sufficient to have a flag or a symbol of the land. Just like what the countries or big companies do, an individual creates a space in Second Life either by building a house or by having an occupation.

Because virtual is, somehow, the real, reflection, another part of the real and simulation of the real, people become a part of this virtual life with all their senses. Even though they are not present psychically, they are telepresent in virtual life with their minds and senses. Therefore, people can easily keep up with virtual reality since it is the simulation of the reality. Once users choose their avatars in Second Life their lives start as a newbie. Even though they can specify their appearance and their ages as they want, they become just like a newborn baby in real life due to their inexperience. That's why they are called newbie in Second Life. In my account, nicknamed as "pinarunl", when I entered Second Life world first I thought where to stay and how to build a home for myself (Second Life 2014). These are the same instincts that happen in real life such as having a shelter to live and also to protect myself and having privacy of life. In addition, the users should find a job to earn money in Second Life and buy things just like happens in real life. However, in order to build a home or a room, the user should either buy Linden dollars (currency of Second Life) or work to earn Linden dollars. If the user does not want to buy Linden Dollars and cannot find a job to earn money, the avatar stays in the air or just hangs around. It is evident that capitalist economic system reigns in Second Life because if

an avatar has Linden Dollars he/she can have a house, a land or go shopping. In addition, the avatars may work in various kinds of jobs to earn some money just like happens in reality. Though these facts may seem actual, Second Life has fantastic features such as teleporting, flying, crossing inside walls, owning free clothes and entertaining for free, as well.

“The simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true – Ecclesiastes” (Baudrillard 1994:1). Baudrillard’s explanation of simulacrum explains Second Life’s virtuality in other words Second Life conceals truth in its structure. People may think that the truth in Second Life comes from real life or Second Life is the reality of its own because the other features of in SL may change. On the other hand if Second Life is thought to be a simulation of reality, it is the truth even though it comprises phantasms and fantastic features in it. Baudrillard uses the example of Disneyland and Los Angeles. Disney Land reflects social microcosm, miniaturized pleasure of real America and its joyful sides. People yearn to enter into this world of phantasm by standing in long queues for hours. It reflects American entertainment and hectic life and it is the simulation of America. As a result of these descriptions of simulations, Second Life is an exact simulation of the reality and real world. Every moment we lived during our lives is a simulation of the latter one. Therefore, every moment we lived during our experience in Second Life is a simulation of the latter one and also the simulation of the moments in reality and real life. Since once a person gets into the virtual world he/she becomes the part of it with all senses, people will consider themselves as they are in real world because they can hang around, go shopping, chat with friends, give conference and even get married.

It is quite possible to create various communities and interaction according to cultural background or interests in virtual reality. As Sherry Turkle states “virtual communities ranging from MUDs to computer bulletin boards allow people to generate experiences, relationships, identities and living spaces that arise only through interaction with technology” (Turkle 1997:21). Without an interaction with technology, it is impossible to create an interactive environment and space in cyberspace. Without a virtual environment, it is almost impossible to create interactive communication and communities. The users of virtual communities are able to communicate according to their interests and what they want to get from these communities ideally thanks to the interaction occurs in these communities. Interacting in virtual spaces may sound quite different from the interaction occurs among people in real life. However, time changes, reality changes and therefore simulation changes. As virtual spaces are conceived as the simulations of real life, which is considered real in the absence of real, interaction among avatars should, somehow, illustrate resemblance with the interactions in real communities. Smith depicts the changes in interactions in virtual spaces over time by stating as:

In cyberspace the interaction, communication, and coordination are different than when people meet face-to-face. These shifts make the creation of thousands of spaces to house conversations and exchanges between far-flung groups of people practical and convenient (Smith 2005: 3).

Even though it was not possible to use some essential expressions and to use face-to-face communication, cyberspace has been bringing a lot of separated spaces together which brings people together in a virtual environment. In textual based virtual environments it was not possible to use facial expressions, mimics and gestures since there was basically textual communication via sending messages. The users were writing their emotional status by stating via letters or by similes. However, users

managed to create various communities by communicating textually by creating message systems such as computer bulletin boards and IRC as well online games played textually.

In addition to building various online communities on various topics and textual online games, Second Life is a graphical virtual environment and it is possible to make many different facial expressions while communicating face to face with other avatars. Except for facial expressions, it is possible to fly or run just by one click to the button if the avatar is in hurry. Instead of using plane to fly, the avatar opens his/her two arms just as wings of a plane or a bird. Because it is a representation of real life with fantastic features in it, real life and real environment simulates into Second Life either by usual forms or by changing forms and Second Life users become accustomed to be in a virtual space. Therefore, interaction among people happens in all circumstances such as with facial expressions and movements, talking via microphones and people may think themselves as a real part of this virtual life. When an avatar joins into a group or a community, the avatar can easily interact with others by reflecting emotional status, feelings, by writing its thoughts, by speaking with microphone or by videoconference. With all these means of communication and interaction opportunities, Second Life creates a homely expression on the users.

As a general understanding, people may build various communities and groups according to many different personal interests, cultural background or sexual preferences. Also, they may join these communities and groups according to these features. As a result, people may interpret someone's personality, culture or, somehow, ideology according to the communities or groups they belong to. The vice

versa may occur, too. A person may join a community or a group to gather acceptance from his social environment or to create a perception about herself/himself as a part of this community by pretending even though it is not like that in real. In this respect, virtual life creates new atmospheres such as building social groups or such communities to gather and chat, sometimes to debate or sometimes to get around for the users. As it is important to have a social acceptance among groups and communities in real life, it is also important to gain acceptance in social groups in virtual environment when virtual reality is considered as a simulation of reality. In Second Life an avatar may get into any social group if it is not a closed group. According to the conditions of the groups or communities the avatar wants to get in, the user can change avatar's appearance and as a result its identity. Because the user in reality has an identity in his/her own, the avatar may sometimes reflect the user's identity and sometimes the avatar's identity may vary according to the user's preferences. In this respect, I use my avatar "pinarunl" as my main avatar to socialize as a researcher in Second Life. However, it cannot be possible to make studies in everywhere without having features of those communities. Because of the limitations I came across, I got two more avatars, one of them "cleos" is for searching on gender identity creation, and the other one is for travelling around Second Life. Therefore, while my main avatar was living domestically to gather information about Second Life's domestic life, the others were observing different communities for different purposes (Second Life 2014).

CHAPTER 2

Identity and Gender Identity Creation

2.1 Identity Creation

Identity is a term which has still been discussed for years because of the ambiguity and contradictions it creates. Definitions and attributions of identity vary in different branches of social sciences like psychology and sociology. In other words, identity becomes something constructed through various disciplines and discourses except for these two disciplines. While psychologists search to find out how identity is constructed in an integrated way with human psychology, sociologists search on how identity is affected and shaped from society and social norms and rules. Stuart Halls emphasizes on that situation as “Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out ... The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational, is not natural but a constructed form of closure” (1996: 5). However, the opposite is also true as identities have capacity to exclude and leave out, they have capacities to include and enclose as a study medium of various disciplines and discourses. Oxford English Dictionary defines identity like that on the one hand it has absolute sameness and on the other a lasting distinctiveness (Oxford English Dictionary). Except for its dictionary meanings, identity has various different semantic attributions. In this respect, instead of excluding one idea and discourse or including another one, this chapter will look at identity with integration of several different discourses while analyzing identity and self, social identity

creation, and how to create gender identity. In this respect, this chapter virtualizes the idea of identity by giving examples from Second Life, the three dimensional online virtual world.

One of the attributions of identity is Freud's notion of identification. However Freud divides identification to the periods according to human development and definite situations, shortly, first of all, a person identifies him/herself with an object or another person which is emotionally linked. As a result, the person starts to resemble to what is identified with just like a baby whose indispensable part is a mother and a father because of its human needs. Later, this notion turns out identifying oneself as something with positive or negative features. Furthermore, Freud, particularly, expresses ego, superego and id formation psychologically and how they shape a person's identity through interaction with the surroundings. Whether identified with somebody or something, or identified as something or somebody, "identification" creates a person's identity in a sense with the description of it according to different situations. Similar to Freud, Erickson (1973a) proposed ego-identity development as an essential part of adolescence for it gathers individual past childhood identifications with current bodily and social changes and future commitments into an integrated package. As a result identity becomes the integration of life and experience of a person throughout his/her life.

The subject "I" or pronoun "me" expresses the idea of one identity of a person. When people express themselves, they always start with I and carry on with me. They generally use these pronouns either to express who they are and to identify themselves or to express how they want to be identified. From this perspective, a person has one identity but at the same time many because of the expressions of

multiple qualifications. On the other hand, “I’ also expresses identity, a personal belonging who controls the other selves” (Craib 1998:7). Furthermore, this reminds Lacan’s (1968) view on consciousness and identity formation. He actualizes his theory with an infant, which at first experiences itself as a bundle of conflicting urges, comes to see itself reflected in a mirror (the eyes of its mother perhaps). What it sees in this reflection is a being apparently in control of itself with clear boundaries and a physical and therefore emotional unity. The infant attempts to become this being, an imaginary identification. To some degree we spend the rest of our lives, unconsciously or consciously, chasing such an identity of what we want to be or be identified. Similarly Giddens (1990) conceptualizes identity as a series of choices one continually makes about oneself and one’s lifestyle. On the one hand, Sartre (1957) states that bad faith which occurs when one attempts to identify with a social role or status. It means that if I decide my identity as a man and start to spend my time in men’s group in order to discover this identity to find solidity and security in this identity. In spite of Sartre’s statement, I can never be a man by experiencing or trying to discover how it to be. I can just try to be whatever it is that I think a man is. It means that people can get into an identity as much as what they have as a reflections of it on their minds. On the other hand, while chasing after an identity, unconsciously, we create multiple identities, sociologically, multiple selves, just like the alts of an identity when we look at from the perspective of sociologists who states that there are one stable identity which does not change, and there are also fluid, transparent selves that change according to different situation as time lapses. Self has a lot of attributions which differs from how a person uses and shapes it in various different perspectives. Identity can be multiple; however, the multiplicity is created through different selves of an identity which makes the identity whole and one.

Therefore, as selves change and take new forms, even though the identity is unified and solid, the identity also gets into new forms. In this respect, in Second Life, a three dimensional online virtual world, a user has one main virtual identity embodied with an avatar and multiple sub alts, which will be emphasized in detail in coming parts, in other words sub-selves, which are used in different communities and environments in various different purposes. Furthermore, the users of Second Life prefer to build several sub-alts, in other words sub-selves, in order to experience and actualize what they have as an image on their minds in online virtual worlds as a place of escape and creation of what is desired to be.

Richard D. Ashmore and Lee Jussim convey from Gleason as “Ericson and the psychologists who followed him viewed identity as internal to the person and persisting through time whereas the two sociological traditions conceived identity as social and variable” (1997:9). The contradictions have been evolving mostly on the ideas of identity’s being unified and solid or multiple and changeable, particularly, when identity is observed and searched in respect to social identity. When sociologically analyzed identification turns into the motivation and mechanism, the individual personally obeys the societally prescribed roles which create the idea of social identity. In addition to be acceptable by the society through obeying social rules and norms dictated by the society, social self is created through socializing in communities. As the perspectives, communities, religions, norms and rules change, the self gets into another shape with its changes. Even though identity is unchangeable, the selves of an identity are multiple and always ready to change; therefore, makes the identity fluid.

Furthermore, identities created and shaped in virtual environments are also affected from social surroundings and communities which make the users create multiple different identities. Online social identities are also affected from online social norms and rule according to in what community the avatar wants to be a part of. In Second Life, where I am also a user of it, one of my friends expressed that he used Second Life as a place where he can escape from the hard times of real life, and be whoever and however he wants to. However, even in that online world, he needs to convert his avatars' thoughts or ideas, or create a new avatar to enter different communities which have different rules. In this respect, not only real life identities are shaped according to social life's norms and rules also online virtual avatars are created and shaped according to the online communities they belong to.

2.2 Gender Identity Creation

In addition to the relationship of identity creation to other fields such as race, religion, and society which affects the identities in different ways, identities created through gender is also a part of the study of this chapter. In order to emphasize on gender identities, separation between sex and gender should be explained because sex and gender are the concepts which create confusion on mind in terms of the function of them. Even though sex and gender is differentiated in poststructuralist ways as sex is biological but gender is social and cultural oriented, most of the feminists could not deny that sex has been naturalized and gender has been socially essentialised. While one is called as "man" or "woman" sexually, one is called as "masculine" or "feminine" in term of gender. In spite of these differences between sex and gender, "gender is the discursive/cultural means by which sexed nature or a

natural sex is produced and established prediscursive prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts” (Butler 1999:7). As Paul McIlvenny directs from Deborah Cameron;

The behavior of men and women, whatever its substance may happen to be in any specific circumstance, is invariably read through a more general discourse on gender difference itself. That discourse is subsequently invoked to explain the pattern of gender differentiation in people’s behavior (2002: 7).

In this sense, gender has always to be reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing definite acts according to the cultural norms which illustrates and creates ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. If behavior in accordance with social and cultural norms creates the distinction between masculinity and femininity, it also creates different displaying of gender identities. In other words, socially and culturally directed genders create gender identities with the masculine or feminine behavior they perform. In addition, because identity is fluid and changeable, and gender of a person might change as the social norms or behaviors of the person change, created gender identity is also fluid and changeable and even can multiply.

Even though virtual environments and real life might seem different from each other, they have similar features for people from real life form the life in virtual environments. Therefore, online virtual environments have similarities on gender creation and gender identity with real life. For Second Life is the study area of mine, because it consists of various different fields and communities, and provides a vast amount of study area, this thesis will present examples from Second Life’s gender identity process. In Second Life there are two definite sexes at the registration part: “man” and “woman” as well as animated one. However the gender of the avatars varies both in accordance with the point of views of the Second Life users from different communities and avatars’ gender choice and behavior relevant to it. In this

respect, a male user might have a female avatar which displays masculine behaviors and vice versa. A female user might have a male avatar with masculine features, too. In this respect, as well as constructing gender identity through social and cultural norms in online virtual environments, users can also create their own gender identities on their own, both for falsifying gender or not.

The users of online simulation platforms or games are required to construct an avatar as a representation of themselves in those virtual platforms. However when a person enters into a virtual world, it may not be sufficient for them to have just one main avatar which reflects the same personality and the same appearance as the real life self. In this case, the users need multiple embodiments in the form of multiple avatars proper to their purposes. On the other hand, avatars enable the users to create virtual identities which are not resemblance of their real life identity. This chapter of the thesis claims that virtual environments and online simulation platforms enable the users to create other identities which they always long for but cannot wear the qualifications of them in real life or some identities through which they would get much more pleasure than their real life identities. In this respect my first part will touch on general understanding of avatar, why people need to create multiple avatars in Second Life and explaining some definite avatars situated in Second Life through my own experiences in this platform. In addition, it will focus on identity creations in virtual environments and claim that the users' need of constructing multiple avatars arises from the need of different identities in real life and somehow from that idea: as much as it gets more virtualized, it gets more real. As well as creating multiple avatars arise from the need of multiple identity, need for a convenient living area, in other words shared communities and groups is the essential part of having a life and experience in Second Life. In this respect, second part of this paper will focus on

how important creating communities in a virtual world is, what kind of communities there are and how communities shape identities in terms of their norms and rules.

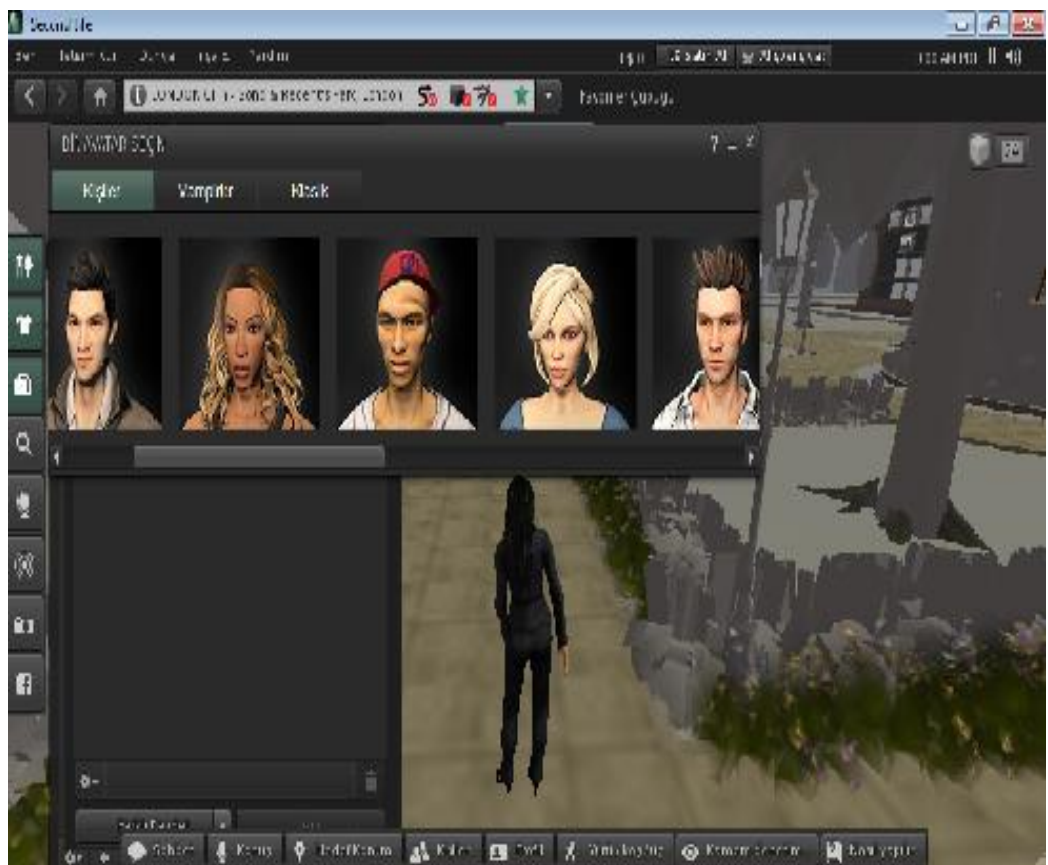
2.3 Creating Avatars

Avatar is a Sanskrit word and it originally refers to the incarnation of Hindu god. This incarnation ideally occurred as a movement from virtual to actual. In other words incarnation actualizes the body or the self. However, with respect to online worlds it refers to the opposite movement from actual to virtual (Boellstorff 2008). Therefore, avatars are virtual embodiment of people in virtual worlds with its virtualization. As B. Coleman states “in computer language an avatar is computer generated figure controlled by a person via computer... It is often a graphical representation of a person with which one can interact in real-time” (2011:12). Similarly, avatars which are representation and aesthetics designed by designers and the users or players adopt it (Pearce and Artemesia 2009). Even though an avatar is a computer generated figure, it creates a link between online and real time as it creates a link between the avatar and the users. Therefore an avatar is a need for representing the self and the body as an image in online media and for creating a link between sociality, and subjectivity of the users. Krueger touches this idea as “people have a very proprietary feeling towards their image [their avatar]. What happens to it happens to them. What touches it, they feel. . . . A new kind of social situation is created” (1991:127–128). This social situation in Second Life occurs from the avatar’s perspective. The users can look around as far as the avatar can reach or can hear any conversation around if it is around the hearing limit of the avatar. Therefore sociality has been constructed according to the availability of the avatars’ skills.

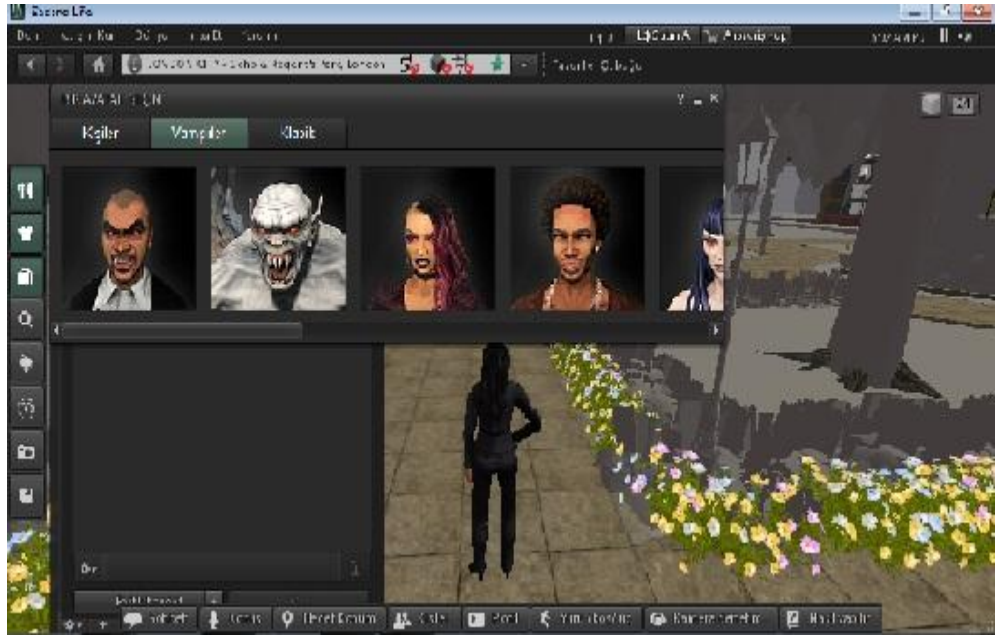
Because virtual worlds become the homeland of the avatars, avatars are considered not only as representation of actual self in virtual form but also considered as other virtualized self of the actual self. Kevin Miguel Sherman remarks that virtual identity of the self appears through ideas, thoughts and phrases of actual self (2011). On the other hand, in a virtual world like Second Life an avatar does not have to represent the user's identity. In other words, an avatar becomes the ambiguous identity in virtual world because it is not definite what kind of identity the avatar will represent in terms of its appearance. In this respect, the avatars represent the reality in virtual forms and this ambiguity creates multiplicity both in creating avatars and as a result creating multiple identities. Avatars may be conceived as the social tools and they are "central to both immersion and the construction of community in virtual spaces" (Taylor 2006a:110).

When I first registered into Second Life as a user, I needed to create an avatar by choosing between some basic types of avatars. There were two types of gender among these avatars: female and male. While trying to decide which one to choose as a newbie- new user in Second Life- I looked for an avatar which looks like my real life appearance. However, there were not any avatars similar to my physical appearance. Therefore, I chose an avatar which reflects some ideas about my personal qualities like busy and hardworking businesswomen. One can also control the avatar's movements and facial expressions through buttons prepared in Second Life. After completing my avatar I stepped into Second Life territory. The first person I talked to understood that I was a newbie because of my basic avatar, and there were a lot of the same avatars as mine walking or dancing around (Second Life 2014). Even though Second Life's "appearance" menu contains various options allowing the users to change nearly every aspect of their avatars, as a rule of the play

buying new avatars, buying new clothes or hair style requires some linden dollars in Second Life and in order to have linden dollars the users can either buy them in real life to use in Second Life or earn linden dollars by working in several different jobs in there. Later, one of my friends teleported me into an area where there were a lot of different avatars, skins, hair styles, clothes for free. I did not need to work to earn money to be able to have new things in Second Life. Since my friend was Latin originated the clothes or the skins in this area were generally Latin oriented. In addition some sexy avatars and clothes were available. The avatars were walking around and wearing the new avatars according to how they want to be seen or how they want to be.



Picture 1: Classical appearance of newbie avatars.



Picture 2: Appearance of newbie wampire avatars.

Tom Boellstorff touches the variety of the avatars as: “[In] Second Life, residents lavished time and money on their avatars. The goal was typically not just an attractive or unusual avatar, but multiple embodiments, often across gender, race, even species (for instance, a handsome man, a wolf, and a robot)” (2008: 129). In the first periods I was one of these residents wasting time on avatars, but later I stopped changing my avatar’s appearance as I had acquaintances. Even though I am not a Latin originated person in real life, I chose a Latin girl avatar and changed my appearance because I was trying to get new friends from different areas.



Picture 3: While changing avatar's outfit it looks like this, opening arms and legs to both sides.

Even though, Second Life gives opportunity to its users to change appearance of the avatars and also having more than one account, people change the appearance of their avatars or have multiple avatars for various reasons. One of them is for being able to have a life opposite to the real life or a life that they do not have in real life. One of my friends named himself as Katz expressed his having a different life style from his real life as;

I am from Brazil and even though I have a young white skinned avatar, I am an old man at the age of 58... I am a history teacher but I like hanging around Second Life. I cannot find time to go around because of my work. I like going to seaside and beaches in Second Life whenever I want to stay alone but am not alone in real life. Mine is like the escape from realities and creating the realities I want to live in Second Life (Second Life 2014).

Katz was also a DJ in London Group which is an opposite occupation of him according to his statements. Moreover, Sherry Turkle argued that the experience of accommodating in a virtual world can be liberating for the users are independent from their own body shape, gender or image and they can be what they choose

(1995). Bixly Shuftan is a journalist in Second Life. He conveys the events, life stories, and personal interviews in Second Life to his blog named. He wrote about his own Second Life career in his blog too. After he joined to Second Life in 2006 he pursued a virtual life in here with his new occupation; by being a journalist. He does not include any information about his real occupation since he considers himself as a part of internet. He stated in his blog about himself that:

I became a virtual journalist having just recently turned 40, with college and my early adulthood years still fresh in my mind. Now, I'm being reminded by real life friends 50 isn't far away, on my way to becoming an old man. The kid who grew up playing Atari video games now spends time in middle age behind a computer screen writing stories about places he once could only imagine (Shuftan 2014).

He could only imagine being a part of virtual worlds and his imagination became true. He lives a virtual life, probably, opposite to real life and the linden dollars he earned by working in Second Life make him a living in real life as well. Therefore, this virtual community becomes the reality for him. Similarly, it is agreed that living an avatar can be perceived as transformational inner journey (Pearce and Artemesia 2009). In this respect, Second Life has become a medium for inner journey of Shuftan just like many others since he managed to do his dream in a virtual world instead of reality as he conveyed.

One of the reasons of having multiple avatars might be the endeavors of hiding and compensating multiple loneliness in real life. As much as the users get in touch with many others, they will cover or decrease their loneliness virtually. For this reason, the users create an identity, avatar, for their each weaknesses and imperfections. Therefore, creating multiple avatars and experiencing multiple life styles might be attractive for the users. One of my friends nicknamed as UltimateLoser expressed his reason to join Second Life as:

My cousin was a member of Second Life and she always insisted me about joining Second Life because I feel that there are no people think like me. I cannot find anybody because of my preferences. I entered Second Life and my lonely days passed away. I am a member of communities where I find people I like and get on well. Second Life is the reality for me from now on. (Second Life 2014).

On the other hand, some users prefer to have more than one avatar in order to be able to create different livings. In addition, while creating multiple avatars, they prefer each avatar's to be unique with their appearance which reflects their personalities. Boellstorff quoted one of Second Life user's thoughts as: "a lot of people have different avatars, but they have a main avatar they usually use, and their main avatar is usually designed by [Real Life] standards of beauty, or is a reflection of their [Real Life] self" (2008:133). Even though it is the real person who determines and controls the movements and the choices of the avatar from the real life, the user can choose something different from its personality or appearance. Users generally choose different personalities or roles in their real life role. In other words avatars may sometimes represent other selves of the users. In this respect, some users have multiple avatars each one for each different life.

Tom Boellstorff explains different types of avatars and their purposes by separating them into sub avatars, in Second Life language alts, like banking alts, building alts, testing alts, exploring alts, escape alts, and social alts in his anthropologist study. These alt avatars in virtual worlds are the sub-selves in real life. Banking alt whose account is used to hold funds and to simplify the works in Second Life. If the user's main avatar is not a working self, this user can use this avatar to earn and save money without encountering its friends. Building alts are accounts in which the users can work at buildings without getting interrupted from their friends. Testing alts are the avatars who have the standard body shapes and who like

spending time on trying out clothes and various animations. From my experience in Second Life, I personally experienced this type of testing-alt. When I was a newbie I learned that appearance is important to be able to get into communities, I started spend my time on clothes lounges (which are free). Exploring alts are the avatars who wonder anonymously across Second Life landscape. My third avatar is used for travelling and observing different situations in Second Life as an exploring alt. Even though the avatars travel anonymously, they get in contact with the other avatars. My exploring alt wanted to go to Turkey's territory as a foreigner. If one wants to teleport him/herself to somewhere else, he/she should know the direction or the link of it. I could not find the territory and found an experienced user by looking at the profile of her to look for where it is. She teleported me into Turkey's territory in an easy way (Second Life 2014). Escape alts are the ones who want to stay away from their in world social networks. Social alts are the accounts which are used to embody an alternative selfhood. Social alts can be used for mostly deceptive purposes (2008). Second Life is a combination of real and virtual life and behind each avatar there is a person sitting in front of the computer screen. Each avatar has an actuality beyond their virtual identity. Therefore, I need not to hesitate what they told me about themselves and their avatars because what they told me is the actuality in virtual life. In addition, I think the multiple avatars in a virtual world represent multiple inner realities both in real and virtual worlds.

2.4 Socializing in Virtual Communities Through Multiple Avatars

Throughout the passing time the type of sociality, kinship or even neighborhood has changed their structures. Networks are created as long as many people connect to each other and create multiple ties. When we look around us, it is evident that “neighborhood and kinship ties are just a small portion of overall community networks” (Wellman and Gulia 2005:169). Communities do not have to have solid groups which are strictly tied together with kinships and neighbors. Social space and virtual environments constitute a great part of people’s social networks. In a virtual space people are present with their avatars or user IDs. As many avatars come together and create ties among themselves, they create multiple communities which are connected to other communities through their users’ networks. As a result, the users may want to own multi avatars because of getting pleasure as a result of the excitement and adventure they experienced with the various kinds of avatars in virtual environments. Second Life is considered as an online virtual world and many might compare it to the actual world for it has borders and limits in spite of its limitless perception. Actually, avatars enjoy living in a limitlessly perceived world because they will be able to construct various different communities from different parts of this world. Avatars may be conceived as the social tools and they are “central to both immersion and the construction of community in virtual spaces” (Taylor 2006a:110). For the embodied avatars represent the identities of the actual users, the avatars create their own separate environments or get into several different communities either with their one solid identity or with their multi embodied avatars. Constructed communities and neighborhoods through the realization of virtual avatars change the atmosphere of virtual worlds like Second Life. Furthermore, multi avatars enable the creation of multi communities which come through as a result of

getting experience in different medium and experiencing different life styles. Besides, avatars start to gather under the name of Second Life as a shelter of the escapers from actual world. As avatars start to be settled in Second Life, they start to create new surroundings and communities through their virtual neighborhoods and friends. In this respect, users find the actuality in an online virtual environment by settling groups, communities, countries and even nations.

It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means (Huizinga 1980: 13).

It is quite usual to encounter groups which serve for many different purposes such as entertainment and games, art and manufacture, raising public awareness, and trade. As Huizinga states each group has its own regulations and secrecy. While some groups accept everyone as members, the others require some qualifications such as having Linden Dollars, living in a definite time period in Second Life or being an experienced member among the various groups and communities in Second Life, many have some requirements. “Meeting of the Minds” is a discussion community in which minds agree or disagree in a discussion. However, this community has a restriction which is the requirement of 100 L\$ as entrance fee to the group. Similarly, while searching for the communities in Second Life, I came across “Planete Slam” whose ambition is to share poetries, slams and words. It only accepts French poetries in its poetry sessions right now but it is easy to communicate with the members through English. Even though it is not restricted to get around this territory, a user should be a part of the group by paying the required amount for entry to other parts and meetings operated in this community (Second Life 2014). As we see from the establishment of groups and communities, entering into a community is easy as long

as owning the requirements but to be a part of all the communities is not that easy because of differences in thoughts, visions, religion and sometimes race.



Picture 4: Pineralla talks to Ndrix Gloom on communities in Second Life in Planete Slam

“From a purely visual perspective, much of *SL* looks and feels like a country (or series of countries)” states Kevin Miguel Sherman (2011: 38). Second Life is certainly a nation which embraces various sub nations or communities through different nations, ethnicities, religions, interests, and even race. Furthermore, for Second Life is a virtual world it corresponds to world in general with its limitless perception. It is not unusual to see similarities to the real world in a virtual world. Since it is considered as a world by many, people prefer settling their own countries or in other words nations. They want to gather their people under their nation’s name with the idea of nationhood and kinship. However, it is likely to be the reverse if the users prefer not to be a member of their real nations in a virtual world because of

living different lives and the wish of exploring around with multi identities. For example, because I logged into Second Life in Turkish and I use Turkish as the language, the system automatically directed me to Turkish territory in Second Life. It was my first experience as an avatar and once I landed into this territory a lot of people tried to talk to me, mostly men. They irritated me because I know they tried to become friends with the hope of having virtual relationship with me. In addition, many alerted me against misbehavior of men avatars and also against women avatars which are actually directed by a man or vice versa (Second Life). Therefore, my first expression towards Turkish community in Second Life was disappointing for it has not resembled to the real one. Later, when I started to talk to someone they always tried to learn where I live in Turkey, which part of Istanbul I live in and more private questions. These questions made me feel discomfort. I left Turkish territory because of both irritations by private questions, and exploring, experiencing new areas and getting around in Second Life. After this, a friend of mine teleported me into Moscow because he wanted to make my dream, going to Moscow someday, virtualized. What I observed in there was that having a multinational structure, either by owning a society form various nations or having multinational people as tourists does not disturb the territory's virtual welfare. Furthermore, the territories are alerted against any virtual terrorist attacks which arise from real political and social conflicts. I was so As a result, I decided that there are not boundaries among territories since it is more flexible to cross borders and being or behaving as a part of somewhere.

Creating virtual nations enables people gather in a proper land and feel them not alone in this seemingly limitless world. In addition to directing the users on behalf of how to be present with everything they have in Second Life, these nations make it easy to create new social surrounding to the avatars. As avatars socialize and

gain new networks, they create communities whose visions change according to social interests and ideologies. The need to be present and to leave a trace in everywhere makes avatars curious about new things and this leads them to explore as much as they can. The desire of being present almost everywhere results with creating new avatars which will represent the users in different perspectives and sides. A user will have a lot of representatives who live separate lives from each other. In this respect, multi avatars, in other words multi identities, will help the users' socialization through created new many social networks and as the avatars get socialize they will create new identities, new avatars.

CHAPTER 3

Creating Virtual Genders in Second Life

The purpose of 'law' is absolutely the last thing to employ in the history of the origin of law: on the contrary... the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected. (Nietzsche 1989:77) (Directed from Judith Butler Gender is Burning)

Even though everything has an original law behind it which expresses the utility and the purpose of that thing, since everything undergoes change overtime it can be transformed and reinterpreted according to new situations and circumstances

as Nietzsche states. In addition, some words might have various interpretations just like human body and the attributions of gender. According to Deleuze and Guattari “the body is the body, it is all by itself and has no need of organs, the body is never an organism” (9: 1972). However, the body does not lose its attribute of “desiring machine” (Deleuze and Guattari 1972). While it is enough to have a body and a genital organ to desire, some feminists like Luce Irigaray are opposed to this idea and she states that 'desiring machine' still partly takes the place of woman or the feminine and it is a kind of metaphor for ‘her’ that men can use (1985). In addition, the language that people use while attributing some features to the others may sometimes refer to socially constructed attributes. Judith Butler (1993) open her article with the quote from Louis Althusser which says “We all friends who, when they knock on the door and we ask, through the door, the question, ‘Who’s there?’, answer (since it is obvious) ‘it’s me’. And we recognize that it is him or her” (1993:448). Even though Althusser thinks that the perception on gender we have in our mind comes from the references of social attributions we made to people on their gender, Judith Butler thinks that a subject cannot be socially constituted as ‘her’ and ‘him’ rather, these associations are “the reprimand which forms a crucial part of the juridical and social formation of the subject” (1993:448). While there have been various arguments on gender issues among scholars, the ideas of virtual gender and creating virtual genders become a controversial issue, too. Mary Ann O’Farrell and Lynne Vallone use the phrase virtual gender to identify “an imaginative space in which to 'put on' alternative gender identities while examining as well the equally persistent and consequent critique of that desire... the term virtual gender, then, refers... to the core set of issues at stake for subjectivity and embodiment in gender fantasy”(1999: 2). As well as the description of O’Farrell and Vallone, I think virtual

gender is the attribution given to the three dimensional bodies, in other words avatars, in virtual environments. Therefore, this part of the thesis touches on the ideas of creation of virtual gender and “gender swap”, and whether there is destruction of the idea of gender in Second Life or while trying to destruct the idea of gender avatars create gender unintentionally throughout my experiences on Second Life (Palomares and Lee 2010:8).

3.1 Ambiguity Created Through Virtual Gender

While sex refers to biological differences; chromosomes, hormonal profiles, internal and external sex organs, gender describes the characteristics that a society or culture delineates as masculine or feminine (Nobelius 2004). However; sex and gender turns into a complicated issue in Second Life because of the ambiguity of what is illustrated and what it is in reality which prompts the scholars to create the idea of “virtual gender”. When I logged into Second Life, I needed to choose an avatar for myself from the venue since I did not have L\$ at first. The avatars in venue vary according to their species like people, vampires and classical as Photograph 1 illustrated in Part 2. In Second Life, there are two types of sex preferences at first which are man and woman, except for animated avatars, and physical appearances of these avatars represent the properties of each sex with external virtual sex organs as described above. Even though users have to choose one of these sexes, their sex and gender do not have to be unchangeable. For many users have alt avatars, their sexual identity may change according to their avatars, as well. In Second Life, the users can change their appearance quickly without being seen anybody around. While an avatar looks like a woman, this avatar can turn into a man. Avatars can even buy male and female sexual organs for free in order to strengthen

their sexual appearance and power if the user uses the avatar for sexual relationships. When it comes to the issue of gender in a virtual environment, the perspectives of both avatars and users change. Virtual gender brings ambiguity to the stage because a female avatar's user might be a man or while the avatar looks like man or woman it might have reverse attitudes. Tom Boellstorff states his experience on this issue as;

I once encountered a newbie woman asking some longer-term residents, "could I make an all-women space?" One resident replied "you could make an all-female avatar space, but you can't ask to check that people are RL women, that's against disclosure TOS [Terms Of Service] (2008:139).

In addition to its being against to TOS to detect real life sex and genders of avatars, it is almost impossible to detect the reality about the gender of the avatars because of the ambiguity that avatars create as a result of the ambiguous choices for the embodiment as male or female without considering their actual world gendering and embodiment.

Even though gender is an ambiguous concept in Second Life, the structure of gender in this virtual world is not ambiguous. There are some definite and strict patterns for both man and woman in different ways. For instance, if the avatar wants to sit down there are two options: man or woman. Man is shown with stereotypical color blue and woman is represented by pink. If a female avatar sits down a blue ball, the system will illustrate various different sitting patterns. In other words, it means that a woman will sit down as a man or a man will sit and behave as a woman in Second Life language. There are balls for male and female avatars in different colors which some positions have already been assigned to according to the gender in a sexual affair, too. While the users want their genders to stay ambiguous, the simulated world of Second Life does not accept and put its rules strictly by defining male and female roles with little balls and assigned attitudes to them. However,

because majority has the same point of view of hiding the actual gender even if the appearance does not, the avatars swap genders which mean that avatars do not behave what their appearance looks like or they have the reverse actual gender. Avatars can change their gender roles in a virtual community easily. In addition, some avatars do not need to change their appearance in order to match the appearance with the gender. Such “gender swapping” allows people to “experience rather than merely observe what it feels like to be the opposite gender or to have no gender at all” (Turkle 1997:152). While the structure of Second Life tries to construct a male dominant or gender based virtual environment, users and avatars go beyond of this purpose and experience in virtual life what they want to have in reality.

While majority experiences gender swapping in Second Life, some of the users want to create communities, groups or to be friends with the avatars whose gender is the same with their users’ actual genders in order to avoid gender falseness occurs in Second Life. As a result, the avatars create their own communication methods and languages either to avoid false gender or to act relevant to the pretended gender. As Palomares and Lee touches “recent examinations have studied the communicative behaviors people manipulate when intentionally performing a false gender” (2010:8). On the other hand most of virtual world users are present in virtual worlds with opposite genders (Turkle; Ensslin and Muse 2010). The other reason for creating different communication methods is the need of hiding the actual genders. In this respect, I want to touch this issue with my experience similar to Boellstorff’s experience with a woman newbie avatar. I was trying to get new friends as a newbie in Second Life and the avatar that I talked to was an experienced one. The avatar had male appearance and according to what he told me “There are many man in woman avatars. They fool people around. I want to verify that your being an actual woman

by your voice. It is enough to say hello to your microphone. Otherwise, I won't talk to you and be your friend." A new communication method has been created in both sides. The one who does not want to encounter with false gender wants to prove it via microphone without being able to think that the user can find out a female sound or make somebody else speak to the microphone. My reaction to him was "this is a virtual world and you need to believe what you see. I am a woman and I won't send my voice to you". (Second Life 2014). He teleported himself to another place at the moment I replied.

The line between actual and virtual becomes blurred when actual people become a part of virtual worlds with their embodied representations. While some users prefer transforming the actuality into virtual world some prefer experiencing what they have never lived actually before in virtual worlds. In order to experience and experiment different sexes and genders in Second Life, I used several different avatars or I switched my avatars' sexes several times. Even though I did not use gender switch for the purpose of finding out the most suitable gender for actuality, there are users who use virtual worlds for their gender development by experiencing different types. In this respect, encountering "transgendered" avatars becomes inevitable and "Probably the most common "transgendered" state of affairs was for residents to participate in Second Life with a male avatar if they were an actual-world woman, or a female avatar if they were an actual world man, and not tell other residents of their actual-world gender" (Boellstorff 2010:142). It is almost impossible to ascertain the amount of these kinds of users. While the main avatar owns the actual gender of the user, the user might experience different genders with its various alts. Boellstorff reveals the dialogue among a group on their genders as:

Adam: I'll be putting the truth out by asking this question, but who thinks it's wrong to portray yourself as the opposing sex here?

Brenda: Some of my closest lesbian friends are men, lol

Yaker: Not only do I think it's not wrong, I think EVERYONE should do it

Troy: I keep switching sexes in SL.

Yaker: I have a male avie now, and I feel very enlightened!

Flo: You will find that most people don't have a problem with it.

Frankie: Unless you are trying to get involved with someone on a deeper level: then I think it is important to be honest

Yakar: I agree, and I think I speak differently with a male avatar

Grog: Personally, I get creeped out when I find out someone I thought was female is male. (2010: 141).

Even though Second Life defines the genders and sexes in every community it has, the avatars does not obey this structure by choosing and determining their own genders and sexes by themselves. Men can live as lesbians in a virtual world without having any difficulty because as stated in the conversation most people do not have a problem with gender switch or transgender. This procedure helps the users find out their own definite genders. A user may find out his/her being transsexual actually. In this respect, virtual gender helps actual gender development by enabling the users experience different preferences. Therefore, virtual and actual intertwine into each other in the blurred virtual and actual genders.

As a conclusion, the idea of gender in a virtual world creates controversies among the avatars and the actual users of them. Second Life is a 3D virtual world in which the users can show their presence with their embodied avatars. Concept of virtual sex and gender arises from the virtual appearance of the avatar and the user's preference of it. Even though the users cannot change the sex which is defined in

registration to Second Life, they can change the sex and gender through changing appearance and the attitudes of the avatars. In addition, even though Second Life reinforces gender norms of actual world with definite feminine and male roles and attitudes given to avatars through small balls which are controlled according to these norms, the users prefer choosing and changing genders at any time regardless of what Second Life assigns them in terms of behavior. It is well known that most of the users have avatars in reverse gender to their actual genders. Through gender swapping, a female avatar controlled by a man or vice versa, the users can experience and live what they are cruise about in terms of gender. In addition, gender swapping creates ambiguity of virtual gender in virtual environments which leads to the idea of false gender that disturbs some users, particularly in romantic and close relationships. While Second Life tries to carry the gender norms in actual world to virtual life by assigning definite genders, most of the users prefer having ambiguous genders. As a result, Second Life becomes a virtual medium that creates ambiguities on its own by enabling the users neutralize genders and the perspectives to genders through creating ambiguous gender perceptions and also by having the structure for only two basic genders.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The border between virtual world and real life has been disappearing as people are getting used to be a part of virtual world and virtual world's being a part of real life. As much as people involve in virtual world, they become aware of the possibilities of what they will have from virtual life. Therefore, Second Life, which is an online virtual world for some and an online game for others, is a world which goes beyond the realities with its facilities served to the users. Users create their own realities in this virtuality by experiencing whatever they like. As they get used to have whatever they like, virtual becomes real. In this respect, Second Life turns into the reality of the users by giving the chance of a new second life which is different from their first life. In addition to serve different facilities to everybody, Second Life is world which creates interaction among the users because it creates an environment where people could be in interaction with several different users at the same time.

Because of Second Life's these features, this thesis illustrates the studies on the reasons of multiple virtual identity and gender identity creation in virtual world, and how it is possible in Second Life. As a result of my observations, experiences and interviews in Second Life, and the detailed literature review on cyberspace, virtual world, identity and virtual identity creation in virtual environment, gender creation and virtual gender identity, the thesis reached to the resolution that users' avatars and the appearances they choose varies in accordance with their preferences. Because the avatars are not limited with basic appearances in Second Life, even though at the beginning one has to choose a basic one, later the user can easily change the appearance for free. After a while avatars turn into the users' virtual embodiment their virtual representations. Besides, avatars become the virtual identity

of the users with their appearances and behaviors. Firstly, people prefer to create multiple embodiments of them in order to be present in everywhere at the same time which is not available in real life. Secondly, people want to create multiple virtual identities to live a life that they always long for but can never have. With multiple identities they can experience multiple things they cannot experience in real life. Thirdly, people want to have multiple virtual identities to compensate their lonesome and to be socially interacted. In order to be in interaction, the users will use their multiple avatars to socialize and take place in almost every community according to their preferences. Fourthly, people use multiple virtual identities to save privacy of each identity and to experience different preferences from gender to education.

While creating an avatar, one needs to choose an appearance either relevant to his/hers or different from his/hers. The appearance and the attitude of the avatars define their gender according to society's social norms and rules. Since gender is a term which is socially constructed, the communities, groups, and even friends of the avatars define or understand an avatar's gender from its appearance. In this respect, since identity has various different attributions and one of them is gender identity, the society and communities defines avatar's gender in a way. In virtual worlds one might have a sense of one another's gender, however; it is quite easy to falsify the virtual gender because a user can easily switch the gender of the avatar by changing its appearance and body shape while having the reverse attitudes and behaviors. Except for cheating others by having different genders, the other reason of it is experiencing how it is to be in another gender and getting the sense of having opposite gender. In this respect, the identity created through gender is also multiplies and makes up multiple gender identities. However, in Second Life most of the people try to tear apart visions which look differently to different genders by swapping

genders. In a sense, while they seem to create genders in themselves, actually they tear apart the idea of gender by trying to create a “genderless” virtual world different from the real life.

Even though, I studied on Second Life about multiple virtual identity and gender identity creation in this thesis, I could not do a detailed research and interviews because of my limited time and limited permission to get into different communities due to the lack of linden dollars. If I had much more chance to do detailed research and enough linden dollars, I would interview with much more people to show as samples for different data.

On the other hand, Second Life is a medium which serves for various different kinds of purposes from trade to education. It is also evident that Second Life has a lot of anonymous researchers just like me. Since I learned Second Life as a result of my pedagogical studies, I know that Second Life is widely used for language teaching purposes. In this respect, for my further studies I think I will use Second Life to do research on changes of student’s behaviors in Second Life and its support in language teaching methods.

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