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Exploring the Relationship of Motivation, Anxiety, and Virtual Worlds in the Experiences of Two Spanish Language Learners: A Case Study

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Exploring the Relationship of Motivation, Anxiety, and Virtual Worlds in the Experiences of Two Spanish Language Learners: A Case Study

by

Amy Katherine Wehner

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Technology College of Arts & Sciences and College of Education University of South Florida

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DEDICATION

To Ryan and Aurora for their unfailing dedication.
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Jessica
Melissa

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Avatars and anxiety
Avatars and motivation
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ABSTRACT

Virtual Worlds (VWs) in foreign language education are slowly becoming more popular. Many studies have looked at the affordances of these worlds and how they affect some aspects of language acquisition. However, it is still unknown to what extent, if any, these virtual worlds can play a role in affecting motivation and anxiety. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between motivation, anxiety and virtual worlds to see how participation in activities within these environments interacted in two individual language learners, Jessica and Melissa.

Using a case study approach, I observed and interviewed the two participants in order to determine how these variables may have interacted in their experiences online. For these participants, avatar presence affected their anxiety, but the amount of that affect was determined by their pre-existing motivations for learning Spanish and the vividness and plausibility of their Ideal L2 Self. Both participants saw benefits for having an avatar as a face-saving device, but this was more evident in Jessica because she engaged in only conversations with speakers other than her classmates. While this investigation yielded results that support previous research on virtual worlds and anxiety, more research is necessary to see if and to what extent these worlds can affect motivation.
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

Motivation and anxiety have long been considered two of the most important variables that can affect how and to what extent a language is learned (Gardner, 1985). Since the seminal works of Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), these two variables have undergone extensive study (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Ortega, 2009). The majority of research has dealt with how these variables affect overall performance in the target language (TL) (Ganschow & Sparks, 1996; Gardner, 1985; Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, 1995; Marcos-Llinás & Garau, 2009; Phillips, 1992; Saito, 1996; Woodrow, 2006) or how language educators can increase motivation (Dörnyei, 2005; Nishitani & Matsuda, 2011) and decrease anxiety in the foreign language classroom (Young, 1991). This line of research has continued into online language learning environments, where researchers are attempting to discover the role that online learning has to play in mediating motivation and foreign language anxiety (Aydin, 2011; Brown, Fuller & Vician, 2004; Coryell & Clark, 2009; Jauregi, De Graaff, Van den Bergh, & Kriz, 2012; Pichette, 2009; Wehner, Gump & Downey, 2011).

In recent years, the development of virtual world technology, such as Second Life (SL), has made it even easier for students to communicate with speakers of other languages online from the comfort of their homes by connecting through digital spaces and with the use of avatars. These technologies have the potential to bridge the gap between classroom practice and real-world use of the target language (TL) by giving
language learners the chance to interact with other speakers of the TL (Deutschmann, Panichi, Molka-Danielsen, 2009; Dickey, 2005; Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath, & Trivedi, 2009; Jauregi et al., 2012; Wehner, 2013; Wehner et al., 2011). However, only one study (Wehner et al., 2011) actually addresses the relationship between avatars and online interactions in these virtual spaces and learner motivation and anxiety in using the TL.

In this study, I looked at the role that the avatar played in the motivation and anxiety of two participants, Jessica and Melissa who were juniors at Slate University. Using the motivational framework set forth by Dörnyei (2005), The L2 Motivational Self System, I looked at the relationship between avatars, Second Life (SL), motivation and anxiety in order to see whether or not avatar presence and activities in Second Life had an effect on the motivations and anxieties of these participants.

In this first chapter, I set the stage for this research by defining VWs, avatars, and discussing the topics of anxiety, motivation and identity that will be included in this study. I also address the implications of these topics for VWs. By outlining the important factors and key terms for this study, I demonstrate how I intended to proceed with this study and how the current research dictates a need for further investigations into relationship between VWs, anxiety and motivation.

In order to do this, I start the chapter by defining what is considered to be a VW in this study and describing the affordances of the VW, Second Life. This sets the context for this investigation. I then continue with a discussion of avatars by defining what is considered an avatar for this project and discussing how they are created and
how avatar creation will be used to investigate the relationship between VWs, anxiety and motivation.

After defining these key terms, VWs and avatars, I discuss the potential of VWs in the field of language learning. I show that these spaces allow for users to interact with others, but that little research is being done on how the user is affected by these interactions. While there is speculation on the effects of using VWs on anxiety (Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008; Thorne, Black & Sykes, 2009; Ushioda, 2011; Wehner, 2013), little has been done to show exactly how or why this may occur (Wehner et al., 2011).

The chapter then continues with brief backgrounds on anxiety and motivation and how these concepts relate to the potential of VWs. I will specifically focus on the L2 Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2005) and how he has moved to reshape the concept of motivation to fill some of the gaps left by previous research, such as the role of identity in motivation or non-integrative reasons for language learning. Additionally, I include a discussion on how identity research fits into this paradigm and what lines of investigation will be considered in this study to help develop the ideas of the L2 Self.

Following this, I will outline the research questions that guided this investigation as well as my theoretical perspective and background as a teacher and researcher that I relied on to complete this study. I then end the chapter with the definitions of nine important key terms and a discussion of the limitations and significance of this study.

**Virtual Worlds**

Virtual worlds, especially *SL*, have been used in disciplines such as mathematics, business, science, medicine, psychology, and language (Sykes et al., 2008; Thorne et
al., 2009). However, the research on virtual worlds and language learning is still developing. In this section, I define and describe the terms virtual worlds and avatar and briefly discuss the affordances of the virtual world SL that will be relevant to this study.

For the purposes of this research, a platform is considered a virtual world if it is an “immersive, three-dimensional (3D), multimedia, multiperson, simulation environment, where each participant adopts an alter ego and interacts with the world in real time. World activity [also] persists even if a player is offline” (Wagner & Ip, 2009, p. 250). Additionally, I also refer to a specific sect of virtual worlds that are classified as social virtual worlds. A social virtual world is one where there is no specific purpose or plot unless the users create them (Warburton, 2009). This addition to the above definition helps to differentiate virtual gaming worlds, such as World of Warcraft or SIMS, from social virtual worlds (SVWs) such as Second Life or OpenSim. With this definition in mind, I move on to address the specific social virtual world, Second Life, and its features that are central to this study.

**Second Life (SL)**

SL is a social virtual world that was developed by Linden Labs. SL represents the most mature virtual world and with that comes an incredibly well developed infrastructure (over 28,949 regions), a large population of users (<30.8 million), and the freedom to use any computer operating system (viewers available on Apple, Microsoft and Linux) (Shepherd, 2012). This contrasts with other SVWs, like OpenSim, that are still under development and only available on the Microsoft platform. These differences make SL the preferable platform for education and research (Warburton, 2009).
Second Life (SL) is an open platform, which means materials and spaces are user-created, not just managed by Linden Labs. SL has its own currency\(^1\) that you can use to buy goods and services, including land, clothes, houses, etc. in-world and the currency can then be exchanged into other currencies (i.e. US dollar). SL also includes its own creation tools and scripting language that users can use to build content. This allows for diverse content and provides opportunities for co-creation and exploration. According to Warburton (2009), without this ability to create and manage objects, these virtual worlds would not be successful. It is in the creation, use, exchange and purchase of user created goods that drive SVWs like SL and allow users to engage in conversations and create relationships.

Along with these user created spaces, SL, like other virtual worlds, has a number of affordances that benefit educational contexts. In SL users have the opportunity for extended or rich interactions with other users and content, visualization and contextualization, exposure to authentic content and culture, identity play, immersion, simulation, community presence and content production (Warburton, 2009). The affordances of extended or rich interactions, exposure to authentic content and culture and identity play are of particular interest to this study because they will allow the participants the chance to create an authentic second language identity and try that identity through their interactions. Additionally, Sykes et al. (2008) mention that SVWs have the potential to lower anxiety in language learning due to the face-saving presence of the avatar. It was the intention of this study to research this claim more thoroughly.

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\(^1\) The Second Life currency is known as the Linden (L) and it is tied to the US dollar. One US dollar is equal to 250L.
In order to do this, I investigated how the participants, Jessica and Melissa, created and developed their avatars. Therefore, I looked at how each participant used the avatar design objects available to them and the avatar personalization feature to create their avatars. The avatar creation tool of SL is one of the most advanced and detailed of the SVW systems. Combined with a large-scale fashion retail market, this creation system allows the user to create the optimal 3D representation for use in the virtual space. The possibilities this tool allows for users to manipulate the avatar to create the ultimate representation of one’s self is important for this study because it allows the participants to fully develop a physical representation of their future self. This idea will be developed later in this chapter. For now, I turn to a discussion of the avatar. As one of SL’s most unique features, the creation and development of the avatar and the relationship of that avatar with the user is central to this study.

The Avatar

An avatar is an animated, generally humanoid (although not exclusively), figure that represents a user in an online space (Morningstar & Farmer, 2008). Through scripts called animations, these characters can run, jump, fly, dance, teleport, communicate, and interact. In SVWs like SL, these avatars “mediate participants’ interactions with each other and the environment” (Messinger et al., 2008).

As previously mentioned, the avatar in SL is highly customizable and can be created to be any number of shapes, sizes, and species. The identity a user creates in this space can be anything or anyone he or she desires. In SL a 40-something, portly man becomes a blonde bombshell, or a 10-year old boy with bunny ears. Men and women turn into dogs or rabbits, giants or miniature pets. You can be one of these
things all the time, or all of these things at once. Identity in SL is constantly changing, however, most of users choose to remain as some super attractive and perfect version of their real-life (RL)\(^2\) selves.

**General creation trends.** While users have the ability to create an avatar to whatever specifications they desire, the general trend is to create a humanoid, or human-like, representations (Messinger et al., 2008). In their study on SL identities, Messinger et al. (2008) found that the majority of their participants create avatars that represent themselves but with slight enhancements (taller, thinner, more shapely), however, many users choose to deviate completely from their RL selves. Even many of the animal forms (aka furries) are human shaped and stand on two legs instead of four.

This general trend in creating human-looking avatars is consistent with previous pilot studies that I have conducted (Wehner, 2010; Wehner et al., 2011). The majority of my former participants chose human avatars and usually tried to make the avatar look like their RL selves. Only in one instance did a participant choose an animal representation, a fox that carried a Spanish guitar. It is my opinion that maintaining some self-representation is important to connecting with the avatar and the program, thereby fully immersing the participant in their character. As I will show with the presentation of the data for this research, maintaining a character as close to the participant’s real life self as possible was an important decision for both Melissa and Jessica.

\(^{2}\)The terms “Real Life” (abbrev. RL) and “Second Life” (abbrev. SL) are used to distinguish between what the user does online in the virtual world platform (SL) and what he or she does outside of the platform (RL).
In this section, I addressed the concepts of virtual worlds and avatars and how
the particular features, especially the avatar creation feature, work in the virtual world
that was chosen for this study, SL. In the following sections, I continue to look at the
affordances of SL that have been identified by language researchers and how these
create the potential for using SVWs in language learning context. I specifically address
the potential of these worlds to lower anxiety and how that could affect learner
motivation in using the TL.

**Potential for Virtual Worlds in Language Learning**

While this study focuses on the avatar and how it mediates foreign language
learners’ motivations and anxieties, there are other affordances of SL that may come
into play. As previously mentioned, Warburton (2009) has defined a number of
affordances of virtual worlds for education. These affordances have been tested out in a
number of different disciplines in K-12 and higher education contexts, including media
arts, health, and environmental disciplines (Hew & Cheung, 2010). However, the
research on virtual worlds and language learning is still in its infancy.

The majority of virtual world (VW) research in the field of second language
acquisition (SLA) has focused on interactions (i.e. Deutschmann et al., 2010),
perceptions and attitudes towards the VW platform (i.e. Blasing, 2010; Peterson, 2005),
with a few studies addressing effects on learning (i.e. Milton, Jonsen, Hirst &
Lindenburn, 2012) and communication strategies (e.g. Jauregi, Canto, de Graff,
Koenraad & Moonen, 2011; Peterson, 2009, 2010). These studies have focused
primarily on interactions, visualization, exposure to content and culture, immersion, and
simulation. The studies listed here provide us with a number of justifications for the use
of virtual worlds, but few have attempted to discuss what is actually going on with the users as far as their relationship to the language being learned. While several theoretical articles have speculated about the usefulness of virtual worlds to decrease anxiety, little research is available that attempts to verify this claim (Sykes et al., 2008; Thorne et al., 2009; Ushioda, 2011).

According to Ushioda (2011), the avatar has the potential to provide the language learner with a clear representation of their Ideal L2 Self. It can give the language learner a picture of what they want to be, which is an important component of the motivational nature of the L2 Motivational Self System that will be discussed in Chapter 2. Like real life identities, the avatar can be changed at will, and this can provide insight to the changes within the language learner on their journey. It was my belief that through developing the avatar and watching its changes over time, we might have been able to actually see how the learner’s identity is changing. Furthermore, by developing this vision, we could be able to reduce anxiety caused by tensions that arise between the language learner, the learning environment, and their Ideal L2 Selves, thereby increasing learner motivation. As the data will reveal, however, when left to create their own avatars with little guidance, this is not necessarily the case. Through the cases observed in this study, it became evident that motivation was a much more powerful factor in the participant’s overall development.

In this section, I briefly identified the gap in SLA research as it pertains to SVWs and anxiety. Since so little research has been done on the hypothesis that virtual worlds can reduce foreign language anxiety (FLA), it was the intent of this study to further investigate this claim. To do so, I relied on the foundations of both anxiety and
motivation research, as these two concepts are intertwined. In the next section, I briefly discuss the foundations of anxiety research and continue to a discussion on motivation, specifically highlighting Dörnyei’s (2005) L2 Motivational Self System.

**Anxiety**

Anxiety, first introduced in the literature by Thomas Scovel in 1959 (see the reprint of this article in Scovel, 1991), is “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125). In this study, I focused on foreign language anxiety (FLA), which is a specific anxiety reaction to learning a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986).

The research on anxiety is conflicting, but there is a general inverse relationship between FLA and motivation (Horwitz et al., 1986; Ortega, 2009). Scovel (1991) discusses two types of anxiety, facilitating and debilitating. Facilitating anxiety is a type of anxious reaction that causes an increase in motivation. For example, a student is nervous about an up-coming test, so he starts studying harder in order to ensure that he will do well. Debilitating anxiety is an anxious reaction that is so severe that it causes a decrease in motivation, or causes the person to stop trying all together. An example of this would be a student who has to give a speech and gets so anxious that they run off the stage.

For the purposes of this study, I was primarily interested in debilitating FLA; however, the case of Jessica, presented a particularly interesting look at facilitating anxiety. Debilitating FLA would normally be responsible for lowered motivation to persist
in language learning (Gardner, 1985). This kind of anxious reaction can occur from the development of tension in a number of different situations.

No matter whether it is facilitating or debilitating, an important component of anxiety is the idea of tension. Tension can be created in a number of ways that can be potentially anxiety producing, whether it be the inconsistency between classroom language use and personal language use (Coryell & Clark, 2009, Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001), the tensions between student and instructor beliefs about language learning and teaching (Young, 1991) or those that exist between the reality of current language abilities and desired language abilities (Dörnyei, 2009), or the desire to integrate in a culture and that cultures willingness to accept an outsider (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2005).

The perceived distance between the two forces can increase or decrease this tension. For example, if the distance between a student’s current language abilities and desire abilities is too great (they think they are much worse of a speaker than they want to be), then anxiety will increase (Dörnyei, 2009). This was the case for my participant Jessica. If the anxiety becomes too great, then the student could become de-motivated, but this gap could also become facilitating in that the student can recognize the gap and take the steps to correct it. Therefore, the question becomes, how can we, as educators, lower anxiety so it is not hindering motivation? How can we close these tension-causing gaps and help the student persist in language learning? In the subsequent sections I address the concept of motivation and these questions.
Motivation

One thing that has remained constant through motivation research is the importance that motivation plays in the language learner’s willingness to persist in language learning and the degree and extent of language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2009; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Ortega, 2009; VanPatten & Benati, 2010). Due to this importance, it is still necessary to discover and research new ways that we can promote the value of language learning to future generations of language learners.

Motivation in language learning is the “desire to initiate L2 [second language] learning and the effort employed to sustain it” (Ortega, 2009, p. 168; VanPatten & Benati, 2010). The thread of motivation research weaves through all of second language acquisition research from the mid-1900s through today. It has undergone a number of different phases, each one focusing on a different aspect of motivation, integrative motivations (Gardner, 1985), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), or the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009). For the purposes of this research study, I adopted Dörnyei’s (2009) framework of the L2 Motivational Self System and used it as the basis for my discussions on learner motivation.

The L2 Motivational Self-System

In 1999, Dörnyei outlined his theory of the L2 Motivational Self System. This system is his answer to a number of questions that began to emerge in motivational research (i.e. What happens to integrative motivation in students who are learning English as a lingua franca?). According to Dörnyei, motivation to learn a foreign language lies in the ability to create a strong future image that contains a language-
learning component. He calls this the Ideal L2 Self. The experiences LLs have with language learning and speaking with other speakers of the target language (The L2 Environment), as well as the pressures they feel from those around them to learn another language (The Ought-to Self) affect whether or not they reach this Ideal self, and ultimately influence the LL's motivation.

Dörnyei’s (2009) theory is appropriate for this line of inquiry because it combines all of previous motivation research into one theory that is based on motivational theory from psychology (see also Markus & Nurius, 1986). The L2 Motivational Self System takes into account a learner’s integrative motivations, the desire to become part of the target language society, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, what moves the LL from within as well as from the outside, and how they desire to improve based on a future self image (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). I agree that motivation is a combination of all of these things and, therefore, all should be taken into consideration when conducting research on motivation.

**Reshaping the concept of motivation.** Through the invention of the L2 Motivational Self System, Dörnyei (2005) has attempted to bridge the gaps in emerging motivational research. Basically, motivation to learn a language is driven by our desire to make our current self more like our future-self image (the Ideal L2 Self) (Dörnyei, 2009). However, the many obstacles we have to overcome (language learning environment, tests, peers, fears of making mistakes, etc.) cause anxiety because it increases the perceived distance between our current selves and our ideal selves. Ultimately, “success” for a LL is achieved when their actual selves merge with their ideal selves, and they finally become what they envisioned themselves to be.
The relationship between motivation, anxiety, and identity is complex (Ortega, 2009). On the one hand, there is the idea of a “tension-to-learn,” in which anxiety plays an important motivating factor by providing leaners with a “manageable gap in their knowledge and motivation to fill that gap” (Blasing, 2010, p. 108). However, debilitating anxiety is often cited as the cause of decreased motivation (Gardner, 1985; Gardner, Masgoret, & Tennant, 2004; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1995; Young, 1991). In order to mediate these anxieties, LLs that experience high volumes of difficulties must go through a number of identity reconstructions and continuously reconstruct their current and future-self identities (Kinginger, 2004; Ortega, 2009).

In so far as anxiety is related to the L2 Motivational Self System, Dörnyei (2009) proposes that tension occurs when the distance between our actual selves and our ideal selves increases. As we stray, or are pushed, further from our language learning goals (i.e., our Ideal L2 Selves), we become more anxious about being able to achieve these goals. In this way, the relationship of anxiety with motivation is consistent with previous research in that it can have both a positive and negative effect on motivation. As Dörnyei discusses, the Ideal L2 Self must be seen as plausible; therefore, if there is too great of a distance between the learner’s actual self and ideal self, the tension created here could be debilitating and lower motivation. Contrarily, if the distance between actual and ideal self is manageable, then this could motivate the student.

In this section, I addressed the relationship of motivation to anxiety, particularly within the concept of The L2 Motivational Self System. The L2 Motivational Self System was also a way for Dörnyei to integrate concepts of identity and language learning that have been so prevalent over the last couple of decades. Specifically Norton (2000)
called for a motivational system that included identity as a way to account for additional motivations of a LL. Because of this inclusion, it is important to discuss how the concept of identity in language learning is related to this study.

**Identity**

Because the realm of identity and language is so vast and allows for almost unlimited avenues for research, I have chosen to focus on the concepts of identity that directly relate to the L2 Motivational Self System. What role does the foreign language learner see the TL playing in their current and future identities (The L2 Self)? How do they use those identities to affect their language learning (motivation)? What outside forces cause them to reinvent those ideas and reestablish their Ideal L2 Selves (The Ought-to Self)? Questions about class difference, power struggles, language ideologies and social justice (common themes in identity research) fall outside the scope of this study and will not be specifically addressed.

In order to demonstrate how I will be framing identity, I will discuss a particular example of one foreign language learner, Alice, presented by Kinginger (2004). In this section, I will briefly discuss the concept of identity in SLA research and then focus on showing how the L2 Self-System can be applied to learner motivation through Alice’s story.

Research on identity in second language learning informs us that identities are constructed and situated socially; they are constantly changing over time and within every interaction (Block, 2007; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Identity is (re)constructed with every interaction, and, therefore, it is dependent both upon both interlocutors. However, identities are not only constructed between peoples, they can
also be constructed within ourselves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Everyday, we are (re)constructing who we are and who we want to be; although, even these internal identities are confined to cultural and social ideals that already exist in our world.

Even though this field is relatively new, emerging in the late 1990s with a call from Firth and Wagner (1997) to explore identities beyond that of “native” versus “non-native” speaker, there has already been substantial research conducted on the topic (see Block, 2007; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004 for reviews). This research has focused on a variety of contexts, populations and social relationships including identity in learning English as a second language (ESL), study abroad, and second language learning. The majority of identity research involves qualitative research studies, especially case studies that focus on telling the stories of individual language learners (Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2004; Norton, 2000, 2006; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Pilar 2002).

Alice. One story of particular interest for this study is 4-year research project conducted on an American woman learning French named Alice presented by Kinginger (2004). Alice views learning French as a way to make herself more cultured and move beyond the hard life she learned in the past. She saw the French as refined and cultured and wanted that life for herself. She also had a desire to become a French teacher so that she could share the things about French culture that she loved. These motivations define her L2 Self.

However, her first encounters with the French culture were very difficult. Her ideas about the way they lived were challenged and she found it difficult to integrate with the French university culture in which she found herself as an exchange student.
The tension and anxiety that arose between the clash of her ideas of her future self and that of reality were strong demotivating factors for her, so strong that she contemplates suicide. Luckily, Alice was able to redefine her goals, create a new future self-image that aligned itself closer to the realities she faced while living in France and was able to once again move forward in the language learning process (Kinginger, 2004). However, if it was not for her strong desire to incorporate French into her identity, she may not have been able to overcome such strong opposition. As I will show later, having this strong Idea L2 Self Identity is integral to sustaining motivations in language learners.

According to Kinginger (2004), Alice had a very clear concept of how she felt French would become part of her future self. As Kinginger states:

Alice’s motives are complex in that the themes she evokes relate both to her personal history, and to the broader themes of language ideology in particular the ideologies of French that are prevalent in the discourses of American mass media and language teaching. These themes also relate to her desire to make French ‘real’ by learning with and from other people, and eventually to become a language educator. In this role Alice imagines herself as a dynamic, engaged teacher committed to the role of language learning in promoting intercultural awareness and social justice. Before Alice went to France, competence in French was both a ‘dream’ and a ‘mission.’ (p. 227)

While Kinginger uses the term “imagine,” we can see in this excerpt what Dörnyei would consider to be a description of Alice’s Ideal L2 Self. The themes described here and throughout the article consistently refer to how Alice viewed the role of her TL in her
life; and it was ultimately this image that allowed her to overcome the many obstacles she faced.

A number of authors in the field of identity research in SLA have recorded similar experiences both in foreign and second language learning (see Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). The authors in these volumes note that often language learners enter the language learning process with a specific set of goals and ideals, and these goals are challenged by the learner’s entrance into the target language society. A space like SL gives LLs a chance to play with these identities and reconstruct their L2 Self identity without risk to themselves (Warburton, 2009).

The avatar can be constantly changed and is actually expected to do so. Identity in SL is expected to be fluid and malleable, and therefore opens up a realm for unlimited experimentation (Messinger et al., 2008; Ushioda, 2011; Warburton, 2009). Through avatar creation, it may be possible to help LLs realize who they want to become as Spanish speakers. Creating a vivid self-image can help them reduce their anxieties for using the TL and create stronger motivations for learning the language (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Ushioda, 2011). In order to investigate this possibility, I created this qualitative study to investigate if the avatar is used as a manifestation of the Ideal L2 Self and whether or not there is an effect on motivation and foreign language anxiety in other Spanish language learners. In the sections that follow, I will discuss the parameters of my research study, the guiding research questions and my theoretical framework and background for conducting research.
This Study

Statement of Intent

As already discussed, the literature on virtual worlds suggests that using avatars has the potential to lower anxiety because it provides a mask or face-saving device that could help students feel less anxious and by extension improve motivation (Deutschmann et al., 2009; Jarmon et al., 2009; Jauregi et al., 2011; Sykes et al., 2008; Thorne et al., 2009; Ushioda, 2011; Wehner et al., 2011). In this research study, I investigated whether or not LLs used the avatar to create a language identity (L2-Self) and how the participants felt that communicating through an avatar affected their anxiety and motivation in using a foreign language.

Guiding research questions. In this study the following questions guided my research:

1. In what ways do Spanish language learners use the avatar personalization features to create a representation of their Ideal L2-Self?
2. In what ways, if any, does using an avatar in communications with other speakers of Spanish affect a Spanish language learner’s (a) anxiety and (b) motivation?
3. What other factors contribute to the Spanish language learner’s possible changes in (a) anxiety and (b) motivation?

Theoretical Perspective

To investigate the three research questions above, I adopted a naturalist, interpretive-constructionist perspective. This perspective is a combination of qualitative research philosophies that emphasize the importance of prior experiences and biases,
how people individually interpret their experiences through these prior experiences, and how that interpretation determines their future actions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In the following sections I describe each part of this perspective individually and how I see them relating to this inquiry.

**Naturalism.** Naturalists, according to Rubin and Rubin (2012), “accept that there is a reality but argue that it cannot be measured directly, only perceived by people, each of whom views it through the lens of his or her prior experience, knowledge, and expectations” (p. 15). For this study, I did not intend to measure the amounts or quantify the types of motivations or anxieties that my students had, but rather investigate the nature of their motivations, how those motivations relate to an “Ideal L2 Self” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), and how they view interactions mediated by an avatar. Each participant had different views, but through data interpretation, these views can hopefully help to form a model for using avatar-based virtual environments as tools in language learning.

**Interpretive constructionism.** Constructionism is already an important theoretical framework in research on virtual worlds and language learning (Cheal, 2009; Deutschmann et al., 2009; Dickey, 2005; Evans, Mulvihill, & Brooks, 2008; Molka-Danielsen, Richardson, Deutschmann, & Carter, 2007). At the core of constructionism is the view that people build understandings together and share in learning and interpretation together (Dickey, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interpretive constructionist researcher, according to Rubin and Rubin (2012), “argues that the core of understanding is learning what people make of the world around them, how people interpret what they encounter, and how they assign meanings and values to events or objects” (p. 19).
I view the collective working together of the participants, the researcher, and other interlocutors as the foundation for development of knowledge. Together, we discussed how avatar creation can be used to construct their Ideal L2 Self, and, in turn, they interpreted their perceptions of interactions in Second Life and how they viewed this world mediated their motivations and anxieties. I investigated how Spanish language learners (SLLs) created their visual representations in this space and how they viewed that representation and what meaning they assigned to the avatar and their interactions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Additionally, I was interested in how the participants viewed their interactions with other speakers of Spanish and to what extent they felt that having an avatar presence impacted their anxiety in language use and their overall motivation to learn a foreign language.

Teaching, Researching, and Living: Personal Foundations for Conducting Qualitative Research

Teaching. I relied on my seven years as a Spanish teacher at the university level to help develop this study. This experience has given me an inside look at what the students need (and want) from language education at this level, as well as helped me hone my own personal beliefs about language education. Over this time, I have come to believe that teaching a foreign language should be as immersive an experience as possible. I conduct my classes, even from the lowest level of beginners, entirely in Spanish and ask that my students also use as much Spanish as they can. I incorporate culture from outside the U.S., as well as ask students to investigate the language learning opportunities that surround them. Virtual worlds, for me, provide places where
students can explore both culture and language and become fully immersed in their language learning experience.

The importance that I place on immersion education stems from my own experiences in study abroad and language learning courses. After living in France, Spain, and Costa Rica, I realized the importance of fully surrounding oneself with the TL. However, as discussed above, these situations are not perfect and can lead to difficulties with integration into the target culture, hence my desire to find a way to both immerse oneself in language with the opportunity to experiment and practice that language.

**Researching.** As a researcher, I have spent the last five years researching and using virtual worlds in my classroom at the university level. I have conducted three pilot studies in order to investigate the different areas of virtual worlds that I could study and to determine what kind of study would be most beneficial to the accumulating body of research on virtual worlds in language education (see Wehner, 2010; Wehner, 2013; Wehner et al., 2011). These pilot studies have also allowed me to determine the best way to conduct the kind of course being used for this project, the difficulties that may be encountered, how to collect data in these spaces, and the ways that data can be interpreted.

**Living.** I have been a resident of the Second Life community for five years. This time frame is important because it has allowed me to accumulate in-depth knowledge of how the system works. I am also familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of the system from a technological perspective. I have advanced knowledge of building and scripting, which allows me to communicate with others quickly and easily within the
space. I have developed relationships with many teachers from around the world, especially in Spanish-speaking countries, that allow me to help my students make connections with other speakers of Spanish (OSSs) quickly and easily. I am a member of a number of educator groups within the virtual world as well that give me access to teaching resources, special islands and privileges that make it easier to conduct classes in this setting and give my students access to more cultural materials. I have also learned about the best ways to collect data and conduct observations that will allow me to complete this research project.

**Definition of Terms**

In this section, I define nine key terms that I will be using in this inquiry in order to give the reader an understanding as to how and/or why I am using them.

*Virtual worlds* - “immersive, three-dimensional (3D), multimedia, multiperson simulation environments, where each participant adopts an alter ego and interacts with the world in real time. World activity persists even if a player is offline” (Wagner & Ip, 2009, p. 250).

*Social Virtual World (SVW)* – a virtual world platform where there is no specific plot or objective other than those created by the users.

*Second Life* – Second Life is the SVW platform developed by Linden Labs that will be used for this research.

*Avatar* – an animated, generally humanoid figure that represents a user in an online space (Morningstar and Farmer, 2008). For this investigation, an avatar is also three-dimensional.
Motivation – According to Gardner (1985), Ortega (2009) and VanPatten and Benati (2010), “motivation to learn a second language is seen as referring to the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experience in this activity,” and the degree and type of “desire to initiate L2 [second language] learning and the effort employed to sustain it.”

Anxiety – “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Horwitz et al., 1986)

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) – a specific anxiety reaction that results from trying to learn another language (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Other Speakers of Spanish (OSS) – I have chosen to use this term to refer to people in Second Life who also speak Spanish. This term is more appropriate than “native speaker” since there is no way of verifying if the person is a native speaker, and since the definition of “native speaker,” when used in SLA research, is unclear. I refer to OSSs encountered in the SL platform as “unknown OSSs,” implying that the participants found them for the first time on SL and do not know them in RL. Interactions with their classmates on SL (who are technically also other speakers of Spanish) will be denoted as “known OSSs” or “classmates.”

Spanish language learner (SLL) - an SLL in this context is a student enrolled in a beginning Spanish course at a university.

Real Life (RL) – this term is a phrase adopted by interlocutors in Second Life that refers to the lives the people live outside of the virtual world.
Significance

This line of inquiry has hopefully helped shed light on how the use of avatar-based virtual worlds in language education can impact the foreign language anxiety and motivations of the foreign language learner. Many studies have hypothesized about the usefulness of avatars as a mask to mediate anxiety (Deutschmann et al., 2009; Jarmon et al., 2009; Jauregi et al., 2011; Sykes et al., 2008; Thorne et al., 2009; Ushioda, 2011; Wehner, 2013; Wehner et al., 2011); however, no studies have shown whether or not this relationship exists. In addition, as Ushioda (2011) suggested, the benefits of identity experimentation that can occur in avatar-based programs could aid in the creation of the Ideal L2 Self, which could lead to increased motivation in language learners. This study serves to increase our knowledge about the kinds of activities conducted online that may be anxiety reducing instead of anxiety inducing. Through avatar-based communication, we may be able to alleviate some of the tension, or anxiety, that arises from the conflict between the perfection required of traditional Spanish language exams and the desire to communicate with one’s peers (Coryell & Clark, 2009).

Summary

In Chapter 1, I discussed the intent of my study: to see if learners use the avatar to create a language identity (L2-Self) and how the participants feel that communicating through an avatar affects their anxiety and motivation in using a foreign language. I set the stage by defining and describing virtual worlds, Second Life and avatars and by addressing the constructs of motivation, anxiety and identity as they relate to this study. I articulated my theoretical perspective – naturalist, interpretive-constructionist – and background in order to situate myself as the researcher. I also addressed significance of
my study. In Chapter 2, I will review and synthesize the literature that is important to my topic. This body of literature includes research conducted on motivation, in particular the L2 Motivational Self-System (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), anxiety, and virtual worlds. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology used for this study. Finally, in Chapter 4 and 5, I review the data I collected and discuss the findings and how it relates to the research questions, and offer up a number of implications that his study has for theory as well as pedagogy.
CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter 1, I set the stage for this proposed research study and briefly addressed the key concepts and their relationships to one another. The purpose of this study is to investigate further the avatar can be used to design and develop a language identity (L2-Self) and how the participants feel that this process and communicating through an avatar affects their anxiety and motivation in using a foreign language. To address these goals, I propose the three questions below:

1. In what ways do Spanish language learners use the avatar personalization features to create a representation of their Ideal L2-Self?

2. In what ways, if any, does using an avatar in communications with other speakers of Spanish affect a Spanish language learner’s (a) anxiety and (b) motivation?

3. What other factors contribute to the Spanish language learner’s possible changes in (a) anxiety and (b) motivation?

In this chapter, I will discuss the major concepts of this inquiry in more detail by looking at the history and development of motivation and anxiety research in language learning, the development of the L2 Motivational Self System, and language learning in virtual worlds.

In Figure 1, I have designed a concept map that visualizes the main concepts of this investigation, their importance, and their relationship to one another. At the center
are the concepts of anxiety and motivation, which are the primary ideas under which all others will be examined. The concept circles progressively lighten as they approach the concepts that lie on the periphery of this investigation. This concept map in no ways shows all of the ideas that will be addressed, but highlights those that are key to this investigation and how I envision them relating to one another. In the following paragraphs, I will outline the chapter and the main ideas to be addressed. The outer-most circle highlights concepts that fall outside the scope of this study.

Figure 1. Concept Map of Ideas Important to This Investigation.

*Graphic representing the primary, secondary and tertiary themes considered in this research. Dark central circle represents most central concepts while lightest circle in top right represents themes and topics that are outside the scope of this study.*
I begin Chapter 2 with an account of the history of motivation research starting with Gardner (1985) and continuing to Dörnyei’s reconceptualization in 1999. The discussion of motivation will also include a look at the concept of investment proposed by Norton (2000). An analysis of these concepts will show how Dörnyei was able to account for the many different aspects of motivation proposed historically by researchers when he developed the L2 Motivational Self System. I will then continue with a historical discussion of anxiety and the major players that have defined this area of research (Gardner, Masgoret, & Tennant, 2004; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Kim, 2009; MacIntyre, 2007; Nishitani & Matsuda, 2011; Scovel, 1991; Young, 1991). In this section, I will also review causes for anxiety and the relationship between motivation and anxiety.

Part three of this chapter will focus more closely on the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005). In particular, I address research on the concept of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and provide a detailed description of the three primary self concepts developed by Dörnyei (2005 & 2009): the L2-Self, the Ought-to Self and the L2 Learning Environment. Thereafter, I outline the concepts of identity that relate to this particular line of research. Much of the identity research done to date concentrates on class differences, power struggles, how the other perceives the learner, language ideologies, and social justice (see Block, 2007; Gass & Selsinker, 2008; Ortega, 2009; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). However, these research areas fall outside the scope of this investigation, as I will be contextualizing identity within the framework of Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System and referring to identity as it relates to motivation, anxiety and virtual worlds.
Finally, I will look at research on virtual worlds (VWs) as I discuss VW communities, in particular Second Life (SL), avatars, VW identities, and VWs and language learning research. Since I have already discussed SL and avatars in Chapter 1, I will touch on these items again briefly, but focus my discussion on research conducted on VWs and language learning. Developing the background of VWs in language education will lead us to the implications of this study and how we can use VWs to design and develop the L2 Self. Dörnyei (2009) identified six conditions that are necessary for possible selves to influence motivation: the vivid future self image, plausibility, harmony between the L2 Motivational Self System components, activation, procedural strategies and the feared self. I will address each of these and highlight how SL can be used to create these conditions, as well as other ways VWs can help to mediate anxiety that will be important to this inquiry.

**Motivation**

Motivation is one of the best-researched topics in the field of second language acquisition (Ortega, 2009). Generally classified among the variety of individual differences, motivation refers to the degree and type of “desire to initiate L2 [second language] learning and the effort employed to sustain it” (Ortega, 2009, p. 168; VanPatten & Benati, 2010). Since the foundational work by Gardner & Lambert (1972; Gardner, 1985), numerous studies have shown that motivation plays an integral role in language learning success (see Dörnyei, 2005; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Ortega, 2009; VanPatten & Benati, 2010). In this section, I will review the literature pertaining to motivation and discuss the links between motivation, investment and the L2 Motivation Self System.
Historically, motivation research has gone through three phases. Phase 1, the social psychological period, started with Gardner and the development of the Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), still widely used today, which was primarily based on social psychology and looked at the idea of integrativeness (Dörnyei, 2005). The cognitive-situated period, Phase 2, emerged in the mid-1990s, when scholars desired to switch from measuring quantities of motivation to qualities of motivation. This resulted in the adaptation of Self-Determination Theory proposed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the 1970s and focused on intrinsic (internal) and extrinsic (external) motivation (Dörnyei, 2005; Ortega, 2009). Finally, Phase 3, the process-oriented period, arose in the early part of this century with the reconceptualization of motivation by Dörnyei as the L2 Self System, which strives to synthesize previous frameworks, but also builds “on the general social psychological theory of regulatory focus and the notion that humans make decisions as to how to act motivated by references to an ideal self” (Ortega, 2009, p. 185-186; Dörnyei, 2005).

Motivation, according to Gardner (1985), is one part of his socio-educational (SE) model for second language learning, along with intelligence, language aptitude, and situational anxiety. In the SE model, a language learner enters the learning environment, through either formal or informal settings, with certain cultural beliefs and individual differences. As the learner passes through the learning environment, he or she will emerge with a certain set of language skills, both linguistic and non-linguistic, that relate to how they interacted with that environment.

Motivation, in Gardner’s model, is comprised of a number of factors: attitudes towards culture, people, and learning environment; interest in the foreign language (FL);
integrative and instrumental orientation, and anxiety (Gardner, 1985). It should be noted here that while Gardner considered anxiety a strong enough factor to be included in his SE Model, it has been tested and often included as a factor of motivation, rather than its own distinct factor (Gardner, 1985). These factors were the catalyst for the development of the AMTB, which is still widely used in motivation research today. However, some researchers have been critical of this model and especially of the importance that has been given to the idea of integrative motivation (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Ortega, 2009).

Of all of the motivation factors, integrativeness has been the most influential in the development of FL motivation theory, but it has been criticized for being “too restrictive and unresponsive to wider developments in psychology” (Ortega, 2009, p. 169). Integrativeness is defined as “a motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings toward the community that speaks that language” (Gardner, 1985, pp. 82-83). This concept was challenged in the 1990s as a result of the growth of English as a lingua franca and the development of World English. As Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) postulate, “Does it make sense to talk about integrative attitudes when ownership of English does not necessarily rest with a specific community of speakers [...]?” (pp. 2-3).

These challenges to Gardner’s model, which was heavily based on the specific bilingual context in Canada, lead to the re-focusing of motivation research on the ideas of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and Self-Determination Theory.

Self-Determination Theory theorizes that people desire to grow and learn and that they are guided by actions that they feel are self-initiated. Therefore, a language learner who is self-motivated to study a language and chooses to do so of their own will, will be more likely to be successful in reaching their goal. This theory also
acknowledges that motivation can come from exterior forces, extrinsic motivation; however, this type of motivation is considered to be less ideal that intrinsic motivation. In addition, because humans also have a desire to be part of a community, extrinsic motivation can also be internalized and become part of a learner’s intrinsic motivation (Ortega, 2009). This theory has proven to be helpful in predicting success of language learners, however, it too is highly contextualized in the North American context and does not account for attitudes towards the target language (TL) and its speakers, which was originally an important part of the Gardner model. These limitations were the impetus for the current wave of motivation research and the reconceptualization of motivation through the ideas of identity and self that was developed by Dörnyei (Ortega, 2009).

Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System is an attempt to account for and synthesize all motivation research that has come before, and to also fill in some of the gaps that traditional motivation theory has left, such as incorporating ideas of identity and finding a model that can be used in a variety of contexts outside of North America. The L2 Motivational Self System, which will be discussed in detail in later sections, draws on identity theories from psychology in which learners are motivated by their desire to close the gap between their actual selves and their “ideal” selves. The ideal self is an image of what one would like to be in the future, and a learner chooses to partake in various activities, like language learning, in order to become that ideal image (Ortega, 2009). Looking at motivation in terms of ultimate attainment of a future ideal self has the possibility to account for the motivations of learners in contexts outside North America, especially in those areas where learners are studying English, or other languages, not to become part of, or approximate themselves to the culture of that
language, but rather to use the language for their own purposes in their own contexts (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). The L2 Motivational Self System is also an attempt to account for influences of learner identity on motivation.

In 2000, Norton proposed that a motivation theory needed to be developed that included identity as a factor. Her dissertation and subsequent article and book publications have helped to re-conceptualize investigations into the relationship between identity and motivation. In her book *Identity and Language Learning*, Norton (2000) details the results from her lengthy study of five immigrants living and working in Canada. As result, Norton has challenged traditional concepts of identity and has presented a new model of second language identity theory. In this model, she identifies four concepts that influence language acquisition: investment, communities of practice, imagined communities and the right to speak (Ortega, 2009). In the next section, I will briefly address the concept of investment, which is of particular interest to this proposed study.

**Investment**

Unsatisfied with the various conceptualizations of motivation provided by researchers such as Gardner (1985), Norton discusses the concept of investment as a more appropriate way to identify why people persist in language learning. It is her understanding that investment “signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it” (Norton, 2000, p. 10). To Norton, traditional views of motivation do not account for why individuals chose not to learn a language, or go through plateaus where they do not desire to continue with the language learning process. Investment in the
language means that the language learner enters into the study with the “understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources” (Norton-Peirce, 1995). Norton-Peirce (1995) describes symbolic resources as things like education, language and friendship and material resources as capital goods, money, and real estate. Thus, for Norton (2000), traditional motivation paradigms treat motivation as the property of the learner, or “a fixed personality trait” (p. 17). Investment, on the other hand, accounts for the presence of multiple desires and a complex social history (Norton, 2000). She states:

The notion [of investment] presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space. [...] a learner’s investment in the target language may be complex, contradictory and in a state of flux (Norton, 2000, p. 10-11).

While he maintains the use of the word motivation, Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System more closely relates to this idea of investment. For Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009), motivation and identity are socially constructed, constantly changing and often exist within one person as contradictions (one can be both motivated and un-motivated to learn a language depending on context, or one can see one’s self both as a part of or not a part of a community). This means that, in order to persist in language learning, learners must realize the potential rewards that exist for them in the future. This lead
him to the theories of possible selves that already existed in psychology research, and to the development of the Ideal L2 Self as a motivational guide for language learning.

The research on motivation shows a developing system that is attempting to cope with the many different reasons someone has for learning a language. However, once someone undertakes the language learning process, there are still many barriers that affect whether or not a person is successful, or what determines success for each individual. One of the primary barriers that many language learners encounter is anxiety, which I will address in the following sections.

**Anxiety**

Anxiety is traditionally defined as “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125). This variable, as discussed briefly above, has often been considered as a factor of motivation and also has also been historically grouped with other negative “affects” of language learning (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Ortega, 2009; Scovel, 1991). While many researchers agree that the anxiety variable is important to the study of SLA, it was not until the publication of Horwitz et al.’s (1986) article that anxiety itself began to be considered as an independent variable. Since then, anxiety research in SLA has cut its own path separate from that of motivation. However, it should be argued that anxiety and motivation still have an intertwined relationship that cannot be completely separated.

The idea of foreign language anxiety (FLA) as a “specific anxiety reaction” as opposed to an anxiety more related to personality type, was constructed by Horwitz et al. (1986). This implies that studying a foreign language may cause anxious reactions in
language learners that can affect performance even if the particular learner is not
normally an anxious person (Horwitz et al., 1986). Research on the topic of anxiety is
generally inconclusive because FLA has been shown to be both a motivating and
demotivating factor. Certain levels of anxiety can actually lead to better performance
because the learner is motivated to prove themselves and move past the anxiety.
However, extremely high levels of FLA can have a negative affect and cause the learner
to perform poorly (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Horwitz et al., 1986; Ortega, 2009). This
discrepancy makes it difficult to determine how to treat anxiety both in the classroom
and in naturalistic settings. The variation in anxiety data could also contribute to the
limited inclusion of the variable in more recent motivation theories.

The Relationship Between Motivation and Anxiety

As previously stated, motivation in language learning has been thoroughly
researched over the past several decades. It has been found to be strongly correlated
to success in language learning and is second in predicting success only to aptitude
(Gardner, 1985; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Ortega, 2009). In studies conducted by Gardner
and associates, FLA was also found to be strongly correlated with language learning
success (Gardner, 1985). Both of these factors, when considered in tandem, can help to
better our understanding of who will be more apt to use the language and use it well.

However, both motivation and anxiety are subject to changes over time. In their
2004 study, Gardner et al. tested a group of students learning French over the period of
an academic year in an attempt to determine if and to what extent the variables that
constitute the SE Model changed over time. They found that there was little change in
French use anxiety over time, but significant change in French class anxiety over the
year. There was also significant change in motivational intensity among learners. Additionally, Gardner, et al. (2004) found that there was little variation in motivation or anxiety across courses. In relation to grades, the researchers found that A students maintained their beginning levels of motivation (high) and anxiety (low); B students decreased in motivation and showed increased anxiety; and C-F students, who started out with low motivation and high anxiety showed further decreases in both. Finally, they also showed that anxiety was more likely to increase towards the end of the term, although motivation remained the same (Gardner et al., 2004).

The results found by Gardner et al. (2004) demonstrate an inverse relationship between motivation and anxiety. It appears that as motivation decreases, as in the case of the B-F students, anxiety increases. This could be attributed to the effect that poor grades have on the self-esteem, or self-confidence of the learner. The conflict and tension that arises from their perceived, or actual, failure in language learning results in an anxious reaction.

Nishitani and Matsuda (2011) demonstrate that failure, which results in anxiety, can be either beneficial or detrimental and that the affect is determined by the type of motivation the learner has. Using the model of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, they showed that “learners with high intrinsic motivation are more likely to recognize the benefits that can come from failure” (p. 438). These learners are then more likely to capitalize on that failure and use appropriate learning strategies in order to change and reach their ultimate language learning goals. Conversely, learners with high anxiety are less likely to overcome failure using learning strategies because they attribute their failure to their anxiety (Nishitani & Matsuda, 2011). These findings account for the
differences between facilitating and debilitating forms of anxiety (Scovel, 1991). Highly motivated learners are more likely to use the facilitating nature of FLA than the debilitating and vice versa.

While Gardner et al. (2004) were looking at the same type of French language classroom, Kim (2009) looked at the stability of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) and motivation across different types of classrooms. She analyzed the variations between a reading course and a conversation course of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Korea. Her findings reveal that there were significant differences in anxiety between the two courses with the conversation course yielding higher anxiety. However, there was no difference in motivation of students between the two courses. Kim’s (2009) findings are consistent with other researchers in that it has been shown that conversation classes and contexts where learners must perform with the language verbally result in higher instances of FLA than lower contact courses, such as reading (Ortega, 2009). This finding could indicate a problem in conversation courses that could arise with the learner’s willingness to communicate and the ultimate affect that may have on their linguistic gains.

MacIntyre (2007) discusses the convergence of motivation and anxiety into the phenomenon of willingness to communicate (WTC). When these two factors come together they result in the “critical decision” of whether or not the learner chooses to use the language (p. 567). He states that “an experienced learner who is unwilling to communicate might show both high motivation for learning and high anxiety about communicating” (p. 564). This state thus reduces the learners use of the language and interaction with other members who speak the target language. The variety of research
on the importance of input (Krashen, 1985) and output (Swain, 1985) in the cognitive tradition of SLA research and interaction (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) in the socio-cultural theory tradition demonstrate the importance of being willing to interact and communicate with other speakers.

Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety

Further importance of anxiety to learner motivation rests on the sources from which language anxiety can arise. According to Young (1991), foreign language anxiety (FLA) can be attributed to six factors: “1) personal and interpersonal anxieties; 2) learner beliefs about language learning; 3) instructor beliefs about language teaching; 4) instructor-learner interactions; 5) classroom procedures; and 6) language testing” (p. 427). Of these, personal and interpersonal anxieties are considered the most common source of FLA. This category includes competitiveness and self-esteem, or self-confidence, which has been cited by a number of researchers as an important contributor to anxiety and overall language proficiency (Gardner, 1985; Young, 1991). Young (1991) also states, “competitiveness can lead to anxiety when language learners compare themselves to others or to an idealized self-image” (p. 427). Congruently, low-self confidence can produce anxiety when the learner views his or herself as deficient, or unable to obtain the goal set-forth for them by others. Four of these factors also stress the importance of positive experiences in the L2 learning environment. As Gardner (1985) points out: “self-confidence develops as a result of positive experiences in the context of the second language and serves to motivate individuals to learn the language [which] seems at the present time to be the most meaningful explanation for the role played by situationally relevant anxiety measures in predicting achievement” (p.
All of these sources of anxiety have a strong relationship to overall motivation and sections to Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self-System, and will be discussed next.

**The L2 Motivational Self-System**

The third phase of motivation research, the process-oriented period, began in the 1990s with the research of Zoltán Dörnyei. His general discontent with the lack of flexibility provided by the idea of integrativeness to contexts outside of Canada and North America lead him to a series of studies that ultimately resulted in the proposal of the L2 Motivational Self System. In response to the criticisms put forth by Norton (Peirce) (1995, 2000), this system attempts to account for the various ups and downs in motivation over time, to integrate previous motivation research into one motivational theory, and to add in ideas of identity and self that were emerging in psychological studies of motivation (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei, 2009).

**Possible Selves**

Dörnyei’s (2005) concept of the Ideal L2 Self relies heavily on the work of Markus and Nurius (1986). According to these authors, while the notion of self-concept and its importance for regulating behavior has been readily explored, the notion of possible selves has remained relatively untouched. In their article, Markus and Nurius describe the idea of the possible self and its potential to motivate and regulate behavior as it pertains to the future. The possible self is comprised of both past selves and future selves. They can be positive representations, who we would like to become in the future, or negative, who we are afraid of becoming in the future. They are both different from and dependent on who we currently are or have been (Markus & Nurius, 1986).
As identities possible selves are both personalized and social at the same time. Markus and Nurius (1986) state:

Many of these possible selves are the direct result of previous social comparisons in which the individual's own thoughts, feelings, characteristics, and behaviors have been contrasted to those of salient others. What others are now, I could become. An individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular sociocultural and historical context and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences. (p. 942)

Just as Norton (2000) suggests, identity, whether it is present, past, or future, is dependent on social construction, and the extent to which one can formulate a possible self is constrained by those around him or her and his or her own personal history. Constraining identity in this way can actually help in conceptualizing the possible self, because this allows the individual to know what is possible for them and is based both on their history and societal dictates. Knowing what is possible for that individual helps to frame him or her to frame their behavior and motivates them towards a particular goal (Markus and Nurius, 1986).

When constructing the L2 self, as I will discuss later, the learner needs to understand what is possible for him or her and why they want to invest their time in the pursuit of language acquisition (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009). The learner also needs to have a clear picture of this vision in order to be able to act upon it. Virtual worlds off us
this chance to help the L2 learner to construct their identity, give it a physical representation and allow them to experiment with that identity in a safe environment (Ushioda, 2011). During this process, the learner can construct and reconstruct their L2 identity as needed based on their experiences and communications with other target language interlocutors. It is through this process that learners can deal with feelings of anxiety caused by the tensions of identity reconstruction, which will hopefully result in increased motivation, or willingness to invest in language learning.

**Components of the L2 Motivational Self System**

The L2 Motivational Self System is comprised of three core components: the “Ideal L2 Self,” the “Ought-to L2 Self,” and the “L2 Learning Experience” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 105-106; Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). Each of these will be discussed briefly in the following sections.

**The ideal L2 self.** According to Dörnyei, the Ideal L2 Self refers to the part of a person’s ideal-self image that desires to speak another language. The ideal self, in psychology research, references the “representation of the attributes that one would ideally like to possess” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 13). According to the theory, the ideal self offers a powerful motivational tool because it because of the learner’s natural desire “to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). The self system acts as a mental guide that helps the learner take the appropriate steps to close the gap and become closer to their ideal self. In language learning, if speaking another language is part of the learner’s ideal self, then they will be motivated to learn the language in order to fulfill the image of their ideal self (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei, 2009).
In relation to other theories of motivation, Dörnyei suggests that the Ideal L2 Self incorporates the ideas of integrativeness and intrinsic motivation. The Ideal L2 Self refers to the internal need to achieve our goals and ultimately become our ideal self, this is similar to intrinsic motivation because it represents the self initiated guide that drives the learner to learn a language. The Ideal L2 Self is also comprised of the learner’s attitudes towards the culture and language, his or her desire to learn the language for instrumental reasons (e.g. job, travel), and his or her desire to communicate with other speakers of the language, all of these traditionally conceptualized by Gardner (1985) in the SE Model.

The Ideal L2 Self is also incorporates Norton’s idea of imagined communities, “communities [of practice] that exist at present only in the imagination, and which learners forge on the basis of their past memberships and life history as well as on the projections they make for a better future” (Ortega, 2009, p. 242). These imagined communities, as we saw in Chapter 1 in the case of Alice, are an important part of how the language learner imagines him or herself interacting within the target language community. In order to harness the motivating power of the possible self, one must have the ability to imagine oneself in a given situation with certain talents or abilities (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Dörnyei, 2009)

**The ought-to L2 self.** The Ought-to L2 Self, states Dörnyei (2009), “concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes” (italics in original, p. 29). This construct contains the ideas of instrumental motivations such as having to learn a language for school, societal expectations of being a bilingual speaker, and other extrinsic motivations, as analyzed
during the cognitive-situated period of motivation research (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei, 2009). The Ought-to L2 Self embodies both positive (what one should become) and negative (what one is afraid of becoming) external factors that can lead to motivation (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei, 2009).

**The L2 learning experience.** This construct deals directly with the motivational qualities of the L2 learning environment, whether that be a classroom, online, study abroad, or residence in a community that uses the target language. Previous research by Gardner and associates as well as a number of other researchers has demonstrated the specific impact that the learning environment can have on language learning (Dörnyei, 2005). The L2 Learning Experience includes factors proposed by previous research such as attitudes towards the classroom or the teacher (Gardner, 1985) and the positive and negative experiences the learner has in previous language learning.

**The Motivating Nature of the L2 Self System**

According to Dörnyei (2009), there must be harmony between the three components in order for them to provide a motivating force. It is in the imbalance and disharmony between these factors that can cause demotivation and anxiety. As was set forth by Young (1991), there are a variety of factors that can attribute to anxiety: low self-esteem, competitiveness, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language testing. These factors fit nicely into the L2 Motivational Self System. Additionally, Young (1991) states that “competitiveness can lead to anxiety when language learners compare themselves to others or to an idealized self-image” (p. 427). According to Dörnyei (2009), the Ideal L2 Self must be perceived as plausible in order
to be motivating. Therefore, if a learner is comparing themselves to an ideal image that is not plausible for them, the result could be anxiety inducing. The second factor, learner beliefs about language, attributes to the formation of the Ideal L2 Self, and the final four factors relate to the learning environment. Tension between these factors and the Ideal L2 Self image of the learner can ultimately lead to anxiety and decreased motivation.

The idea of tension between the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience has been shown in other empirical studies. Nishitani & Matsuda (2011) discovered that learners with low motivation, or as Dörnyei would put it, learners with un-elaborate or non-vivid images of their ideal selves, were unable to see the value in anxiety. This led to lower self-esteem and ultimately decreased motivation. Learners were consequently unable to use learning strategies appropriately in order to obtain their goals. Spielman and Radnofsky (2001) and Coryell and Clark (2009) revealed that tension that arose between learner goals (Ideal L2 Self) and program goals (the L2 Learning Environment) created anxiety. They noted that when classroom objectives did not align with the learner’s perceptions of their future selves, students reported feeling anxious and felt demotivating effects.

Identity

Identity research in the field of psychology has enjoyed a long, and thoroughly examined history. Since the publication of Goffman’s (1959) book, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, theories have been developed about the role of self and identity as the relate to most areas in psychology (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Although the entrance of identity research into the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and applied linguistics only gained full recognition about 18 years ago, research in this field
has undergone significant development (Ortega, 2009). In this section, I will briefly discuss the history of identity research including the sociopsychological, interactional socioclinguistic, and poststructuralist periods (Block, 2007) in order to lay the foundation for a discussion of identity as it relates to the L2 Motivational Self System.

**The sociopsychological period of identity research.** Like research on motivation, theories of identity and language learning have gone through a number of stages. The first stage, the sociopsychological period, took a similar approach to that of motivation research. During this time, identity research focused primarily on the theory of acculturation and assumed a one-to-one relationship between language and ethnic identity. Based on this tradition, language learning occurred when “in-group identification is weak, in-group vitality low, in-group boundaries open, and identification with other groups strong” (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 4). Stated simply, if language learners did not identify themselves with their current group, they were more likely to learn a language in order to assimilate to another group. This relatively simple view of the interaction between language and identity and parallels the ideas of integrative motivation of Gardner (1985), whereby language learners are motivated by their desire to integrate and become part of another culture.

Additionally, this line of inquiry assumes a monolingual and monocultural bias that is prevalent in much of the early research on language acquisition. This bias obscures differences that have been found within cultural groups, as well as the variety of other identities to which language can be related (i.e. professional). Additionally, as in motivation research, the sociopsychological paradigm does not address identity of language learners who do not identify with the target culture, yet are proficient users of
that language, as is the case with many Iranian learners of English (Hoffman, 1989; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009).

**The interactional sociolinguistic period.** Identity research then transitioned to an interactional sociolinguistic paradigm that “views social identities as fluid and constructed in linguistic and social interaction” (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 8). In this paradigm, researchers such as Myers-Scotton (1998), addressed negotiations of identity through the use of code switching. Through linguistic choices, interlocutors position themselves and how they wish to be perceived, thus creating their identity with each interaction. However, this too presents a relationship between identity and language that may be over-simplified. According to Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), many studies have challenged the link between code switching and identity, stating that language choice is not always a reflection of the identity one wishes to portray, and, therefore, language choice cannot be predicted by an analysis of the speech situation.

**The poststructuralist period.** Similarly to the path of motivation research, current researchers have acknowledged that the relationship between identity and language learning is much more complex than the desire to assimilate to another culture or language choice. The poststructuralist frame allows current research to move beyond “unchanging, universal laws of human behavior and social phenomena to more nuanced, multileveled, and, ultimately, complicated framings of the world around us” (Block, 2007, p. 864). This paradigm allows us to account for the multiplicity and fluidity of identities as they are continually constructed and reconstructed as individuals move in and out of psychological and physical borders (Block, 2007).
As Block notes, as people cross these borders, identities are repeatedly negotiated and the “ensuing and ongoing struggle” does not result in an addition of the new to the old, or a 50/50 split, but rather the past and present identities merge and alter one-another and create something new (Block, 2007, p. 864). This concept exemplifies current definitions of identity, where identity is understood as socially constructed and situated, and references “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2000, p. 5).

In the following sections, I will address how internal struggles with language learning effect anxiety and motivation through the lens of the L2 Motivational Self System. I will also take another look at integrativeness and a study conducted by Taguchi et al. (2009) that looks at motivations of language learners who study a language for reasons other than to integrate into the target culture. This will help to create the link between identity research and how it is being conceptualized for this study.

**Internal Struggles in Language Learning**

Out of the research in identity has come a wide gambit of topics, ideas and frameworks that have influenced SLA research. Many of these, however, fall outside the scope of this research. I acknowledge the contribution of this work to this study, especially in Norton’s (2000) call for motivation research to include facets of identity that lead Dörnyei to develop the L2 Motivational Self System. This section continues with a discussion of Kinginger’s (2004) case study of Alice and highlights how language
learners struggle internally with language learning and how that creates anxiety that can affect their motivation.

**Alice.** From identity research, the story of Alice that I presented in Chapter 1 can really help to convey the power of future-self identity, and the need for more informal settings for language instruction. In this study, the author demonstrated how the individual goals, dreams and desires of this woman affected her language learning outcomes. Throughout her journey, she encountered conflict between her perceptions of what language learning meant to her and what she wanted to achieve and the realities of that journey; this caused anxiety that temporarily derailed her language-learning experience. However, Alice was able to overcome many of the obstacles she faced and learned the language in a way that suited her individual needs (Kinginger, 2004). In this section, I continue the discussion of this study through the lens of the L2 Motivational Self System in order to show how Dörnyei has integrated identity into measures of motivation and how identity relates to this study.

As I outlined in Chapter 1, Alice was an American woman learning French. She studied French academically and then eventually went to live and study in France (Kinginger, 2004). Alice’s story is a powerful representation of how the L2 Self can be an important motivating factor. Her desire to become a teacher, to learn French to improve herself as a way to get out of her desperate family and life situation and improve her status were so strong that this image kept her learning even in the face of suicide. Although she had to adjust how she learned, where she learned and what she learned, she was able to do so because she was so invested in learning the language. As
Dörnyei (2009) mentions, the ability to create a strong, vivid, future-self image is an important part of motivation.

However, the confrontation between the goals and the realities, such as the difficulties encountered by Alice (e.g. age difference between herself and other Americans, financial difficulties, difficulties with academia, perceptions of French culture) manifested themselves as anxious reactions towards the language-learning situation. Alice’s anxiety reached such a high level that she contemplated suicide. She struggled so much with the differences of the American and French university systems that she eventually gave up the pursuit of formal French training and opted for getting as much speaking practice as she could. As she stated, “A little bored and a teeny tiny bit depressed. Everyone has gone off to Paris to have fun. I’m staying here because I don’t have the money to fly off and vacation. I have to keep reminding myself that I’m not like the other. This is a real opportunity for me […] It’s so important for me to concentrate on the reason I came here: to Study French” (italics in the original, Kinginger, 2004, p. 233). Therefore, in order to compensate for her difficulties, she began to focus on other opportunities for learning; she read books of her own choosing, she spoke with French friends, she wrote her journals, emails and letters in French, totally engrossing herself in social networks.

This is not an uncommon situation, even outside of the immersion context. According to Coryell & Clark (2009), it is common for both heritage and non-heritage learners of foreign languages to experience this kind of anxiety and displeasure with the academic setting. Often the focus of the classroom is on form as opposed to use of the language and the teaching cannot, for a number of reasons, adapt to every individual
student the way they need. Students develop an anxiety in the language-learning situation because they feel inadequate or do not feel that the academic setting addresses their reasons for learning a language (e.g. communicating with family). Like Alice, a frustration grows with the focus on “one-right-way” to speak a language and the perfection needed to perform in the classroom.

The change Alice made by leaving the academic setting and focusing on her needs to communicate with others in a more informal setting changed her language-learning experience. As she wrote in one of her journal entries, “I would sit around with all my fellow students and we would sit around with our coffee and cigarettes and we’d have these long philosophical conversations using big long French words and I was so French” (italics and bold in the original, Kinginger, 2004, p. 236). The more informal settings of dinner parties and bars allowed her to concentrate on her need for verbal practice and fluency that was part of her future-self image.

It is in this context that virtual worlds can play a significant role in language learning. The casual, informal and social setting of the virtual world can allow the student to adapt the language learning experience to their needs. When used in conjunction with formal classes, students can create opportunities to practice their linguistic skills and form their identities by addressing the reasons for their linguistic journey. Conversations in virtual worlds, which are as real as they are in real life, allow students to explore their own interests and make friends with real people who speak their target language. The avatar acting as their face in the virtual world provides a face-saving device that allows language learners to experiment with who they are, without fear of rejections, such as those experienced by Alice.
In the L2 Motivational Self System, Dörnyei (2009) discusses the idea of tension and how that is created by the Ideal-Self image distancing itself from the current self or the language-learning environment. When any of the three parts of the Motivational Self System move too far apart or are no longer in harmony, tension is created. This tension brings about anxiety. In the case of Alice, her language-learning environment had distanced itself from her language learning goals; she wanted more experience with authentic communication, and keeping herself in an academic setting with little opportunities for that communication created anxiety. The same is true in the study conducted by Coryell and Clark (2009). The students of this study also found that the language-learning environment was too far removed from their personal objectives, and therefore, they experienced anxiety when working on required assignments. However, as we can see in the case of Alice, a strong future-self image can help to maintain focus, allowing the learner to adapt and change the other components (i.e. the Ought-to Self and the L2 Learning Environment) in order to regain balance and overcome this tension.

The development of the L2 Motivational Self System helps to better understand, and measure, how a students personal goals and identity can be used to create the necessary conditions for motivation. By creating a learning environment that values these concepts teachers can sustain and increase the motivation necessary to achieve linguistically, as well as minimize anxieties that may arise from too great a distance between each variable. In order to do this, however, the teacher must also consider other reasons students may have for learning a language.
Non-integrative Motivations for Language Learning

One of the primary variables that has been studied in motivation has been integrativeness, the students’ desire to integrate and become part of the target language culture (Gardner, 1985). This idea, however, has been challenged in recent research primarily because there are a number of cultures (i.e. Japan, China, Iran) where people are learning languages without a strong desire to integrate with cultures that speak the target language (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Gass & Selinker, 2000; Norton, 2000; Ortega, 2009; Ryan, 2009; Taguchi et al., 2009). Motivation is multifaceted and can be promoted by more than just the desire to integrate (Macintyre, Mackinnon & Clément, 2009).

In several recent studies using the L2 Motivational Self System (see Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), researchers have found that the Ideal L2 Self is a stronger predictor of motivation than integrativeness alone (see Taguchi, et al., 2009 & Ryan, 2009). This is due to the fact that language learners in these contexts often are learning the target language, usually English, in order to become more distinguished members of their own societies than to move to or interact with English speaking cultures (Ryan, 2009).

This is especially true with English developing around the world as a lingua franca. As Ryan 2009 points out, “the static characterization of language communities presented by Gardner's socio-educational model appears incompatible with the dynamic, fluid reality of the global English-speaking community” (p. 124). There are many students learning English around the world that will never come into contact with others from an English-speaking culture (i.e. the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Australia), yet there is a need to learn the language for other reasons.
Taguchi et al. (2009) found that the constructs of the L2 Motivational Self System helped to better explain language learner motivations significantly better than Gardner's (1985) original model. Similarly, Ryan (2009) found that the Idea L2 Self was more inclusive of the variety of motivations that students may have for learning a language. The motivations of the students in these two studies were built around culturally situated identities created by both internal and external factors.

As shown here, even though this research will not be focusing specifically on identity, there are aspects of this research that will come into play. The participants will be asked to describe their Ideal L2 Selves, how they envision language relating to that self and then to create a virtual identity that will hopefully help them to maintain this vision. Identity research in SLA shows us the importance of a strong future-self identity and how teachers and students alike need to work to create harmony between the three L2 Motivational Self System variables: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to Self, and the L2 Learning Environment. With this in mind, this discussion highlights VWs, VW identities and how VWs have already been used in SLA research.

**Virtual Worlds (VWs)**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, VWs have already been used in a wide variety of educational contexts and have been prevalent in the field for many years. According to Warburton (2009), VWs have existed in some form since the early 1980s and have since developed into the variety of platforms we know today. There are a number of platforms that can be considered a VW, such as *Club Penguin*, *Disney’s Toontown*, *Whyville*, *Habbo Hotel*, *The Manor*, *Active Worlds*, *Cybertown* and *Second Life* (for a more complete list see Book, 2006). In its most basic form a VW is a place that “provides an
experience set within a technological environment that gives the user a strong sense of being there.

Since the 80s, virtual worlds have developed into what is now technically referred to as multi-user virtual environments (MUVEs) and all, whether 2D or 3D consist the same basic features: there is a common space where users can interact, each user is represented by an avatar, interactions occur in real time, similarities to real-world such as topography, movement, laws of physics that make the user feel as if they are there, and activity persists even when the user is logged off (Warburton, 2009). As stated in Chapter 1, this research will be focusing on the 3D VW, Second Life (SL), which I will continue to discuss in the following sections.

**Second Life**

The many benefits of using SL over other VW platforms are many and have been already outlined in Chapter 1. However, two of the most important benefits deserving recognition here are the availability of the platform on all computer operating systems and the advanced avatar design features. Some of the other popular VWs that are used in education, such as OpenSim, are not available to users of Apple products; this makes it difficult to implement these platforms in a large scale at the university level. SL has also been highly researched in many fields in education, as well as psychology, mathematics, business and medicine. A quick search completed in a university library database returns over 150,000 hits for peer reviewed articles involving SL. However, while the body of research is increasing each year, there is still comparatively little research being conducted specifically on using SL in language learning or its effects on anxiety. The research in this area will be discussed later in this chapter. For now, I will
turn to a discussion on avatars, their creation in the SL and their links to identity and anxiety in order to demonstrate how students can use avatar creation in order to affect their real life selves.

**Avatars and How They Are Designed**

The avatar in a VW is the essence of that world. It is the vehicle by which a user interacts with other users, the environment and the platform. Avatars sit, walk, run, fly, dance, build, and provide facial and visual context cues during communications. They are the digital representation of the user within in the virtual space, and even sometimes outside of that space. In this section, I will discuss how avatars are created in SL, some key factors on avatars and identity that relate to this research, the Proteus effect and the brief findings about avatars and their link to anxiety.

In SL, avatars are designed through two primary methods: purchasing parts to put together the avatar and/or using the avatar design tool. When users create a SL account for the first time, they are asked to choose a starter avatar; this avatar will be their initial representation and they can then change and customize their avatar later. Upon entering the program, they can then choose to alter their avatar through purchasing body parts and clothes. One can purchase everything one needs including hair, eyes, skin color, body type, shirts, shoes, jackets and animation overrides. There

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3 Many VW users also use pictures of their avatars for other online social interactions in spaces like Twitter or Facebook. The avatar can often become someone’s online representation, not just the VW representation.

4 Purchase is the term used for items that are both free and cost money. The Linden (L) is the official currency of SL and the value is tied to the U.S. dollar ($1=250L).

5 Animation overrides (AO) cause an avatar to move in ways that are different from the default settings. They change how the avatars walk, run, jump, fly, dance, and interact.
is an extensive avatar customization market in SL that allows complete freedom to make the avatar whatever and whomever the user wants.

Another way to customize an avatar is by using the avatar creation tool available on the SL viewer. This tool allows the user to manipulate each aspect of the avatars body giving the user even more precise control over the dimensions of the skin color, head, neck, chest, waist, hips, legs, arms, feet, hands, eyes, nose, ears and mouth. The majority of SL users use some combination of both methods to create their avatar. The identities created through these methods are often both combinations of the users real-world identity and the specific roles they want to play within the virtual world itself.

Avatars and Identity

In Chapter 1, I discussed some of the general avatar creation trends in SL. Avatars are usually designed, although not always, in the likeness of the user, but somewhat enhanced. The user will incorporate RL features; some use more RL features than others, and then adapt the avatar to suit their social needs within the virtual world. For instance, a user that wishes to participate in a 1920s role play game would design an avatar that has key RL features he or she wishes to maintain, but is clothed in apparel from that era. He or she will maintain this persona in all spaces where he or she wishes to be associated with that identity (Martey & Consalvo, 2011; Messinger et al., 2008).

In designing my own avatar, I maintained my own identity through the use of hazel eye color and by using part of my RL name to create my SL name (Katherine to Katarina). As many other avatars in SL, my outward appearance, other than my eyes and name, changes on a regular basis depending on my purpose for using the space.
Even with this freedom, most users still look to design an avatar that is acceptable within their social circles in the VW environment (Martey & Consalvo, 2011).

*Figure 2. The Many Faces of Katarina Camino.*

The different representative avatars of Katarina Camino. My avatar was styled to meet the variety of roles that I play in SL, including, but not limited to, teacher, research, colleague, and friend.

While there is interesting research being conducted on the issues of identity and VWs, the majority of this research dealing with ideas of gender and sexual identity falls outside of the scope of this research (see Martey & Consalvo, Messinger et al., 2008). Three ideas that are important to this investigation are the avatar creation trends of transformation and metamorphosis (Parmentier & Rolland, 2009), the Proteus effect (Yee & Bailenson, 2007), and the affects of avatar presence on anxiety (Messinger et al., 2011).

**Transforming the RL Self**

Research on identity in VWs has brought to light four different ways a user can choose to represent his or herself in SL. Studied by Parmentier and Rolland (2009), a user may choose to use duplication, improvement, transformation or metamorphosis to create his or her VW identity. Duplication occurs when a user creates an avatar that is physically close to his or her RL self and reflects his or her personality. Improvement, identified as the most common phenomenon by Messinger et al. (2011), is when an "individual considers his or her avatar to be an extension of him or herself and only
transfers part of themselves, generally the most positive aspects” (Parmentier & Rolland, 2009, p. 50). The personality of this avatar is also close to the user’s RL personality. Transformation occurs when the user alters both the appearance and personality of the avatar to reject the RL identity. As these authors found, “A shy person is not shy in the virtual world. [...] An impulsive person will try to be more controlled. The virtual world allows users to push the boundaries of the behavioral and physical limits imposed by the real world. In this positioning type, the virtual world is used as a platform for self-invention, self-rebuilding or deeper personality exploration.” Metamorphosis means that the user creates both an avatar and online personality that is completely different from his or her RL self. The actions of the avatar are that of an “imaginary other” (Parmentier & Rolland, 2009, p. 50).

These final two, transformation and metamorphosis, are where the potential lies for VWs to affect behavior and will become relevant to this study. By using the avatar to transform the user, there is the potential for that use to create an identity that is more comfortable in the language-learning environment. A student who is not comfortable speaking in the classroom due to shyness or some other social reservations could transform his or her avatar into a character that does not have these problems, thus allowing themselves to explore more readily the TL. By so doing, students can affect change within themselves through a concept called the Proteus Effect, by which the actions of the user affect the avatar and then the actions of the avatar transfer to the user.
The Proteus Effect

An important concept that has been discovered in virtual research is known as the Proteus Effect.\textsuperscript{6} Discovered by Yee and Bailenson (2007), this concept represents the effect of a person’s actions in a VW and their real life actions. The authors found that people who interact in a VW are likely to integrate their avatars actions or feelings into their RL selves. Since the avatar is a full self-representation, not just an outward appearance it is highly likely that the avatar itself can affect the user's personality and how they behave both online and in RL.

As Messinger et al. (2011) and Martey and Consalvo (2011) found, people who are normally shy in RL blossom and become more extraverted in VWs, the reverse can be said as well. Those who act more extroverted in SL may adopt that extroversion into RL. Researchers in psychology have also found similar results. Yuen et al. (2013) conducted a study on the effects of using SL with people exhibiting social anxiety disorder (SAD). They found significant improvements in social anxiety symptoms, depression, disability and quality of life in 14 participants who spent time working in SL. Through the Proteus effect, these studies show that a once shy person who spends time acting extraverted in SL can then adopt that extroversion into their RL selves, thereby becoming more extraverted.

We can apply this to language learning and anxiety in the following manner: if a student exhibits high foreign language anxiety (FLA) in the classroom, after spending time in a VW working with the language and becoming more confident, they may then

\textsuperscript{6} Named for the Greek god Proteus, from which English has adapted the adjective protean meaning, “the ability to take on many different self-representations” (Yee & Bailenson, 2007, p. 271).
take that confidence and be able to apply it to their RL selves. This is a phenomenon that I have seen happen in my students during previous pilot studies. The students who fully integrate themselves into the SL community and use the system to explore the language to its fullest are also those who blossom in the classroom. They become less anxious and start to take more risks, ask more questions, and use and encourage others to use the language more (Wehner, 2013).

It is within these concepts that this study finds its root. How can the potential of VWs and avatars to affect change in the users be used to help lower FLA and increase anxiety? Given that there is little research on this topic, as I will discuss in the rest of this chapter, there is an important gap to fill in how VWs, avatars, anxiety, and motivation can be intertwined and used to help students through language learning.

**VWs, Anxiety, Motivation and Language Learning**

Relatively little empirical research has been conducted on the relationship between motivation, anxiety and virtual worlds. In fact, only one article by Wehner, Gump, and Downey (2011) has addressed these specific topics together. The majority of research on VWs and language learning has focused on student perceptions and attitudes towards using the platform, interaction patterns and communication strategies employed during interactions, and learning outcomes (Blasing, 2010; Deutschmann, Panichi, & Molka-Danielson, 2010; Jauregi, Canto, de Graaff, Koenraad, & Moonen, 2011; Peterson, 2005, 2006, 2010; Shih & Yang, 2008; Wang, Song, Ston, & Yan, 2009; Wehner et al., 2011; Zheng, Young, Brewer, & Wagner, 2009). Table 1 provides an overview of research that has been done on language learning and VWs to date and the findings of those studies. Based on the findings of these studies, researchers have
shown that students enjoy working in VW spaces, and are highly motivated to interact and continue use of the programs (Balcikanli, 2012; Blasing, 2010; Deutschmann et al., 2010; Jauregi et al., 2011; Liou, 2012; Peterson, 2005, 2006, 2010; Shih & Yang, 2008; Wang et al., 2009; Wang & Shao, 2012; Wehner et al., 2011; Zheng et al., 2009). There has been evidence of uptake of new forms of language and SL provides a lexically rich environment (Blasing, 2010, Milton et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2009; Zheng et al., 2012).

Interactions are spontaneous as they are in the real world and more collaborative tasks can be used and designed for the classroom (Deutschmann et al., 2010; Jauregi et al., 2011; Peterson, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010; Shih & Yang, 2008; Zheng et al., 2009).

Table 1. Overview of Virtual World Research in Language Learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Outcome</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th># of Studies</th>
<th>Study Names</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learner perceptions, attitudes,</td>
<td>Surveys, questionnaires</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Balcikanli, 2012; Blasing, 2010; Deutschmann et al., 2010; Jauregi et al., 2011; Liou, 2012; Peterson, 2005, 2006, 2010; Shih &amp; Yang, 2008; Wang et al., 2009; Wang &amp; Shao, 2012; Wehner et al., 2011; Zheng, 2009</td>
<td>Enjoyed the experience; wanted to use SL in course; overall positive attitude with some frustrations with technology; students were motivated; desire for continued use of programs; reduced anxiety; believed activities helped learn new vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Patterns</td>
<td>chat logs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Deutschmann et al., 2010; Jauregi et al., 2011; Peterson, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010; Shih &amp; Yang, 2008; Zheng, 2009</td>
<td>spontaneous interactions similar to real-world; learner centered; collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication strategies</td>
<td>chat logs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jauregi et al., 2011; Peterson, 2009, 2010</td>
<td>requests for and provision of assistance, continuers, off-task discussion, task-focused discussion, self- and other-initiated correction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on learning</td>
<td>pre/post oral test, chat logs, voice recordings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Blasing, 2010; Milton et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2009; Zheng, 2012</td>
<td>Some uptake of new forms as a result of interactions in SL; exposed to lexically rich environment that increased use and fluency; learners able to personalize language use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Like most forms of technology, VWs have great potential for language learning. These worlds, as advanced forms of synchronous environments, offer many of the affordances of other computer-assisted language learning (CALL) platforms. Chappelle (2009) states that CALL technologies have implications for a variety of different theoretical approaches to SLA, such as opportunities for interaction with speakers of the target language, for individualized learning, to analyze the evolution of learner identities in language use, for learning through practice, and an array of other benefits.

Several theoretical studies have looked at the value of virtual worlds and other CALL platforms on motivation and anxiety (Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008; Thorne, Black & Sykes, 2009; Ushioda, 2011). These studies suggest that due to the social nature of virtual spaces, the availability of both text and audio synchronized chat, and the use of avatars, virtual worlds can provide additional opportunities for language use and experimentation (Sykes et al., 2008; Thorne et al., 2009). Ema Ushioda, a colleague of Dörnyei and proponent of the L2 Self System, points out that the use of avatars has the possibility of allowing language learners the chance to experiment with “new and alternative identities and modes of self-presentation (e.g. through bots or avatars in virtual worlds such as Second Life)” and that these “offer interesting possibilities for learning and communicating in the L2 in ways that are creative, individual and exploratory, yet without posing a threat to students' real-world identities and private selves” (Ushioda, 2011, p. 207). Such experimentation could ultimately lead to lowered anxiety from the reduced threat to real-world identities (Pfeil, Ang, & Zaphiris, 2009; Ushioda, 2011) and increased motivation by providing better visualization of the L2 self (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).
Some support for these theories can be found in research that has been done on other forms of synchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC). In regards to motivation, Jauregi et al. (2012) conducted a study on interactions between native and non-native speakers of Dutch through video-web communication. They wanted to see if oral interactions with native speakers had an impact on the motivation of foreign language learners. Their study showed that video conferencing (VC) had a positive impact on a variety of aspects of motivation including: learning goals, linguistic self-confidence and language anxiety. There was also no negative affect of VC on the motivation of the students in their study. They also noted that part of the effects on “perceived competence and anxiety reduction could also be due to the native speaker speech partners applying motivational strategies [italics in the original]” (Jauregi et al., 2012, p. 12). The authors reported a number of strategies were used by native speakers which helped to “establish and maintain a pleasant and supportive atmosphere” thereby helping the learner to feel more at ease, reducing anxiety and increasing motivation by increasing perceived competence and by extension self-esteem (Jauregi et al., 2012, p. 12-13). This study shows that incorporating interactions with other speakers of the target language through synchronous CMC environments can have a positive effect on motivation, especially with lower level language learners.

Another note worthy study on the use of technology in foreign language education, this time focusing on distance learning and anxiety, was conducted by Coryell and Clark in 2009. They looked at self-identified anxious learners that were enrolled in online Spanish courses and whether or not and to what extent their anxiety was impacted by “the lack of face-to-face (F2F) and other synchronous learning
interactions” (Coryell & Clark, 2009, p. 483). This qualitative study found that the learner’s anxiety was not caused by or lessened by the use of technology or the lack of face-to-face, but actually related to the types of activities in which they were involved and how they were assessed in learning the language. They looked at both heritage language learners and non-heritage language learners and found that the stress of the Spanish course on performing in only one “correct” manner conflicted with how they personally wanted to be able to use the language. This tension was the cause of the anxiety in the learners, and it was not mediated by the use of technology (Coryell & Clark, 2009). This suggests that in order to lessen anxiety in language learners, it is not a matter of the technology that is being used, but rather how it is used and to what extent its use aligns with the desired outcomes of the course and the learner.

There has been only one study so far that attempted to examine the relationship between motivation, virtual worlds and language learning. This study, conducted by Wehner et al. (2011), examined the motivation of two courses of second semester Spanish at the university level. Using Gardner’s AMTB, they wanted to see if there was a difference in the motivations between a group that used Second Life as part of their Spanish curriculum and a group that did not. While they did not view any statistically significant differences, the general trend in motivations showed that the group that used Second Life was generally more motivated than the group that did not use Second Life. Of particular interest to the researchers was the anxiety variable. The results from the AMTB showed that levels of anxiety between the two groups differed more than any of the other variables. While this was an exploratory study with a relatively small
population sample, the study does show some interesting trends in the possibilities of using virtual worlds to enhance motivation and lower anxiety (Wehner et al., 2011).

Other research on the use of technology in language learning has returned more ambiguous results when it comes to anxiety. In a study on internet anxiety and foreign language learners, Aydin (2011) discussed that just using the internet can be anxiety causing activity, however, his findings showed that, in his sample, the internet itself was not anxiety causing; it was the activity, or what the learner was expected to do with the internet that could cause anxiety. The technological issues involved with using platforms like Second Life could possibly induce anxious reactions or frustrations that lead to demotivation, also the nature of one-to-one voice communication could also cause anxiety, just as it would in face-to-face communications (Deutschmann et al., 2009; Dickey, 2005; Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath, & Trivedi, 2009; Jauregi et al., 2011; Oliver & Carr, 2009; Peterson, 2006, 2009, 2010; Pfeil et al., 2009).

**Implications**

So how can educators use these virtual spaces to create more motivating spaces? Dörnyei (2009) identifies six conditions that need to be in place to maximize the motivational qualities of the L2 Motivational Self System: a vivid and plausible future self image, harmony between the ideal and ought-to selves, activation of the self image and a plan for approximating the Ideal L2 Self and a fear of what might happen if the learner does not succeed. I argue that the affordances of VWs can allow educators to create spaces that could optimize these conditions thereby motivating students and decreasing anxiety.
The Vivid Future Self Image

Dörnyei (2009) asserts that in order for the future self image to be motivating it must “elaborate and vivid” (p. 18). In general the more vivid the image the more motivating it will be because learners will be able to see their goals more clearly. If a learner’s ideal self does not include the need to learn a language then they are unlikely to be very successful when asked to do so. Development of a clear L2 Ideal Self is important in order to sustain language-learning motivation (Dörnyei, 2009). One of the advantages of a virtual world is that learners create avatars, a three-dimensional representation of the self in a virtual space. I agree with Ushioda (2011) who argues that avatars can allow users to experiment with a variety of identities without causing detriment to the actual person. The avatar could serve as a representation of the Ideal L2 Self, a picture of what the learner would like to be as a user of the language.

Plausibility

The possible self can only be motivating if the learner sees that becoming that image is possible. If the learner does not think that their Ideal L2 Self image is obtainable then they will be less likely to attain the characteristics of that image. This unattainability of the Ideal L2 Self could also be anxiety inducing because comparing oneself to an unrealistic ideal self-image could lead to low self-esteem and competitiveness, which are “significant sources of learner anxiety” (Young, 1991, p. 427). Again, creation of an avatar here could lower the feeling of anxiety because the act of creating a vivid L2 Self makes the image seem more plausible. In addition, interactions with native speakers can give the learner more self confidence as they
learn that there is not just “one right way” to use and communicate in a language (Coryell & Clark, 2009).

**Harmony Between the L2 motivational Self System Components**

Dörnyei (2009) discusses the importance of the ideal and ought-to selves being in harmony. If there is too much distance between the two the result is a “clash between a learner’s personal and social identity,” which can lead to demotivation. This clash, as shown by Coryell and Clark (2009) can also lead to anxiety. I would also argue, based on their findings, that this harmony must extend to the L2 Learning Experience as well. As Dewaele, Petrides, and Furnham (2008) also found, “purely classroom-based language instruction was found to be linked to higher levels of FLA [foreign language anxiety] compared to instruction that also involved extracurricular use of the language” (p. 912). Using VWs to merge classroom learning with authentic communication could help to close this gap and provide foreign language learners with additional use of the target language with the hopes that this practice would lead to improved self-confidence and lower anxiety.

**Activation**

Additionally, the Ideal L2 Self image needs to be activated, that is the learner needs to be continually reminded of their vision in order to maintain motivation. Regular use of the language in authentic conversation can keep the learner focused on their vision. Establishing a regular program of interaction, identity creation, and cultural investigation through virtual worlds could help to keep the vision of the Ideal L2 Self within the working memory of the learner (Dörnyei, 2009).
Procedural Strategies

It is within this construct that the L2 Learning Environment and the Ideal L2 Self need to merge. Dörnyei (2009) mentions that it is important for the L2 learning Environment to contain a goal setting component that will guide the learner along the path to their Ideal L2 Self. As seen in Coryell and Clark (2009), when course objectives and tasks do no take into account the goals of the individual student the conflict that arises causes anxiety. Any program, whether it is within a virtual world or not needs to take into account the personal goals of the students.

The Feared Self

Dörnyei (2009) suggests that a learner also needs a healthy fear of what could happen if he or she fails to reach their Ideal L2 Self image. This fear can be equated with research on anxiety that shows that a small amount of anxiety can actually be motivating (Horwitz, 2010; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991). As noted by Nishitani & Matsuda (2011), learners with lower amounts of anxiety and higher internal motivation were able to see the benefits of failure and use appropriate learning strategies to correct this failure. In the VW, learners would have the opportunity to interact with other speakers of the target language, which can result in both positive and negative experiences. The negative experiences that occur can provide a reminder of the “limitations of not knowing languages as well as recurrently priming the learners’ Ought-to L2 Self by highlighting the duties and obligations the learners have committed themselves to” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 38).

In this research, I hope to guide learners through the creation of their L2 Motivational Self System by addressing the items above in the application of a program
using the virtual world Second Life. As discussed, VWs have the possibility to help in
the development of the Ideal L2 Self. Using the research questions proposed above, it
is my intention to investigate to what extent, if at all, creation and use of avatars in
authentic interactions conducted in SL can impact the motivation and foreign language
learning anxiety of students in a Spanish as a foreign language program.

**Other Implications of VWs for Motivation and Anxiety**

A core question for these topics has been how do language teachers promote
and help students maintain motivation and lower the debilitating effects of anxiety
(Dörnyei, 2005; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Gardner, 1985; Ortega, 2009; Scovel, 1991;
Young, 1991)? The answer could be the creation of educational programs and L2
experiences that promote individualized and user-controlled learning experiences.
Research into virtual worlds, such as Second Life, can be valuable in this way. Virtual
worlds provide the opportunity for leaners to experiment and create vivid
representations of their Ideal L2 Selves, to engage in conversations with other target
language speakers freely, to control the learning experience to suit their particular
needs, and to interact more in the target language that could provide them with more
positive L2 learning experiences (Gardner, 1985; Ushioda, 2011).

In particular, the use of avatars in a virtual space may function as a useful tool to
help create the vision of the Ideal L2 Self. An avatar allows the user to experiment with
a wide variety of identities. These identities are already possessed by the student
mentally, but the ability to change an avatar in to any shape, size, or form gives the user
the chance to try on a number of identities without detriment to the actual person
(Dörnyei, 2009; Ushioda, 2011). Dörnyei stresses that it is important for the Ideal L2 Self
to be vivid and detailed. The more elaborate the image, the more impact it will have on motivating the learner (Dörnyei, 2009). Physically creating the image in cyberspace can help that process.

Another area in which virtual worlds could offer some benefits is in the mediation of anxieties caused by conflicts between the L2 Learning Experience and the Ideal L2 Self. As Coryell and Clark (2001) found, much of the tension and anxiety that arose for their learners resulted from a conflict between their personal goals for the L2 use and those of the course curriculum. As in many traditional classrooms, the Spanish learning environments in this study were largely based on grammar-translation methods and the idea that there is only “one right way” to speak the language (Coryell & Clark, 2001, p. 483). The online program that was in place in the study did nothing to bridge the gap between the perfectionism expected by the course curriculum and the general conversational use for which most participants were studying the language (Coryell & Clark, 2001). Implementing activities in a virtual world, or other online synchronous chat environments, could show students how the language is used in a variety of contexts and enforce the idea that there is not one right way to use a language. When specifically related to the L2 Motivational Self System, providing these experiences could reinforce their learner’s Ideal L2 Self and reduce the tension between the three system components. The reduction of tension in this way could then lead to reduced anxiety on the part of the learner.

The L2 Motivational Self System provides a unique way of using the learner’s identities in order to help motivate them through the language learning process. By helping the learner to enhance the vision of their Ideal L2 Self, sustaining that vision
through positive learning experiences that increase their self-esteem, and helping to “operationalize the vision” through creating an action plan, we can keep the students motivated; and, as research has shown, highly motivated and invested individuals are more successful in language learning (Dörnyei 2005, 2009; Gardner, 1985; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Norton, 2000; Ortega, 2009).

Summary

This chapter began with a history of motivation and anxiety research. Research on virtual worlds was presented and discussed in relation to how this platform could be used in the language-learning environment. How activity in VWs can affect change in the real life personalities of the user was demonstrated by covering the concepts of transformation of identity and the Proteus Effect. Finally, I discussed Dörnyei’s (2009) concept of the L2 Motivational Self System and how virtual worlds could be used in conjunction with this system to increase learner motivation and lower foreign language anxiety. In Chapter 3, I identify the research project methods, contexts, and procedures that I propose to undertake to explore my guiding questions.
CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As we can see from Chapters 1 and 2, the literature on virtual worlds, motivation, and anxiety suggests that using avatars has the potential to lower anxiety because it provides a mask or face-saving device that could help students feel less anxious and by extension improve motivation (Deutschmann, Panichi, & Molka-Danielsen, 2009; Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath, & Trivedi, 2009; Jauregi, Canto, de Graaff, Koenraad, & Moonen, 2011; Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008; Thorne, Black, & Sykes, 2009; Ushioda, 2011; Wehner, Gump, & Downey, 2011). In this study, I investigated how, if at all, LLs use the avatar to create a language identity (L2-Self) and how the participants feel that communicating through an avatar affects their anxiety and motivation in using a foreign language.

In this study the following questions guided my research:

1. In what ways do Spanish language learners use the avatar personalization features to create a representation of their Ideal L2-Self?
2. In what ways, if any, does using an avatar in communications with other speakers of Spanish affect a Spanish language learner’s (a) anxiety and (b) motivation?
3. What other factors contribute to the Spanish language learner’s possible changes in (a) anxiety and (b) motivation?
In this chapter, I detail the methodology for this study that allowed me to investigate the above questions. I address the following research components: the (a) research approach, (b) research setting: including institutional, virtual world, and course settings, (c) the participants, (d) data collection methods, (e) data analysis methods, (f) data quality and credibility, and finally, (g) the role of the researcher.

In my discussion on research approach, I outline the qualitative methods that were used during data collection as well as the formation of the multiple case study approach. The section on research setting describes the university demographics of the research site, the reason for the selection of SL as the VW platform, and provides a detailed description of the 9-week, VW program that has been developed for the participants. This discussion includes a description of the virtual setting, the WLE Virtual World Platform, and the activities and course requirements of the SL Lab that have been designed for this project. I then continue with a discussion of the Spanish language learner population where I found my participants.

This chapter also includes detailed descriptions of the data collection methods I used and how they relate to each of the proposed research questions. I also discuss how these methods attribute to credibility and reliability of this research project. Then, I describe how I analyzed the different data sources and triangulated the data to uphold the validity of the research process. Finally, I address my philosophical beliefs about the research process, and my role as a researcher and using myself as an instrument and participant in the phenomenon under study.
Research Approach

In this research study, I conducted a qualitative inquiry into the relationship between virtual worlds and the motivation and anxiety of two Spanish language learners (SLLs). Furthermore, a multiple case study approach was appropriate to gain a better understanding of how creating and using avatars impact student anxiety and motivation (Stake, 2006). Stake (2006) states that a multiple case study starts with a “quintain” or “an object or phenomenon or condition to be studied” (p. 6). While Stake (2006) generally refers to using at least 4 cases to make a quintain, Duff (2008) states “the approach taken by many researchers in applied linguistics case study research is to select two to six cases for in depth analysis.” (p 124) In this study, the “quintain” was the phenomenon of avatar-based communication in a 3D virtual world. In order to get a better understanding of this phenomenon and its impact on Spanish language learners, I looked at two separate cases, in depth. Studying the similarities and differences between the cases helps create a better understanding of the “quintain,” and then allowed me to “gain a general picture” of the phenomenon (Stake, 2006, p. 7). This approach illuminated the particularities of the virtual world environment that addressed my specific research questions for this study, and allowed me to discuss implications for the implementation of avatar-based communication in the language classroom.

This multiple case study was also part of a formative evaluation research paradigm that will “serve the purpose of improving a specific program” (Patton, 2002). The information from this study helps to better our understanding of how virtual worlds can be used in a language-learning environment. It can also be used to increase our knowledge of effective practices (Patton, 2002). Knowing how avatar-mediated
communication can impact language learners, either positively or negatively, can help us improve programs that may use this technology. This study addresses virtual world programs at the university level, specifically during a second-semester, beginning-level Spanish course.

**Research Setting**

In this section I define the setting for the research investigation. The settings included the real-world setting, the university, the virtual setting, SL, and the virtual course setting. In the following sections, I describe these settings as well as discuss the design and development of the SL course design in which the participants took part.

**The University**

In this study, I asked for participation from the second semester of beginning Spanish at Slate University. Slate University is located in the Midwestern United States and serves over 18,000 students in a small metropolitan area; approximately 1,700 of those students are from underrepresented populations, including African American, Latino, Asian American, American Indian and LGBT. The international population includes around 800 students each year from 90 different countries.

Although taking a language is not a formal requirement for any degree at Slate, other than a language major or minor, many students choose to take a language. Spanish is the most commonly chosen language. Beginning Spanish levels 1 and 2 have the highest enrollment of any of the language courses and are primarily taught by teaching assistants working on their Master’s degrees in Spanish. Students who are successful in Beginning Spanish 1 and 2 often further their studies in more advanced classes, and about 5% become Spanish major or minors.
The current classroom setting in Spanish courses at this university is based in the communicative approach to language teaching. The amount of Spanish used in the classroom does vary depending on teacher, but the primary textbook and syllabus are task-based and promote use of language. The bi-weekly tests used by the instructors focus on grammar structures and listening and comprehension (see Appendix A, B & C for examples from the textbook, test bank, and online exercises). One of the primary reasons for the development of a program using SL was to supplement this method and provide students the chance to communicate using the TL. The SL program setting and the SL course will be described in the following sections.

Second Life
In order to facilitate authentic communication, the participants partook in a 9-week program using Second Life (SL). SL is a three-dimensional, online environment where users design an avatar and interact with virtual objects and other users. SL was chosen for this project because of the availability of the platform to both Apple and Microsoft operating systems, the number of residents (30,826,829 registered residents as of 9/8/2012; Shepherd, 2012), and the number of regions that have been built where students can find a variety of activities (28,949 regions as of 9/9/2012; Shepherd, 2012). The scale of this virtual world makes it easy to encounter people from all over the world and participate in activities with them that will help facilitate conversation, just as in real life.

While most of the spaces in which students interacted have already been developed by others (e.g. USF Islands, Costa Rica, Virtual Spain, etc.), I developed a special landing point for the lab called the WLE Platform (Figure 3). This platform
provided a home base for the students as they explored SL, as well as provided teleport\textsuperscript{7} boards for important islands, relaxing places to have conversations with other speakers of Spanish, and objects like food carts and dance balls to teach students how to interact with SL materials as well as help them practice their Spanish vocabulary.

\textbf{Figure 3.} The Virtual World Platform in SL.

The Virtual Worlds Platform was designed by the researcher to act as a home base for all students using SL. The platform provides teleport boards, space to sit and have conversations and a variety of objects with which one can interact to practice using the social space.

\textsuperscript{7} Teleporting is the way that you move through the virtual space. Teleport boards provide a landmark (LM) or virtual address for each of the many locations in the virtual world. Users click on the board and are given the landmark for a particular destination that they can then click on and be transported to the corresponding location.
The Second Life Lab. The SL Lab program that was developed for this investigation asked students to perform a variety of tasks in the virtual world that involve interactions with native speakers as well as activities having to do with Spanish culture. Prior to this investigation, I piloted an alternate lab call the Second Life Lab (SL Lab), which was designed and tested over the three years prior to this investigation. During the first phase of development, the classroom teachers and students met online twice per week and did a variety of activities together as a class. According to the feedback we received, this proved to be too time consuming for both the teacher and the students, so the amount of time required online was reduced and the activities were designed to be more independent for the students. During the second phase, weekly activities were designed by the teacher and students were required to complete the activities. Some of the activities were reported to be too challenging and several of the students mentioned that they would like more freedom to make their own activities. Therefore, we designed the concept of the free task, which will be explained in the upcoming sections. This method has lead to the most positive responses to the SL program so far (Wehner, 2010, 2013; Wehner, et al., 2011).

In the classroom that was selected for this research, the SL Lab formed part of their class grade and was completed in conjunction with other homework and activities. During the SL Lab, students spent the semester interacting with peers from the university as well as other residents of the SL community. All members of the class were required to participate in an in-person orientation, as well as orientation activities online, and complete seven Free Tasks (Gass, Mackey, & Ross-Feldman, 2005; Jauregi et al.,
2011) and maintain the use of the TL (in this case Spanish) in order to receive credit towards their grade.

**Orientations.** Students in this lab were required to complete one, in-person orientation session that introduced them to the inner-workings of SL including: moving, looking, purchasing, changing clothes, opening objects, etc. These were necessary tasks that a learner had to be able to accomplish in order to interact within the world. The syllabus I have created for this lab is included in Appendix D.

The in-person orientation introduced the SLLs to movement and looking so that they can move through the space in order to interact with other interlocutors and cultural exhibits. They were also lead through buying clothes and personalizing their avatar. This was an important phase because avatar creation is important to both how you integrate into the SL culture and to the ideas of creating an Ideal L2 Self. Finally, the orientation demonstrated how to create a free-task and showed the SLLs how to find islands, teleport and join groups where they could communicate with other speakers of the TL.

**Free-tasks.** After completing the orientation and the orientation activities, the SLLs were asked to complete seven free tasks (Gass et al., 2005; Jauregi et al., 2011). Free tasks are tasks where the students get to negotiate and choose the content of their task. While they were free to choose their task, at the end of each free task, the SLL had to show how the task they chose related to the course objectives and to what they were studying in the face-to-face course. All negotiations for choosing the tasks and subsequent conversations during the tasks had to be conducted in Spanish. Negotiating the task was part of the development of the SLLs linguistic skills (Gass et al., 2005; Jauregi et al., 2011).
After each task, students submitted a journal that included the following sections (also see Appendix E):

1. The goal of the assignment
2. The chat-log where the students negotiated the goal in Spanish and then achieved it.
3. Photos taken in SL of the students achieving the goal
4. A very brief discussion of why the students thought the goal helped with the course objectives and how the task related to the current coursework.
5. A description of how the students achieved the goal: the processes, challenges and rewards.
6. Any recommendations for other students who would undertake the same goal.

These sections were developed based on Kolb and Kolb’s (2005) model of experiential learning, during which students are asked to reflect upon the tasks they accomplish in order to learn from them. According to Kolb and Kolb (2005):

This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner ‘touches all the bases’ – experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting – in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned. These reflections are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn. These implications can be actively tested and serve as guides in creating new experiences. (p. 194)
Thus the journal reflections were an important part of helping the student attempt to move into more and more successful encounters with other interlocutors in SL.

Grading. Students in this lab were not graded on perfection in their use of Spanish, as they were in the classroom and other textbook based activities, but rather on their ability to maintain the use of Spanish throughout their interactions, their ability to reflect and adapt their experiences to reach their learning goals, and how well they integrate what is being taught in the face-to-face classroom with their tasks in SL (see Appendix F).

Participants

Participants were selected through convenience sampling due to the limited number of classes currently participating in the SL Lab at Slate University. A call for participation was sent out to all teachers of Beginning Spanish 2 courses in which they were asked if they would like to integrate the SL Lab as part of their course work for the semester. Only one teacher of the four available agreed to use SL in his class, Tony Flint. Asking for volunteer students to participate in the SL Lab from all classes may have provided a sample that was too concentrated with students who were previous gamers or had experience with these types of platforms. Therefore, having all students in the class participate in the SL Lab allowed for both gamers and non-gamers alike the chance to participate in these activities. Additionally, since it was part of their course work students received a grade for completing the assignments and it was not additional work. This was important in order to keep the context of the participants as close to regular classroom environment as possible.
Participants for this study were enrolled in a face-to-face Spanish course, were in their second semester, and were of traditional university age (between 18-25). Once the SL Lab was introduced to the entire class that would be using the interface, I asked for volunteers to take part in this study. Since the students were already participating in the SL Lab, regardless of their decision to participate in this research, they were informed that participation would have no affect on their grade and would require minimal extra time and effort on their part (only the three interviews required extra time).

A call for participation email was sent out to all students participating instructor Tony Flint’s beginning Spanish 2 classroom. Additionally, an announcement was made during the in-person orientation session about the nature of the research with a request for volunteers. Originally three students volunteered for the study, however, one student withdrew immediately, resulting in two students volunteering for the project. Once they had agreed to participate, participants were asked to sign a consent form before beginning the study (Appendix I). While I originally intended to have speakers with as little language learning experience as possible, due to the convenience sample this was not possible. However, many students enrolled in Beginning Spanish 2 had at least two years of high school study. As I will examine later in this section, both participants who volunteered had previous language learning experience, similar to others in their class.

Because participants came from only one classroom environment, I was not able to analyze the cases across a variety of backgrounds. However, I was still able to discuss the language learning environment in terms of how the participants felt that Tony’s class influenced their motivations and anxieties compared to other language learning experiences they had had prior to enrolling in Beginning Spanish 2. As part of
the L2 Motivational Self-System, the learning environment can have an effect on the student’s motivation and anxiety and a discussion of their current and previous learning environments will take place in Chapter 5 (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). I will now introduce the participants.

**Jessica**

Jessica was a 21-year old female nursing student from the Midwestern United States. She identified herself as a Caucasian with no hispanic background. Jessica had previously studied Spanish for four years in high school and had traveled to Peru for one month a few months prior to the start of this investigation. She had only studied Spanish previously and had not been given the opportunity to study other languages as Spanish was the only language taught in her high school. More details of Jessica’s background and previous learning experiences will be discussed in Chapter 4.

**Melissa**

Melissa was a 20-year old female science major also from the Midwestern United States. She also identified herself as caucasian in her initial background questionnaire, but it was later discovered that her birth mother was Mexican. According to Valdés (2001) and Carreira (2004), in order for a language learner to be identified as a Heritage-Language Learner (HLL), the learner must have had exposure to the target language and/or culture during the sensitive period for language learning (Valdés, 2001) and/or self-identify as a heritage language learner, one who is attempting to learn the language in order to connect or re-connect with their heritage.

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8 On the Background Questionnaire that the participants were given, the question that asked them to identify their ethnicity was open-ended. Terms for race and/or ethnicity were of the choosing of each participant and not provided by the researcher.
According to Melissa, her mother left her when she was a baby and she was adopted soon after birth by her American father’s parents and has never had contact with her mother or her mother’s family. The only contact with Mexican culture that she has had is through vacations she took with her parents (her grandparents). According to Melissa, she does not consider herself to be a heritage language learner, therefore, she will not be treated as such during this investigation.

Prior to enrolling in Beginning Spanish 2 at Slate University, Melissa had studied Spanish for six years starting in middle school (sixth grade). She had vacationed in Mexico two times on the Isla de Mujeres and also attempted a study abroad in Peru for a science class the summer prior to this investigation. She complete only one of the four weeks abroad due to an illness that forced her to return home. In Chapter 4, I will consider how these previous experiences influenced her motivation, anxiety and virtual world experience. In the next sections I describe how I collected my data and what steps I took to insure reliability and credibility.

Data Collection

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), the naturalist-interpretive-constructionist paradigm that I adopted for this research “provides the intellectual basis for several research techniques: participant observation, documentary analysis, conversational and narrative analysis, and in-depth interviewing” (p. 26). In the following section, I highlight each of the data collection methods used, how they fit within my research philosophy, and how they were used to explore my guiding research questions. Data collection methods included those listed in Table 2.
This table lists the methods of data collection that were used in this study and provides a description as to the type and quantity of data obtained. One hundred and eighty pages of data were collected along with images and videos of interviews. The variety of sources were important to maintaining creditability and validity as I was able to compare the data obtained in the interviews with the other sources in order to support my conclusions and recommendations. In the following section, I outline how the data was triangulated in order to answer each of the three research questions.

**Table 2. Data Collection Methods, Types of Data and Volume Collected During.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Type of Data Collected</th>
<th>Volume of Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-class participant observations</td>
<td>Researcher observations of student behaviors and participation levels</td>
<td>8 pages handwritten notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews   | a and b) video recorded interviews with both participants and teacher                  | a) 3 one-hour interviews with each participant (total 6) yielded 80 pages of transcriptions and researcher notes  
                                           | b) 1 one-hour interview with teacher yielded 6 pages of transcription and research notes  |
| Document Analysis                         | a) images taken by students of activities and their avatars in SL.                     | a) 24 images (12 from each participant)                                                   |
|                                          | b) student journals turned in upon completion of time each week in SL.                 | b) Jessica - 7/8 journals; Melissa - 6/8 journals yielding 70 pages.                      |
|                                          | c) Chat-logs that record the interactions of participants and their interlocutors      | c) Jessica - 484 minutes of chat logs submitted; Melissa - 246 minutes of chat logs submitted |
| Open-ended questionnaire                  | Background information on starting motivations for studying Spanish                  | 3 pages of short answer, background data                                                 |
| Self-reflective researcher journals       | Reflections on interviews, observations and data review                                | 15 pages                                                                                 |
Data Collection by Guiding Research Question

In Table 3, I have outlined the data collection methods used to answer each of my guiding research questions.

As can be seen, a combination of multiple methods were used to answer each question. This helped with triangulation of data, which increases credibility of the research. Each of the data collection methods and how they attributed to the research is discussed in the following sections.

Table 3. Data Collection Methods and Benefits by Research Question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Method(s)</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods Allow Me to…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. In what ways do Spanish language learners use the avatar personalization features to create a representation of their Ideal L2-Self?</td>
<td>Participant observations; semi-structured interviews; image analysis; researcher e-journals</td>
<td>Analyze how the avatar is constructed and ask questions about reasons for choices. Show how and why avatar represents Ideal L2 Self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In what ways, if any, does using an avatar in communications with other speakers of Spanish affect a Spanish language learner’s (a) anxiety and (b) motivation?</td>
<td>Participant observations; semi-structured interviews; narrative analysis; conversation analysis; open-ended questionnaires; researcher e-journals</td>
<td>Analyze participant interactions and their own reactions and beliefs to understand their anxieties and motivations and how that changes over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What other factors contribute to the Spanish language learner’s possible changes in (a) anxiety and (b) motivation?</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews; participant observations; narrative analysis; conversation analysis; researcher e-journals</td>
<td>Understand and identify other factors that may affect the constructs by asking questions to determine participants’ feelings and motivations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Observations

I observed my participants in the classroom on two separate occasions. These observations occurred at the beginning of the Research period and at the end of the
semester. These observations were important to my understanding of how the participants conducted themselves in a face-to-face classroom versus their interactions online and allowed me to see any transformations that may have occurred in the student's classroom behavior over the semester. This was also an important part of learning about the differences between the two contexts. Both observations were 110 minutes in length, which was the length of the class. My observations and notes from both sessions were be collected in the field notes form in Appendix J for analysis. In order to minimize the effect of the researcher, I maintained a low profile and sat in the back of the room. I did not make any comments or offer any assistance during the class and asked that the professor not make any reference to me during the class period. Additionally, during the interview with the professor, I asked about their behaviors during my observations and he was able to confirm that they were consistent with other class periods.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

The primary tool of the qualitative researcher is the “in-depth qualitative” interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews were my primary tool for this research because it allowed me to explore the perceptions of my participants about their time in SL, their avatars and the perceived effects they had on the participants’ motivations and anxieties. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather rich and detailed information about the participants and to be flexible and adjust my questions and responses for the specific interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

In order to create the initial interview protocols, I relied on the work of Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) and Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009). After reviewing they works, I
developed fifteen questions, five for each interview. During the Fall semester prior to this study, I asked these questions to the students in my Spanish 2 class and attempted to elicit the information for which I was looking. The questions were then edited to reflect the necessary changes. However, since this was a qualitative study in which I used the constant comparative method for data analysis, questions were added and changed according to the results of the data collected prior to each interview and questions were added in order to delve further into the responses from each participant.

**Participant interviews.** I conducted three interviews with each participant over the course of the 9-week SL project. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in my office at Slate University and recorded using QuickTime. The first interview was used to begin to construct the participants' background, learn about their motivations for studying a foreign language and their pre-existing anxieties. This initial interview was also used to further my understanding of their responses to the background questionnaire. An example of some of the questions used during the first interview can be seen in Appendix K. All interviews were transcribed using ExpressScribe.

A second interview occurred during week 4 of the 9-week program. During this interview, I asked each participant questions about the choices she made as she shopped for the pieces of her avatar. In this semi-structured interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), I asked them about the changes in their avatars, why they chose to make those changes, and how they felt they were viewed by other uses of SL (Appendix L). I also explored their satisfaction with using SL to communicate with others and what effects the program may have already had on their motivations and anxieties, if any.
The third interview took place at the end of the semester. This interview was used to discuss the participants’ current levels of motivation and anxiety, any changes that had occurred in their avatars, their feelings and perceptions about the interactions in which they had participated, and any other topics that I had noted in their journals or chat logs (see Appendix M). At the end of the semester, I also interviewed the participant’s teacher to discuss the level of participation of each woman and any changes that may have been noted by the teacher.

**Teacher interview.** In order to obtain a better understanding of the participants’ conduct in the classroom, I interviewed the teacher for each participant. This interview was held at the end of the semester, after the conclusion of the SL project. This interview allowed me to ask the teacher about his observations of the participants’ progress in class and any changes that may have taken place. This information was used to help triangulate the data obtained from my own in-class observations of the students and decrease the effects of my presence in the classroom observations. An example of the teacher interview protocol can be seen in Appendix N. This interview took place in-person and was recorded using QuickTime software.

**Document Analysis**

**Image analysis.** One of the easiest ways to collect data on appearance is through image collection. According to Richards (2006) visual data are as important a source as the written word. Images allow the researcher to actually observe changes over time, which is important to this study because it allowed me to distinguish changes in the participants’ avatars over time. In addition, images can be act as stimuli to
remember specific events as well as help the participant make deeper connections with the content (Richards, 2006).

Students in the SL lab were already required to take pictures of themselves and their friends during their interactions in SL as part of their assignments. I collected these images, as well as took my own, and analyzed them to see how the avatars changed and where the participants chose to spend their time. I analyzed them by comparing the features of each avatar image over the course of time. Taking pictures also helped with my observations because they assisted in recalling and describing the scene more effectively when analyzing the variety of interactions.

**Narrative analysis (student journals).** Narrative analysis “involves examining people’s descriptions of experiences” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This kind of data allows the participant to share their story and reflect upon that story to make meaning. In the naturalist paradigm, every experience is filtered through the individual’s own lens, which is shaped by his or her experiences. Collecting narrative journals was important to this research because these journals allowed the participant to tell their experience from their perspective and to reflect on that experience.

As part of the 9-week program, students were already required to conduct reflective journaling. As previously described, students recounted their experiences in the journal and talked about what went wrong, what went right, and how they could make changes to their behaviors in order to create more satisfactory experiences. These reflections were then analyzed for information that related to each exploratory question. I coded each journal by highlighting words and phrases that reflected possible responses to the research questions and also development of the participant during the
research period. I then combined those codes into major themes that I then developed into the narratives that are presented in Chapter 4. I was able to analyze the reflective journals for evidence relating to their comfort levels in interacting with other speakers of Spanish (OSSs) and how their experiences affected their language learning process. By reading and analyzing these journals throughout the length of the program, I was able to formulate appropriate questions for the interviews that related to their interactions and how they felt having an avatar impacted their experience.

**Conversation analysis (chat-logs).** Conversation analysis “explores how people talk to each other in naturally occurring situations” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Chat logs in virtual communication make this kind of data collection and analysis very obtainable. Submitting chat logs was already a requirement for the SL lab grade. These chat logs were automatically recorded and saved to the students’ computers and were submitted with their journal entries.

I collected these chat logs and analyzed the contents for interaction patterns. I coded the chat logs by highlighting phrases that showed interaction patterns, including feedback, recasts, time in conversation, number of conversation partners, etc., and grouped the different phrases into those categories. I looked at the words and phrases the students used that may have indicated their motivations or anxieties within that conversation. Since these chat logs were automatically time and date-stamped, I used this information to look at the amount of time spent online, number of interlocutors with whom they interacted and other information that that may have indicated levels of discomfort or anxiety.
**Background Questionnaire**

The sole function of the questionnaire for this particular line of research was to obtain background information and to provide a starting point for preparing questions for the first interview. Since anxieties and motivation in language learning are affected by previous language learning experience (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Gardner, 1985), I needed to establish a base for each participant in regards to their pre-existing motivations and anxieties. All participants completed a questionnaire (see Appendix O) on their backgrounds, reasons for learning a foreign language, and foreign language related anxieties. This questionnaire was developed based on the work of Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) who developed a quantitative questionnaire to measure motivations of students based on Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self-System. The questions were basic informational questions, such as name, ethnicity, year in school as well as basic information questions such as “how long have you studied a foreign language?” and were developed solely for obtaining basic participation information from which to start creating their narrative.

The first set of questions on the questionnaire was designed to elicit descriptions of a future, possible self and how language learning relates to that Ideal L2 Self. The second set of questions delved into the student’s perceptions of the Ought-to Self and how they viewed language playing a role in who they thought they should be. The third set of questions looked at the idea of the Feared-self and how what we are afraid of happening can help us to achieve, this is also known as facilitating anxiety (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Horwitz et al., 1986; Nishitani & Matsuda, 2011; Taguchi et al., 2009; Young, 1991). The final set of questions dealt with attitudes towards the target culture.
and language learning, which could be an important factor in a learner’s desire to learn a language (Gardner, 1985; Taguchi et al., 2009). The open-ended questionnaire was distributed via GoggleDocs, which required all participants to log in with an approved email address before taking the questionnaire.

**Self-reflective Researcher E-journal**

Finally, I used a researcher e-journal that aided in the process of reflection and reconstruction of meaning (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). The process of reflection on the part of the researcher was an important step to situating myself within the context of my inquiry. The e-journal was written using Pages for Mac, which allowed me to take notes and write reflections from any of my electronic devices and store them on iCloud so that I could access them from anywhere. This gave me mobility to conduct research from both face-to-face and online sites.

Journal entries were written after each attempt to collect data as well as during the transcription process. Each entry consisted of three parts: recollective reflection, introspective reflection and conceptual reflection. Recollective reflection required me to recount the specific details of events and experiences that I had observed. Introspective reflection asked me to analyze my own “mental and emotional responses to encountered experiences” and “think beyond specific details to the significant aspects of encountered experience” (Piantanida & Garman, 2009, p. 63). In conceptual reflection, I began to connect the recollective and introspective reflections with the theoretical concepts and exploratory questions that guided this research. Keeping an e-journal in this manner allowed me to revisit thoughts and ideas about the ongoing
research as well as helped me address biases that may exist in order to maintain credibility in my research (Patton, 2002; Piantanida & Garman, 2009).

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research is a continuous and ongoing process that occurs throughout the study period (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Janesick, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For this study, I analyzed all of my data throughout the study, approximately once per week, using the constant comparative method established by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Using this method let me identify patterns and themes that emerged from the data, allowing me to adjust my data collection methods and interview questions throughout the course of the program. This method also allowed me to “get a connective sense of the data set by identifying codes and grouping them into categories and subcategories” (Coryell & Clark, 2009).

**Data Organization and Preparation**

All data was collected electronically from the participants and stored on my personal, password protected computer. Data was organized and analyzed in chronological order as changes and differences over time is one facet of my study. Since this is a multiple case study (Stake, 2006), data was organized by participant and then by type. This allowed me to analyze each participant separately before looking at both of the cases as a whole (Stake, 2006).

**Data Transcription**

The majority of data collected for this research were already in written or visual form. However, for the semi-structured interviews, I needed to transcribe the data. Personally transcribing the data was a useful tool for beginning to immerse myself in the
data and starting to analyze and deduce themes (Janesick, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I transcribed the data using ExpressScribe, an audio and video play back tool that allowed me to control the flow of play back, and Word. Since I am looking primarily at content of the transcription, I omitted any words or pauses that do not add to the content of the data. Pauses, likes, umms and mmms were included if I felt they were necessary to understand the content (Janesick, 2012).

All transcripts were sent back to the participants for member-checking (see Appendix P). Member-checking is an important step for establishing credibility of the data and giving the opportunity for the participant to verify what they said and perhaps explain what they said if there is ambiguity (Janesick, 2012; Patton, 2002).

Coding

All interviews, observations, questionnaires, student journals and researcher journals went through the same process of coding. I coded data using Microsoft Word for documents in Word format and Adobe Acrobat Pro for documents in PDF format. I conducted this part of the data analysis using the guidelines set forth by Janesick (2012). The first step of the process is to summarize the texts by looking for “themes, concepts, events, and topical markers” (Janesick, 2012, p. 180). Second, I put the texts into topics and subtopics. Third, the process continued through a stage of precoding where I highlighted strands of notes or conversations that were valuable to understanding my exploratory questions. Fourth, the data underwent three stages of coding where codes were identified based on the topics I developed. I then used those codes to format categories of broader themes. Finally, I finalized the categories in each case (Janesick, 2012).
Because this is a multiple case study, I will analyze each participant individually using the method above. Subsequently, I wrote a summary report of each participant that I could read while comparing each participant to the other (Stake, 2006). Data coding for the case happened in a similar method to what is listed above, but instead of looking at each case individually, I looked at both cases as a whole to see what themes and categories were common that addressed my exploratory questions (Stake, 2006). During the entire data analysis procedure, I maintained my researchers e-journal where I commented on my coding process; this helped to formulate my role as a researcher (discussed below) as well as maintain quality and credibility.

Data Quality and Credibility

In a qualitative research study there are a number of ways to establish quality and credibility. According to Patton (2002), credibility of the qualitative inquiry comes from three sources: 1) “rigorous methods,” 2) “credibility of the researcher,” and 3) “philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry” (p. 552-553). I address each of these sources in the following sections along with how I established credibility in this study.

Rigorous Methods

In order to ensure quality data collection and analysis, I used triangulation (Stake, 2006; Patton, 2002; Janesick, 2011). As can be seen from the methods of data collection, I procured data from a number of sources. Through triangulation of these data sources, I compared information from interviews with results of questionnaires, observations, journals, and chat logs. Different kinds of data captured different aspects of the same case and both supported or contradicted various findings (Patton, 2002).
According to Patton (2002), “either consistency in overall patterns of data from different sources or reasonable explanations for differences in data from divergent sources can contribute significantly to the overall credibility of findings” (p. 560).

In addition, member checking (see Appendix M) ensured the data I had was accurate (Stake, 2006). Patton (2002) states that researchers can “learn a great deal about the accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of their data analysis by having the people described in that analysis react to what is described and concluded. Janesick (2012) encourages member checking not just after analysis is finished, but also during data collection. Participants also reviewed transcripts of interviews to ensure that they were clear in their statements.

**Credibility of the Researcher**

Credibility was established by readily acknowledging my own biases and background for this research. My own credibility was determined through reporting “any personal and professional information that my have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (Patton, 2002, p. 566). In this research, I played the role of researcher. I was not the teacher for this class and, therefore, I was not responsible for giving grades or feedback. During classroom observations, I maintained a low profile by sitting towards the back of the room, but in sight of each participant. While there may have been some effect of my presence in the room on the participants, I also collected information from the teacher about each participant’s classroom behavior in order to cross-reference my data.

Since I conducted observations and interviews, it was also important to acknowledge how my presence may affect what was observed or the answers I receive
in interviews. As mentioned above, students were not graded for their participation in the research only their participation in the SL Lab, affording me the chance to work only as a researcher and not instructor. I hope that this role allowed the participants to feel more comfortable around me and reduced anxieties that may have resulted from a teacher/student relationship.

In qualitative research, the researcher should attempt to show fairness throughout the research process in order to maintain credibility. Fairness, as opposed to objectivity, ensures that the researcher takes into account multiple perspectives, thereby presenting all sides of a situation, and strives for balance in research design (Patton, 2002). In this study, I strive for fairness by implementing the various data collection and analysis procedures that I have described above. I believe that an in-depth, qualitative inquiry into avatar-mediated authentic communication can help us to understand the usefulness of this medium for the foreign language learner and how we as teachers can better construct activities and programs in virtual environments for foreign language learners.

**Philosophical Belief in the Value of Qualitative Inquiry**

As previously stated in Chapter 1, my own view of qualitative research aligns with that of the naturalist and interpretive-constructionist paradigm, which “emphasizes the importance of context, of complexity, [and] of examining situations in which many factors interact” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 19). Additionally, how a person views “an object or event and the meaning that they attribute to it are what is important” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 19). In this research, I am interested in how the participants view their interactions with other speakers of Spanish and to what extent they feel that having an
avatar presence impacts their anxiety in language use and their overall motivation to learn a foreign language.

**Role of the Researcher: Self as Instrument**

For the purposes of this study, I acknowledge my participation in the community that will be created. Piantanida & Garmon (2009) state:

> At the heart of interpretive inquiry is a researcher’s capacity for encountering, listening understanding, and thus ‘experiencing’ the phenomenon under investigation. Rather than assuming the traditional stance of a detached and neutral observer, an interpretive inquirer, much like a tuning fork, resonates with exquisite sensitivity to the subtle vibrations of encounter experiences. (p. 59)

I know, as a naturalistic, interpretive-constructionist researcher, that I cannot detach myself from this community and that we, the participants and myself, constructed knowledge together and for one another. It was my job as the researcher to participate in this community and “make-sense” of it (Piantanida & Garmon, 2009). Throughout the process, I continuously worked to develop theoretical sensitivity through questioning and interpreting everything that is going on around me.

I looked deeply at what I brought to the table, as these previous experiences affected how I interpreted the data I collected. I must be aware of these in order to cultivate my credibility as a researcher. According to Piantanida and Garmon (2009), I must cultivate a “heightened awareness of [my] worldview, experiences, preconceptions, biases, current knowledge, and so on, and [recognize] how these may expand or constrict one’s capacity for being open to and resonating with the experience
of the study” (p. 60). My researcher’s journal was instrumental in helping me identify these areas and making me aware of my own thoughts and feelings as I embarked on this journey,

Over the last three years, I have taken courses in qualitative research in which I conducted small studies that helped me to sharpen my skills as an observer and interviewer. In those studies, I was also able to transcribe my own data using ExpressScribe and practice coding and creating themes. In addition, I have overseen and organized three pilot studies on SL in the Spanish classroom that have helped me focus my research interests and shown me both the positive and negative aspects of this platform.

This study was a part of my journey towards becoming a competent researcher and scholar. It is my hope that this process, filled with reflection and observation, helped me develop my skills and awareness of my role as a researcher. In addition, I hope that this study will shed some light on the role virtual worlds can play in mediating the motivations and anxieties of Spanish language learners in the foreign language context.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I addressed the (a) research approach, (b) research setting, (c) the participants, (d) data collection methods, (e) data analysis methods, (f) data quality and credibility, and finally, (g) the role of the researcher. I addressed the proposed qualitative and multiple case study approach that I formulated for this investigation. I described demographics of the research site and online space, the reason for the selection of SL as the VW platform, and provided a discussion of the 10-week, VW program that was developed for the Spanish program. I also included a description of
the WLE Virtual World Platform and the activities and course requirements of the SL Lab. Additionally, I introduced my participants, Melissa and Jessica, and described the institutional context of their language learning environment.

This chapter also included descriptions of the data collection methods I used (Participant Observations; Semi-structured Interviews; Document analysis; Open-ended questionnaires; Self-reflective researcher e-journals) and how they related to each of the proposed research questions. I addressed how each of these methods attributed to the credibility and reliability of this research project, and I described how I analyzed these different data sources and triangulated the data to uphold the validity of the research process. Finally, I discussed my philosophical beliefs about the research process and my role as a researcher for this study. In Chapter 4, I will present the data collected over the course of my research as well as a discussion of how this data lead me to interpret my exploratory questions. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes my research by highlighting what was learned from the data and how it can be applied to future programs using VWs.
CHAPTER 4:
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research project yielded a wealth of data about the experiences of the two participants, their motivations, anxieties, and how they themselves viewed the changes in their linguistic development over the course of the semester. Many of the patterns that were observed were similar to that of previous research that this researcher has conducted. Other results were unexpected and have opened the door for a variety of future paths for research. In this chapter, I present the data collected over the course of my research as it relates to each individual case. This is then followed by a discussion of how this data lead me to interpret my exploratory questions:

1. In what ways do Spanish language learners use the avatar personalization features to create a representation of their Ideal L2-Self?

2. In what ways, if any, does using an avatar in communications with other speakers of Spanish affect a Spanish language learner's (a) anxiety and (b) motivation?

3. What other factors contribute to the Spanish language learner’s possible changes in (a) anxiety and (b) motivation?

I begin the chapter by presenting each individual case, first that of Jessica followed by Melissa. While I briefly introduced each participant in Chapter 3, this chapter will provide a more detailed description of each student. For each case I present the
background of the participant, including their original motivations and anxieties in second language learning and then I discuss their Second Life (SL) experience. Presenting the data in this way allows me to set the scene for the analysis and discussion of the research questions.

I have chosen to structure the descriptions of both participants using the lens of Dornyei’s (2005) L2 Motivational-Self System in order to highlight the different facets of each learner’s motivation. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the parts of the L2 Motivational-Self System, The Ideal L2 Self, The Ought-to Self and the L2 Learning Environment. According to Dörney (2009), all three of these components must be in harmony in order to be a strong motivating force. The Ideal L2 Self is the most significant component. For the Ideal L2 Self to be motivating the language learner must have a strong and vivid image of how they see the target language playing a role in their future self. We will see in this chapter that Jessica had a strong Ideal L2 Self, due to her desire to become a medical missionary, whereas Melissa struggled with how she saw Spanish playing a role in her future self.

I will first discuss the participant’s backgrounds highlighting the influences on the components of their L2 Motivational Self Systems. This organization will help me to better analyze the outcomes of the SL project on each woman’s motivations. Following the analysis of motivations, I look at the foreign language anxieties for each participant, thereby setting the stage for our discussion of questions one and two and the possible affects of Second Life on anxiety and motivations. The data will show that there was evidence of improvement in all facets of Jessica’s motivation, anxiety and linguistic
development, whereas Melissa’s journey did not show the same level of improvement and she even demonstrated a decrease in motivation over the semester.

In the description of Jessica, I begin with an outline of her motivations and anxieties prior to taking the Spanish course at Slate University. Developing her background in this way will help us understand some of her decisions during the semester and how she viewed the affects of the Second Life program. As I will show, Jessica already had strong motivations about why she was learning a language and what was propelling her to further her linguistic development. She additionally highlights several personal foreign language anxieties that have both helped and hindered her progress throughout her language learning experience.

Melissa’s story will demonstrate a struggle to formulate a strong Ideal L2 Self Image, which ultimately affects how she approaches the Second Life project and her Spanish learning experience. During the semester, Melissa’s motivations waned as a result of academic pressures from other classes and this resulted in a weaker desire to apply herself in the foreign language classroom. There was minimal change in her perception of anxiety and minimal linguistic growth. The reasons for this will be discussed in the sections that follow.

After I present each case, I demonstrate how my findings relate to my research questions. Each question is presented individually along with the findings that have led me to interpret it. I will use these results to further discuss how this research aligns itself with previous research and the significance of these findings. Through the discussion, it will become clear that while participation in activities did not affect motivation, as hypothesized, there was an affect in both participants on anxiety. Additionally, several
other factors in the language-learning environment also influenced these factors. I now turn to my discussion of the participants and their journey’s in second language learning.

**Figure 4. Jessica’s L2 Motivational Self System.**

*Diagram of Jessica’s L2 Motivational Self System that describes her pre-existing motivations prior to the beginning of the research period. Key quotations from the interviews or questionnaire are included to support the descriptions.*

**Jessica: Becoming a Medical Missionary**

In the following sections, I present the story of Jessica. Jessica, as mentioned in Chapter 3, is a 21-year-old female student in her junior year at Slate University. According to her initial questionnaire and subsequent interviews, Jessica self identified as “Caucasian” with no family or close personal ties to Spanish language or culture. Before enrolling in Spanish 102 at Slate, she had studied Spanish in high school for four years, and had not studied any other languages. Jessica’s dream since she was a child
was to become a nurse, and, as I outline in the following sections, this dream included
learning another language.

In the model provided in Figure 4, I have illustrated the primary components of
Jessica’s L2 Motivational Self System. This model shows that Jessica’s Ideal L2 Self
consisted of her desire to become a medical missionary, that her Ought-to Self was
created by her academic environment and her limited choices of languages to study,
and that her L2 Learning Environment consisted of four years of high school Spanish,
her current Beginning Spanish 2 class and travel abroad experience. In the sections
that follow, I will delve into each of these systems more closely to show how these
components created a strong motivation for Jessica to study Spanish.

Motivations and Anxieties: Jessica’s Motivational-Self System

Jessica’s ideal L2 self. It was clear from the beginning of the research period
that Jessica had a strong vision of who she wanted to become. This was not always the
case, however. In high school, when she began her language-learning journey, her
desire to be a nurse was always present. “I want to be a nurse,” she said, “so I knew
that experience [of learning a language] would be good for me to know anyway.” After
four years of high school Spanish, Jessica stopped taking language courses for the first
two years of her college career. When asked in our first interview about the hiatus she
said:

There were so many classes you have to take before you can register to
get into the [nursing] program, so I was like, I have all these to do already,
so to put Spanish in there, which was just an extra thing […] I saw other
things as a priority than Spanish […] I guess I didn’t see [the] need. Like, I
knew I needed it for nursing, but then I changed my major and then I went back to nursing.

The impetus for Spanish becoming “a priority again,” was a mission trip to Peru in the summer of 2013. That summer she and 12 other students from a church near Slate University went to Iquitos, Peru, a large, but isolated city in Peru that can only be reached by boat or plane. Their primary task was to help the staff at a local safe house, which tasked itself with helping local impoverished women find shelter and medical attention for diseases and injuries. “What they’ll [the workers at the safe House] do” she said during our first interview, ‘is literally go out to the streets and find women that are homeless, addicted, prostitutes and stuff like that and take them in and make sure they are, that they don’t have STDs or that kind of stuff and if they do they help treat them. And sometimes they’ve got injuries or wounds that they just don’t take care of [...]”

Jessica was inspired by her work there and the connections that she made with people, but also frustrated by the fact that her level of Spanish was not adequate to communicate properly with the language. She had the following to say about her experience:

Going there I was like, ‘I know a little bit of Spanish, I'll be able to communicate what I want’. And then when I got there, it was like ‘this is so hard because I can’t’, like I can say hello, how are you, but as soon as the conversation got past that and [moved to] what do you do for a living or back and forth, getting deeper into knowing them it got really hard and then I got frustrated and they’d get frustrated because they just want to talk to you. (Interview 1)
It was this frustration with the language and her renewed ambition to become a nurse in the field of medical missions that made learning Spanish a priority again. Despite having frustrating or anxiety inducing experiences in her initial interactions with Peruvians, due to limited linguistic knowledge, Jessica was able to use that as a source of motivation to continue her studies in the Spanish language. When asked about her experiences in Peru, she said:

I got frustrated and they’d get frustrated cause they just want to talk to you and so I just want to be able to [pause] we are actually going back in December, so I hope that I will be able to get to know them more this time. (Interview 1)

This demonstrates that Jessica was able to turn her frustrations and anxieties into a motivational factor, which is in line with research that has demonstrated the dichotomy between facilitating and debilitating foreign language anxiety, and speculates that some facilitating anxiety in all language learners is necessary to push them towards their ultimate language learning goals (Nishitani & Matsuda, 2011; Scovel, 1991). In general, Jessica describes this trip as a defining moment for her and has since started taking the appropriate steps to make a return to Peru a reality. Additionally, in this case, it seems that because Jessica’s Ideal L2 Self Image was so vivid, she was able to turn her anxiety into more motivation.

In accordance with to Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, Jessica had a vivid self-image prior to joining this class. Whenever she talked about why she was learning a language and what she wanted to do in the future, she centered on her desire to become a medical missionary in South America. Throughout her interviews,
she continuously went back to this goal and talked about how Spanish would be a part of achieving that goal. When asked in our first interview about why she had chosen to study Spanish she said, “I want to be a medical missionary in South America, so I would need to speak and understand Spanish. I want to learn Spanish so I can travel through South America as a medical missionary after I graduate.” Learning Spanish was very important to her because she wanted to live in a Spanish speaking culture, Peru in particular. In our second interview she noted, “I could speak a little bit [with Peruvians], but I didn’t speak it as well as I wanted to, so now wanting to do medical missions and stuff in South America, maybe someplace else, but definitely in Peru; so, I’ll definitely need to learn Spanish fluently.” This was her reason for enrolling in Spanish 102 and for excitement for the impending Second Life project that is the focus of this research. In our first interview she revealed that, “I wanna be able to do that [have conversations with Spanish speakers] and get used to speaking because I want to be able to speak confidently in Spanish, I just need to practice. […] I hope to be on there a lot just talking to different people and just getting used to conversations.” This strong L2 Self image will become important as we look at Jessica’s SL experience and how it impacted her overall motivations and anxieties.

Jessica’s ought-to self. Other than her future profession, Jessica had a few other external factors that influenced her desire to study a language, or perhaps more importantly, which language she chose to study. Originally, in high school when she began thinking about becoming a nurse, she knew a language would be helpful, but she did not specify which language, rather, her environment chose that language for her.
Jessica went to a very small high school, therefore, Spanish was the only option. She decided to study the language both because she thought she would need it for her future, but also because there was an opportunity to study abroad in Spain at the end of the 4-year period. She recounts:

I knew it was a good thing to have a second language and it was the only second language to pick, we didn't have French, we didn't have anything like that. I came form a really small school, I graduated with 12, so really small, so we were only able to take Spanish and it was one of those classes that you could take that was kind of a fun class, and you could go to Spain as a senior [...] so it was kind of like, ‘take four years and you could go to Spain,’ so everyone was like ‘let’s go to Spain.’ [...] but I wanted to learn it too as a second language. (Interview 1)

In addition to this, she also identified other external influences like the United States’ growing cultural and linguistic diversity, the ability to be able to communicate with other speakers of Spanish locally, and that knowing a language makes you more equipped for jobs you may want. However, these external factors did not seem to have as much of an impact on her motivations for learning a second language as her desire to pursue her passion as a medical missionary and her experiences with learning and speaking Spanish in the L2 Learning Environment.

Jessica’s L2 learning environment. Jessica reported taking Spanish for four years in high school prior to enrolling in Beginning Spanish 2 at Slate University. She initially displayed frustrations with her high school experience because it was “really laid back” and they “spoke English a lot of the time.” She felt that in these four years, she
did not learn as much Spanish as she hoped that she would. Of her high school class she said:

We did a lot of games and stuff, but not like speaking conversations and stuff, so I don’t feel like I learned, like in that four years I probably learned maybe one complete, like what I might learn in Tony’s class in a year, so it was very laid back. And I feel like four years was a lot for what I actually did […] Four years sounds like I should be a pro at it, but I’m not.

(Interview 1)

The activities of those years focused primarily on the basics of Spanish language form and vocabulary and required very little oral production with the exception of oral presentations and oral portions of exams.

By contrast, when Jessica enrolled in the Beginning Spanish 2 class, she was surprised by the professor’s use of communicative language teaching. While she was nervous at first, she “really liked how Tony [the teacher] does it” through immersing them in the Spanish language. Tony’s classes are conducted almost entirely in Spanish. During my observations of his classes, Tony only used English when requested by a student for clarification or when introducing new vocabulary items in Spanish that were not in the textbook. He made use of communicative language learning activities and required that all students speak in Spanish in the classroom to the best of their abilities. For Jessica, this was beneficial because “if you don’t know it,” she said, “you’re gonna get to know it, you don’t have an option,” and she preferred Tony’s teaching style and activities to that of her high school teacher.
Other than the classroom, Jessica’s L2 Environment also consisted of trips abroad and interactions with other Spanish speakers in her community. After high school, Jessica took two years off from studying Spanish until the summer of 2013 when she had an opportunity go on a mission trip to Peru. Here she spent a month interacting with Peruvian Spanish speakers and was able to use and get feedback on her Spanish. In general, she found the process frustrating because she felt that she knew more Spanish than she could articulate in conversation. When asked about her experience in Peru, she had the following to say:

So, it was a missions trip through our church and going there I was like, “I know a little bit of Spanish, I’ll be able to do what I, like, be able to communicate what I want.” And then when I got there, it was like “this is so hard” because I can’t, like, I can say hello, how are you, but as soon as the conversation got past that and what do you do for a living or back and forth, getting deeper into knowing them, it got really hard and then I got frustrated and they’d get frustrated cause they just want to talk to you.

According to Dörnyei (2009), these anxiety-causing experiences often serve to reduce motivation in language learners because they create tension between the parts of the L2 Motivational Self System and make the goal of obtaining the future self identity seem further away. Here, tension between Jessica’s Ideal L2 Self and her current linguistic ability caused frustration, but in this case, these experiences became a facilitating form of anxiety that motivated Jessica to learn more Spanish. In her first interview she stated that after her first trip to Peru she was “like okay, I can learn this and come back and be able to talk to them without having them have to repeat themselves like 4 or 5 times.”
In Peru, she felt a strong desire to communicate and develop relationships with the people in her work, but she was unable to linguistically. However, even though she experienced these frustrations, due to a lack of linguistic knowledge and her anxieties about speaking Spanish, she knew that the best way to overcome these obstacles was to engage in further instruction.

Jessica’s foreign language learning anxieties. Jessica’s anxieties are found primarily in her interactions with her L2 Learning Environment. Jessica stated from the beginning that she felt more comfortable with written Spanish, both reading and writing, than with speaking. “I understand written Spanish way better than spoken Spanish,” she said; and the majority of her anxieties can be linked to speaking. Throughout the interviews, she expressed her anxieties in speaking Spanish in a variety of settings, in the classroom during tests, in Peru, in church and with her friends at school. Additionally, she discussed anxieties with moving beyond the core grammar and vocabulary structures that she learned in high school, to the more advanced structures of her university classroom.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, anxieties in foreign language learning can come from a variety of sources: “1) personal and interpersonal anxieties; 2) learner beliefs about language learning; 3) instructor beliefs about language teaching; 4) instructor-learner interactions; 5) classroom procedures; and 6) language testing” (Young, 1991, p. 427). The majority of Jessica’s foreign language anxiety (FLA) seems to come from classroom procedures (i.e. communicative versus non-communicative environments), language testing (i.e. oral exams and presentations), and interpersonal anxieties (i.e. embarrassment over making mistakes when speaking face-to-face).
Jessica indicated that speaking, either in class or out, was her primary source of anxiety in language learning. As I showed in Chapter 2 in my overview of Kim’s (2009) study, research has shown that conversation classes and tasks yield higher anxiety levels than composition courses and activities. When speaking in class, Jessica identified that the primary reason for feeling nervous when speaking was that she was afraid that the language would not come out right and she would appear incompetent. “I get really nervous what I speak it,” she said in our first interview, “I’m really worried that it’s not coming out right, [or] doesn’t sound right.” This idea appeared throughout our interviews when we discussed her anxieties. She talked about her interactions with her friends that spoke Spanish and how she felt when they would speak Spanish to each other around her: “I just felt kind of left out and I don’t want to say anything because they speak fluent Spanish and I don’t want to make an idiot out of myself, so I just kind of felt left out.” She also discussed her interactions with Peruvians on her mission trip when she mentioned that “not being able to put it [words] in the right sentence so that they [the Peruvians] would understand it and then when they got what I said they would [speak very quickly] and I was like shoot, and it started all over again and having to ask them to slow down to speak.” She additionally expressed similar concerns about interactions with Spanish speakers in her church, where she felt it was very taxing to carry on in-depth conversations with them.

Part of this speech anxiety also included her difficulties with moving to more advanced grammar structures. “I get nervous,” she stated, “[when] the rules of past, present, like that type of stuff that I get really confused on and like the he/she when its in a weird context. So I get really nervous when it changes from present.” Since she
was unsure of the proper grammatical structures, she had difficulty formulating what she wanted to say, thereby causing her anxiety in her speech. For Jessica, this was the primary thing she wanted to work on during the Second Life program, feeling more comfortable with and practicing her speech. In the next section, I will look at Jessica’s Second Life experience and discuss how she went about completing her activities in-world and what she thought about her experience.

**Jessica’s Second Life Experience**

Prior to beginning the Second Life project, Jessica was excited about the opportunities of speaking with other speakers of Spanish. As a self-described “gamer,” she has experience with other multi-user virtual environments like SIMS, so she looked forward to interacting with people online. She was interested in exploring the different islands and worlds and was hoping to connect with people with whom she could develop a mutual teaching/learning relationship. In her first interview she stated:

> […] being able to speak with someone and even helping them with English too, like it’d be mutual, like she could laugh at me for speaking Spanish and I could laugh at her for speaking English, you know just learning, but I hope to be on there a lot just talking to different people and just getting used to conversation.

She also seemed to understand the goals behind using SL in the classroom, since she identified that her primary objectives for the semester were to meet different people and explore the worlds. Over the course of the project, she did just that. Jessica met

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9 Gamer is the term used to refer to those who enjoy and participate in a variety of different games including but not limited to virtual worlds, online video games, console video games and/or board games.

10 SIMS (short for simulation) is another type of multi-user virtual environment.
many different Spanish speakers online, starting right from the first week of orientation. She spent anywhere from 2-4 hours a week online, speaking with 1-5 Spanish interlocutors and many of these conversations persisted for an hour or more.

Table 4 shows a breakdown of Jessica’s interactions over the course of the 9 weeks\(^{11}\). As can be seen Jessica completed seven out of eight required assignments (orientation plus seven free-tasks). During that time she interacted with thirteen different interlocutors all of whom were unknown OSSs. This accounted for a total of 484 total minutes online.

**Table 4. Jessica’s Division of Time During the Second Life Program.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Amount of Time Spent in Conversation (min)</th>
<th># Interlocutors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 demonstrates that Jessica was not deterred by negative experiences she encountered in the virtual world. As research has shown, having high motivation and a willingness to communicate allows learners to overcome difficult situations and turn anxiety into motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Gardner, 1985; MacIntyre, 2007; Nishitani & Matsuda, 2011). When she thought she was being ignored, a relatively common experience in SL, she would simply look for other interlocutors. She often had

\(^{11}\) Assignments were labeled by week of the program. The absence of weeks 1, 3, and 9 in this table indicates that the student did not submit a journal for those weeks.
multiple conversations going at once in order to find a conversation partner and spent extra time logging in and out of SL in order to see if there were others online with whom she could interact. “Normally I have a couple [conversations] going just in case one stops,” she said when asked about how she goes about finding conversation partners. This shows that she was committed to finding other speakers of Spanish (OSSs) with whom she could have meaningful conversations.

As she progressed through the weeks, she became more and more comfortable using the SL interface and approaching other speakers of Spanish (OSSs). Even from an early point in the project, Jessica was able to see improvement and reported lowered anxiety. Starting in Week 2 she notes, “The more I use second life the more comfortable I get with the layout and how to use it. There are a lot [sic] of places that you can visit. […] I’m really liking SL and can see improvement [sic].” In Week 4, Jessica attempted to use the voice chat feature in order to hold a live conversation with a Spanish speaker. While this caused some technical errors, she was “excited to be finding people to talk to using the microphone.” The combination of feedback and positive interactions reduced her anxiety and gave her more confidence using the target language; this translated itself into the classroom (Gardner, 1985; Gass & Selinker, 2008; MacIntyre, 2007). As I pointed out in Chapter 2, MacIntyre (2007) notes that it takes both motivation and anxiety to converge into a willingness to communicate. Here Jessica’s high motivation, combined with her now reduced anxiety from her target language interactions and improved self-confidence combine to make her more willing to communicate with unknown OSSs. Because of this she is more exposed to more linguistic content and variety online.
All of the OSSs with whom Jessica interacted were unknown speakers not from her classroom. She made the effort to find interlocutors who had time to speak with her for longer periods of time, which ensured that she could have more in-depth conversations with them; and because she only spoke with OSSs outside of her class, she was exposed to more linguistic variety. This will become important later when I discuss her progress during the semester and how the activities affected her overall anxiety and motivation.

Jessica said that she had a good experience with SL overall. She was always able to find other interlocutors with whom she could speak, she visited a variety of different islands with those interlocutors in order to provide content for their conversations, and she used the SL interface to personalize her experience by visiting places that interested her. In Week 2 she visited the Blarney Castle of Ireland with a Spanish speaker from Barcelona. In Week 4 she met a Spanish speaker from Peru in Virtual Spain and eventually had a voice conversation with him through Second Life. In Week 5 she visited Halloween themed islands with two different Spanish interlocutors and in other weeks she and her Spanish-speaking friends went to Latin ballrooms, a replica of Calvary and islands decorated for Christmas. In her journals for each week she mentions that she feels more comfortable with the language and can see her own improvement.

Throughout the semester, Jessica chose to adapt the SL interface to her language learning goals. She made the learning experience personal by finding religious sites of interest and instead of giving herself goals about using different linguistic forms, her goals were more general. For example, in Week 4 her goal was to
“utilize the speaking part of second life [sic].” Due to this, she was the only participant in the class, according to her teacher Tony, who attempted using the live voice chat feature, even though that proved difficult for her due to the technology. In Week 5, her goal was to “Celebrate Halloween On Second Life [capitals in original],” which provided her with conversation starters, and she had her longest conversation of the term, a 2-hour conversation with an interlocutor from Spain.

Jessica found the OSSs to be very friendly and generally willing to talk, but it did take her a while sometimes to find someone who was going to be on long enough for her to fill her one-hour conversation requirement. “All of them are really nice” she said “There’ll be times where I find someone to talk to and I’m like ‘okay, I can see this conversation going for like an hour’ […] I’ve never had a problem getting an hour worth of conversation once I start a conversation with people.” To do this, however, she spent extra time online visiting a variety of locations to find other interlocutors.

Because of this, she mentioned that she would often log on to Second Life and then log off again if she realized she would have a difficult time finding OSSs. “I’ll go on for a little bit and be like okay this isn’t a good time to do it [her assignment], or I just jump on and […] be like ‘nah’ and then jump off.” She would continue this behavior throughout the week in order to find people that had time to speak with her.

Therefore, she spent at least 2 hours per week online having short conversations with a variety of interlocutors until she could find someone that was available to have a longer conversation. When I asked her how much time she was spending on SL she said, “I would say a minimum of 2 hours because normally I will find out what I want to do and then find someone decent to talk to for an hour and then by the time I go
somewhere and talk for an hour it is normally 2 hours.” Her chat log records indicate that she would speak to other interlocutors for at least one hour or longer, up to two hours.

Because of her determination to interact with more knowledgeable OSSs, Jessica grew linguistically (Krashen, 1985; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; MacIntyre, 2007; Swain, 1985). Throughout her chat logs, there are examples of positive feedback, negotiation of meaning and an increased use of more advanced forms with fewer errors. According to Gass and Selinker (2008) “interactional feedback is an important source of information for learners. Most generally, it provides them with information about the success (or, more likely, lack of success) of their utterances and gives additional opportunities to focus on production or comprehension” (p. 329). Table 5 provides excerpts from her chat logs that demonstrate feedback she received. In this table, one can see that the OSSs provided Jessica with explanations of language meaning, helped to correct her language use and gave her complements about her language use, which bolstered her confidence.

While this is current line of research does not attempt to analyze these linguistic affordances in more detail (that will be a recommendation for future research), these examples help to demonstrate the type of interactions Jessica had and how they affected her anxiety and motivation. By receiving complements about her language use, Jessica felt more confident and was then willing to take more risks. In our last interview she stated:

I was like yeah, I’m learning Spanish and all this stuff and they’re like ‘oh you speak well’ and I’m like ‘I’m learning’ and they’re like ‘you speak pretty
good Spanish’ or ‘you write well’ or something like that and it’s just like ‘okay I’m not as bad or I don’t stick out like I can’t speak or don’t speak Spanish.

**Table 5.** Types of Feedback Jessica Received During Activities in SL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Type</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recasts</td>
<td>Jessica: <em>Gracias muy mucho</em> AM: <em>Muchas gracias ;)</em></td>
<td>Jessica: <strong>Thanks very much</strong> (literal translation from English) AM: Thanks very much (appropriate word order)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jessica: gracias..<em>mucho practica</em>; escribo mejor que hablo</td>
<td>Jessica: thanks.. <strong>much practice</strong>; I write better than I speak Gabo: Thanks..I <em>practice a lot</em> (correcting her error above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complements</td>
<td>Jessica: tu hablas ingles bien! Gabo: No tan bien como tú hablas el español.</td>
<td>Jessica: you speak English well! Gabo: Not as well as you speak Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jessica: estoy aprender espanol ZB: tu español no esta mal</td>
<td>Jessica: I am learning Spanish ZB: your Spanish isn’t bad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The feedback she received from these, and other, interlocutors allowed her to modify her own linguistic hypotheses and become a more confident language user:

Most of the time they’ll correct you like if I’ve already told them that I’m learning Spanish and all this stuff, like, most of the time they’ll just be like ‘it’s said this way, or typed this way.’ They’re pretty nice, they’re not angry about it and sometimes they’ll just laugh and be like ‘it’s this’ or something like that, it’s [interacting is] a *lot easier.*
As I have discussed above, Jessica’s experiences were generally positive and involved long conversations with a variety of OSSs from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. She took extra time online to ensure that she could have in-depth conversations and used the SL interface to provide activities and content for those conversations. Because of this, further analysis of her time in SL will show that she underwent a more drastic transition than Melissa, my second participant. In the sections that follow, I will discuss Melissa’s background, motivations, anxieties and Second Life experience. At the end of the chapter I will answer my guiding research questions by using the data I have collected, and in Chapter 5, I will move to a discussion of the theoretical and pedagogical implications of this research.

Melissa: Struggling to find her Ideal L2 Self

Melissa was a 20-year old female at Slate University. She was junior at the university studying science, but she had no specific plans for what she wanted to do after graduating. On her background questionnaire, Melissa self identified as Caucasian and had studied Spanish in both middle and high school, for a total of 6 years prior to enrolling in Spanish 102. While Melissa had all the makings to become a proficient user of Spanish, she struggle with her ability to make language learning a part of her future self image.

Motivations and Anxieties: Melissa’s Motivational-Self System

Melissa’s case presented a very different picture. In the model of Melissa’s L2 Motivational Self System (Figure 5), I have illustrated how Melissa’s Ideal L2 Self was undefined and she had more influences from our Ought-to Self and her L2 Learning Environment. As I will discuss in the following section, the lack of a strong and vivid
Ideal L2 Self Image plays a significant role in her motivations over the course of the semester and limits the role that Second Life could have played in minimizing her foreign language anxieties (FLA).

**Figure 5.** Melissa’s L2 Motivational Self System.

*Diagram of Melissa’s L2 Motivational Self System that describes her pre-existing motivations prior to the beginning of the research period. Key quotations from the interviews or questionnaire are included to support the descriptions.*

Melissa’s primary indication for learning a language was for fun. According to her, she chose to study Spanish for two reasons: in her middle school, when she started learning a language, no other options were available and because her mother was from Mexico. In Chapter 3, I discussed how Melissa was adopted and raised from infancy by her father’s parents and has never had contact with her mother or her mother’s family. In her first interview, she stated:
Well the only one [language] I considered studying was Spanish. I didn’t really consider studying any other languages. It was the only offered in my middle school, I went to a private middle school, and I just really liked it and then my mom is from Mexico, but I don’t have any contact with her so I always have thought that was interesting.

In her background questionnaire, Melissa self identified as Caucasian, however, as can be seen in the quote above, she revealed that her birth mother was Mexican.

Melissa said that even though her mother was from Mexico, she never had any contact with the culture or language prior to middle school and she does not consider herself to be Latina, nor does she identify herself as being part of the Latino community or a heritage language learner, even after giving her a description of a heritage language learner (Carreira, 2004; Valdés, 2001) “I don’t have anything in my life culturally that would relate to it [Mexican heritage],” she replied when I asked her if she would consider herself a heritage language learner. In light of this and the research I presented in Chapter 3 about identification of heritage language learners, even though one of her reasons for learning Spanish is “because [her] mom was Mexican,” I will not be treating her as a heritage language learner (Carreira, 2004; Valdés, 2001).

Melissa’s ideal self was not very well defined in our interviews. She mentioned several times that Spanish was an elective and she was primarily learning it for fun. When asked in our first interview about why she was learning a language she had this to say:

I don’t know [why I am studying a language] I just, I find it really interesting, where most subjects I’m like ‘oh, this is boring, I could care
less,’ where if I learn about something about the culture of a different
culture I’m like ‘that’s really interesting, I’ve never thought about it that way
’ or something like that and there’s just, like, I relate to my friends. It’s
interesting to be like ‘oh now I kind of get how all this is connecting’
depending on their kind of background, and then for kind of learning the
language part of it, I hope to use it, I just don’t know if I will.

In this quote, Melissa acknowledges that she does not know why she is studying a
foreign language. Unlike Jessica who had a clear purpose for learning Spanish, Melissa
struggled with understanding or defining how the language played role in her life. While
she found it “fun” and “interesting,” she did not see how it would be applicable to her
future self. She addressed this point further later in the interview:

Career wise I don’t think it’s [learning Spanish] going to be very useful so I
don’t see much there, there’s not really like a reason besides a personal.
It’s kind of just something I want to do for me just so I have that knowledge
and experience even if there’s not a whole lot of ways to use it. I’m not
doing it so I can use it necessarily, but just so I can learn more about it I
guess.

This quote shows that her ideal L2 self was perhaps not be as strong as it should be to
be motivational, like Jessica who had a clear vision of how the language would be part
of who she wanted to become.

While she stated that she wanted to learn Spanish for personal reasons, both
because she thought it was interesting and also because of her birth heritage, she did
not have a strong vision of how the language would apply in her future. This eventually
became important as she moved through the semester, because she found it hard to concentrate on Spanish and make it a priority when the classes for her major were becoming more demanding. Dörnyei (2009) posits that, in order for the L2 Motivational Self System to be truly motivation, a language learner must have a clear image of what their future self will be and how a language rests within that image. Additionally, they must have external sources of motivation and have a positive L2 learning environment. As we will see throughout this analysis, Melissa had less than desirable conditions in each of these areas. Coupled with the fact that she already felt comfortable with her level of linguistic knowledge at the beginning of the semester and that she preferred casual conversation environments where she did not need to challenge herself, little growth was noticed in motivation, anxiety or linguistic competence.

**Melissa's ought-to self.** Melissa had few external factors outside of the language-learning environment that affected her motivation to learn a foreign language. As previously mentioned she chose Spanish because that was the only option at her school, but she did value learning a language prior to that. She also did not identify other external influences like growing Spanish-speaking population, or potential job benefits that may have had influenced her decision to study a language.

She did, however, mention that her mother and her mother’s family were one of the reasons she thought she should study a language. While she did not consider her birth heritage to be part of her ideal L2 Self, it was clear that she felt a push to study Spanish from her background. When asked about the role her family played in her desire to learn Spanish she said, “Well, it motivates me just because a lot of my family probably still is in Mexico, but I don’t really consider myself [Hispanic].” This quote is
illustrative of how Melissa felt that she one of the reasons she should learn Spanish was that her mother’s family was from Mexico, but that she did not feel that getting in touch with that side of her heritage was an intrinsic motivating factor, as a heritage language learner might. Her background serves as more of an extrinsic factor, part of her ought-to self. It will be evident throughout the rest of this analysis that this factor did little to influence her motivations and anxieties during the semester of this research.

**Melissa’s L2 learning environment.** Melissa started learning Spanish in middle school primarily because it was part of the curriculum. As a private middle school, they tried to integrate language classes into the curriculum starting in the 6th grade. All students participated in Spanish classes one day per week in the 6th and 7th grades, and then everyday for a semester in 8th grade. She continued with the Spanish in high school for three years, but, as she stated, she “wasn’t as motivated in high school.”

According to first interview:

> I wasn’t as motivated in high school. I think part of that was kind of how the class was set up. It was a lot of, like, for our tests we’d have to just sit with the teacher, but the whole class was there too, and answer questions by talking and I just didn’t really like that, you know?

The way the teacher conducted tests caused high amounts of anxiety for Melissa. These tests consisted of students sitting in front of the entire class and the teacher while they listened to questions on a set of headphones and then had to reply to the question out-loud for the teacher to hear. Due to this experience, Melissa decided not to continue with Spanish immediately when she started at Slate University.
Even though she waited three years between her high school classes and her first university Spanish class, Melissa came into the classroom with more linguistic knowledge and more comfort with the language than Jessica. She consistently scored the highest in the class on tests and assignments, and, according to her teacher, she was also the most active and vocal at the beginning of the semester. She was always one of the first to raise her hand to answer a question. “I’m a little bit more motivated in college Spanish wise, to try harder and get more out of it than I was in high school,” she said in our first interview at the beginning of the semester. However, this would change over the semester, as I will discuss in Chapter 5.

Melissa also had experience traveling abroad. In her interviews she discussed several trips that her parents (her biological grandparents) took to Mexico and a recent attempt at traveling to Peru the summer of 2013. Her parents took her on vacations to Isla Mujeres, a small island off the coast of Mexico, twice and she said the experiences were always positive and that she enjoyed the environment, culture, people and the opportunity to use her linguistic skills. When describing her trips to Mexico she said:

I went to Isla Mujeres twice with just my family and that was really awesome. It wasn’t a resort so you actually got to talk to a lot of people that they only speak Spanish, they barely speak English, so I felt like I got to practice a lot and that was really fun because it, I don’t know, everyone things its fun that you are trying to speak Spanish, you know so they’re try to help you […]
In later interviews she revealed that the majority of the people with whom she interacted were waiters, clerks, and hotel staff, but she always had positive experiences and that made her enjoy using her Spanish.

She continued her interest for traveling abroad in the summer of 2013 with a trip to Peru. This trip was not as positive of an experience as her trips to Mexico:

When I went to Peru, that was in May of this year [2013], I got really sick and I had to come home so I was only there for about a week. I was supposed to be there like a month so I didn’t get as much practice with my Spanish and I also felt like a lot of people there spoke a lot more English than in Mexico even, which I was kind of surprised, so I didn’t use my Spanish as much, but I did use it, definitely on a daily basis.

This trip was a research trip conducted by a sister university and included travel to mostly tourist areas in a group of English-speaking students with an American teacher. The focus of the trip was science and not Spanish and Melissa later identified that as one of the reasons she did not feel she had to use as much Spanish. It was the semester after this trip that Melissa enrolled in Beginning Spanish 2.

Melissa, at the beginning of the semester, was very excited about studying Spanish again. She enjoyed Tony’s communicative approach to the classroom, and due to her extra years of language study, was clearly more advanced than most of her classmates. In his interview, Tony described Melissa as “outgoing from the start. […] She was very efficient in class, she was always done before everyone else and she always knew an answer.” This was reflected in her scores in class and the way she attacked her work. However, over the course of the semester, her motivations began to
change. As I will outline during the discussion on Question 2 there are several possible explanations for this, and in order analyze these explanations, I now turn to a discussion of Melissa’s foreign language anxieties.

**Melissa’s foreign language learning anxieties.** Melissa stressed that her primary anxieties in foreign language learning were with speaking, especially with test taking or giving presentations. These anxieties began in high school with her teacher’s exam techniques and persisted primarily in the classroom environment. As Young (1991) and Kim (2009) found, anxieties related to speaking are very common and usually those situations are more anxiety inducing than others. Additionally, these anxieties are consistent with the research conducted by Coryell and Clark (2009) who found that a focus on perfection, as in tests and presentations, can increase anxiety in the foreign language classroom.

When she discussed her time traveling to Mexico, she said that there was “less pressure” when speaking with people there because she did not have to focus on the exact form of her message, as she would have in class. “It was pretty easy to use my language skills,” she said, “even though I probably wasn’t saying things the exact right way they sill could understand what I was saying.” However, she did express increased anxiety when she would have to speak with hotel or serving staff and convey an exact message:

> I felt like it’s easier to talk to people if you’re having a fun conversation you know? […] Where if it’s something that you have to talk about, kind of like at a hotel if we’re checking in or something […], if it’s a point that you have to get across like in one certain way that was a lot harder than just kind of
having a random conversation where you could kind of insert different things or whatever if you know how to say it or you didn’t. Whereas if you’re trying to get something across that you have to know how to say in a certain way then that was frustrating because its harder to say it.

This quote is very telling of Melissa’s anxieties because she felt this way in both in-class and out-of-class communications. In the classroom, she said she was much more anxious in testing and presentation situations for a grade than she was in small group work or just talking in class. As I have already stated, this attitude is supported by current research like that of Coryell and Clark (2009), in that she found increased anxiety when forced to speak in “one right way,” and this theme influence how she chose to conduct her Second Life experience.

**Melissa’s Second Life Experience**

Melissa’s SL experience was very different from Jessica’s. While Jessica took the extra time and effort to find speakers from other Spanish speaking countries, Melissa grew frustrated with looking for others and chose to do the majority of her assignments with friends from class. During the orientation week Melissa chose not to speak with anyone, even though they were asked to, “because [she] was preoccupied with clothing [her avatar] and learning how to navigate.” Working within the world did not come easily to her and it took her longer to feel comfortable with the SL platform.

In Table 6, I have outlined Melissa’s Second Life usage statistics. The table shows that Melissa turned in only six of the eight required assignments. She spoke with only six other interlocutors, half of which were her classmates. These conversations
accounted for a total of 246 minutes in conversation, which is half of the amount of time Jessica spent in conversation.

**Table 6. Melissa’s Division of Time During the Second Life Project.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Amount of Time Spent in Conversation (min)</th>
<th># Interlocutors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1 - unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2 - unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1 - classmate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1 - classmate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1 - classmate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jessica chose to do all of her SL activity for each week at one time. “I do it all at once,” she said, “I don’t come back.” She chose a day and a time each week and did not go on SL any other times during the week. In her journals and in our interviews she reported feeling frustrated that she had difficulties finding others for conversation. In her journal for Week 2, she wrote:

> I started in Virtual Spain and then I did my first search in the worlds. I searched for a location related to animals so then I decided to travel to animal isle\(^{12}\). Animal isle said I was not part of the group therefore I could not enter. I traveled to Peru, and a few other places but it was hard to find people to talk to! Finally I just decided to go back to Virtual Spain because I spent an hour already just trying to find someone to talk to!

\(^{12}\) Melissa did not know that Animal Isle is an island for what is known as a “furry” in SL, an animal shaped avatar. There are many users that choose to have animal avatars and they have their own societies with their own sets of rules. There are many islands that are reserved for “furries” in SL, and users who are not members of the group do not have access to those areas.
This frustration with locating other interlocutors also emerged in our second interview where she stated, “I tried and do it [her assignment] in the day one week and then it was just dead everywhere there was nobody on Monday.” However, she made no efforts that week to try another day and waited until the next week to change the day and time she would log on.

In addition to this, Melissa reported frustrations with understanding the OSSs from Spanish speaking countries. In her first week using SL after the orientation, Melissa had a short 30-minute conversation with an avatar she met in Virtual Spain. Even though she said he was nice, she reported that she “wonder[ed] if he thought I was silly for trying to use proper grammar.”

The following week, Week 2, Melissa had more trouble finding people on the Spanish speaking islands due to her limited time frame for completing the activities. When she finally managed to find someone, she felt that he was trying to discourage conversation and asking that she go somewhere else to find someone with whom she could speak. In our second interview she said:

I was in Spain one day trying to talk to people and then this one guy, who I think was kind of a person that leads a lot of stuff in Spain or something like that cause he’s always there, was like ‘this isn’t really a place for learning so you should probably go somewhere else’ or something like that, like this is only a place for, I don’t remember how exactly he said it, but kind of like ‘go find someone else to talk to somewhere else’ and I was like ‘oh!’
Further analysis of her chat logs showed that her negative interpretation of this situation might have been the result of a possible miss-communication. However, whether there was a miss-communication or not, this conversation was a source of frustration for her.

Although she was more advanced than other students to begin with, Melissa still chose to stay in her comfort zone by surrounding herself with classmates instead of continuing to interact with OSSs from other Spanish-speaking countries. When she first encountered experiences that she viewed as negative online (i.e. people using too much slang made it too difficult to communicate, or the interlocutor who dismissed her), she became frustrated with the exercises and stopped trying to find people outside her class with whom she could communicate. In the last 5 weeks she visited only Instituto Español, an in-world Spanish language school, and attended a live concert and explored some of the cultural artifacts they have created on that island.

As a result, there was minimal evidence of linguistic growth, exposure to alternative linguistic features, or corrective feedback of Melissa’s language in her chat logs, like there is in Jessica’s dialogues. Melissa seemed to prefer adapting the role of the more knowledgeable speaker (the reasons for this are currently unknown, but would make for an interesting avenue of investigation in the future). This was demonstrated in her chat logs, where there is still some evidence of linguistic feedback, but it is her giving feedback to her classmates instead of receiving feedback.

In Table 7 below, we can see a portion of the conversation between Melissa and her classmate JR. This is the only evidence of feedback in her chat logs. In the example, JR asks Melissa if the person she is talking about has medication and he
incorrectly spells the verb “tiene” as “tine”. Melissa uses a clarification request to elicit the correct verb form.

Melissa’s move from speaking with more knowledgeable OSSs to her classmates also coincided with the increase in course work that she experienced in her other classes. All of these factors combined led to a decreased in language learning motivation as the semester progressed and courses became more demanding and difficult.

**Table 7. Evidence of Linguistic Feedback in Melissa’s Chat Logs.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Feedback</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarification request</td>
<td>Melissa: si fue loco pero esta bien</td>
<td>Melissa: yes it was crazy but that’s okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JR: el tine medicacion?</td>
<td>JR: does he ‘tine’ (have) medication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melissa: tine?</td>
<td>Melissa: tine?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JR: tiene lo siento</td>
<td>JR: tiene sorry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unfortunately, it took her most of the semester just to get accustomed to using the SL platform and learn how the virtual space worked. She also did not realize the affect the time difference between her location and others would have. In our second interview she stated “I usually actually go on really late, I usually go on at like 10 or 9 […] I didn’t think about the time difference really I just tried to fit it in where I could fit it in.” She did not consider that these times might not have been appropriate for users in other countries. In her final journal entry she wrote, “This was a very successful evening in secondlife [sic]. I had a lovely chat with Jack and now I am feeling much more comfortable with using secondlife [sic] navigation wise. I was disappointed however to not find very many users online.”

From this data we can see that Melissa’s experience on SL was very different from Jessica’s. Melissa faced what she felt were a few difficult interactions with
unknown OSSs and had difficulties locating interlocutors due to her restricted SL access times. She then chose to communicate and explore the virtual world only with fellow classmates. In the next sections, I will discuss how these choices in her SL experience may have affected her overall progress in the course and her anxieties and motivations, as I use the data from this investigation to address my guiding research questions.

**The Research Questions**

In this section, I will present the data I have collected as it relates to each research question. Each question will be answered individually and then discussed in further detail in Chapter 5. While both participants created their avatars and had similar opinions about how to conduct themselves within the virtual world, the data shows that they each had very different experiences. Additionally, as I will discuss in the next chapter, each participant acknowledged a different level of affect of SL on their anxieties and motivations, which may have been a direct result of how and with whom they chose to communicate online.

**Question 1: In What Ways Do Spanish Language Learners Use the Avatar Personalization Features to Create a Representation of Their Ideal L2-Self?**

It was evident that the participants in this research did not create avatars based on images of their Ideal L2-Selves. Both Melissa and Jessica chose to create avatars that more or less represented what they looked like in real life (RL). Therefore, there was little evidence of transformation, which has been speculated to be more likely to affect RL behavior (Parmentier & Rolland, 2009; Yee & Bailenson, 2007). “I guess I could be anyone I wanted to be,” said Jessica, “but, you know, I think it’s just like who you think you are could be your avatar, but you know I just keep it plain pretty much.” In
the following sections, I will describe how Jessica and Melissa designed their avatars and show that despite a lack of transformation, both participants still felt that the avatar in SL served as a face-saving device that made interacting in Spanish easier in-world than in RL.

Jessica. Jessica chose clothes that were similar to ones she would wear “if she dressed up in real life” and found a hairstyle that was similar in color and shape. “Obviously,” she said, “my hair is more done than I normally do my own hair, but […] I think it looks the most like I could get it [her avatar] to look like me virtually. I found an outfit that I think I would wear if I dressed up.” It is not surprising that both participants chose to mimic their RL selves, since this trend was also noted by Messinger et al. (2008) and my own previous research (Wehner, 2010; Wehner, Gump, & Downey, 2011).

Figure 6. Photograph of Jessica’s Avatar.

This image was cropped to make the avatar the central figure in the image.
Jessica was a fairly simply dressed person in real life usually wearing a sweatshirt, jeans and running shoes. She chose equally simple fashions for her avatar (See Figure 6). She did not feel the need to create an avatar that was not like herself. “[It’s] my style,” Jessica said of her avatar, “it’s not crazy like I’m going to be someone totally different than this like I am here [real life]. No I’ve [referencing her avatar] got brown hair and the style I would wear if I dressed up. For me to come up with a different personality, it was just easier for me to stick with who I am.” It was important to her to maintain her own look and personality.

While Jessica’s avatar typically wore a t-shirt and jeans, she did experiment a little during the holidays. For Halloween in Week 5, she changed her avatar to a vampire in order to celebrate and find a common ground for conversation (see Figure 8). Her goal for that week stated: “My goal is to Celebrate Halloween On Second life [sic]. Dress up and talk to other people dressed up. I would also like to find a Halloween party or something similar to go to.” By adapting her avatar in this way she felt she was able to approach others that were dressed up. “It was fun going on second life today and having a topic to talk about Halloween” she noted in her weekly journal. “It makes it easy [sic] than just trying to strike up a conversation.” This minor change in her avatar appearance also indicates her desire to integrate in SL culture, which helped her immerse herself more fully in the program.

Figure 7 shows the transition of Jessica’s avatar throughout the semester. You can see that for the most part she is simply and conservatively dressed and maintains the same physical profile. However, in Week 5 she changes her avatar to a vampire costume in order to commemorate Halloween. As reported by Martey and Consalvo
(2011), this is common behavior in avatar design. They noticed that users will commonly design the base of their avatar to reflect their real life self, but then modify that avatar slightly depending on their goals for their interactions during a particular session, this was the case for Jessica. In Week 6 she reverted back to the stock avatar she chose upon registration. In our second interview, she explained that this was because she had experienced a technical malfunction that caused her to loose her clothes and in order to correct it she had to reselect her beginning avatar and start over. “One time I tried to fix something and I [her avatar] literally ended up naked in the middle of the area and it was like ‘NO!’ and then I had to put back on my original avatar.” This malfunction occurred when she was attempting to put on the new outfit she had acquired that is pictured in the remaining images in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Transformation of Jessica’s Avatar During the SL Project.

Transformation of Jessica’s Avatar During the SL Project. From the orientation on the left to Week 8 on the right, we can see that Jessica’s avatar changed in Week 5 to reflect a Halloween costume, then in Week 6 to the stock avatar and then in Week 7 to the final avatar she chose for the project.

Although much of the physical appearance of Jessica’s avatar was “as close to real life as possible,” one behavioral factor that will be of significance in our discussion arose. Jessica’s avatar spoke Spanish, and nothing else. Throughout the semester, Jessica saw the SL environment and her avatar as a place to speak Spanish. When asked about this in her second interview, four weeks into the program, she said:
Second Life is strictly Spanish, but in the classroom, I’m not gonna lie, there’s times when I’ll wait for Tony to come by and we’ll speak in Spanish and then as soon as he walks away we [her and her friends] are like ‘what was that?’ and are still kind of confused and still learning, we are kinda like ‘Spanish, Spanish, English, English’ you know? Sneakin’ it in there, but just on Second Life we can’t say what we want to say to them in English because they don’t understand so it has to be strictly Spanish. […] I don’t even think I’ve talked to an American or anyone that speaks full English.

When Jessica was in SL, she spoke Spanish. Even though she presented herself to most other interlocutors as a Spanish language learner, she maintained the use of Spanish consistently in Second Life. “Your motive for being on Second Life is to completely speak in Spanish,” she said, “so I know that’s our motive for class, but it’s a lot easier to do it when everyone around you isn’t kind of confused or need to know what to say.”

Despite the lack of transformation in the physical appearance of the avatar, Jessica did view her avatar as “more talkative and outgoing” a trait that she hoped to carry on in real life during her travels to Peru at the end of that year. This is consistent with research by Yuen et al. (2013) and Messinger et al. (2011) where participants reported feeling more outgoing in interactions on SL than in real life. When discussing her upcoming trip to Peru she said “I would like to be talkative like I am in Second Life […] I hope that I talk to just anyone [in Peru].” This and the fact that she was able to maintain Spanish in SL and not in the classroom will present itself again as we look at how Melissa represented herself in SL.
Melissa. Melissa and Jessica used very similar thought processes when discussing the reasons for their avatar personalization choices in SL. Melissa also felt that it was easier to design the avatar after herself, to represent herself accurately and to use her own personality (Figure 8). She also wanted to find the “most modest appearance possible” in SL and did not conform to the traditional ways SL users dress their avatars. “I changed the hairstyle to be more like one I would probably wear” she said. “I also changed the outfit to be more like something I would probably wear. I don’t remember what my avatar looked like at first, but I think it was kind of like American Indian or something like really fancy clothes on, so I just kind of went toward American style of clothing I guess.”

Figure 8. Photograph of Melissa’s Avatar. This image was cropped to make the avatar the central figure in the image.
The avatar she initially chose was a furry in the form of a rabbit (which I found out later was because she really like rabbits), but she quickly changed to the human avatar pictured in Figure 8. This avatar was her only representation for the entire program (Figure 9). Unlike Jessica, Melissa never made any other attempts to change her avatar even to provoke conversation with other interlocutors. She remained exactly as she was throughout the 10-week period. In our final interview, Melissa expressed that she was “just content with how she looks and how she represents me I suppose.” Jessica described her avatar as “pretty reserved as much as she can be on Second Life, and I don’t know, she has brown hair and brown eyes, so I guess it kind of looks like me a little bit, so I just try to make her as much similar to me as possible.”

![Figure 9](image)

**Figure 9.** Transformation of Melissa’s Avatar During the SL Project.

*This figure shows the transformation of Melissa’s avatar, from the stock “furry” rabbit representation during the orientation to the humanoid female representation in Week 1. There were no other changes to her avatar.*

Like Jessica, Melissa noted that her avatar’s personality was the same has her, and she also distinguished that her avatar only spoke in Spanish and that she was more outgoing. In Interview 2 she noted:

[My avatar is] pretty similar to probably real life. I think online I’m more outgoing with my Spanish you know? I’m more willing to use it and I don’t
have to sit there and think about ‘oh wait is my grammar perfectly correct?’
or things like that [...].

It was surprising to me that even though she was primarily talking to her classmates, whom she saw every day, she was able to maintain speaking with them in Spanish in SL, but not in the classroom. Additionally, I will discuss the possible affects of both avatar appearance and behavior on Jessica’s and Melissa’s anxiety and motivation.

Since both participants used duplication to create their avatars, rather than transformation or metamorphosis, the ways Jessica and Melissa used SL as Spanish speakers are not visible in the physical appearance of their avatars, but rather in their ability to see the whole space as a place to only speak in Spanish. This is most likely due to the immersion atmosphere that is similar to that of a study abroad experience. While neither could directly articulate how her avatar represented her as a Spanish speaker, it is clear from the discussion above and their interviews that they saw this as an opportunity to force themselves to speak Spanish and possibly become Spanish speakers. This is further related to how their avatar presence and experiences in SL affected their foreign language anxieties.

**Question 2: In What Ways, if any, Does Using an Avatar in Communications with Other Speakers of Spanish Affect a Spanish Language Learner’s (a) Anxiety and (b) Motivation?**

**Avatars and anxiety.** As I demonstrated in the previous section, both participants chose to create their avatars to resemble their real life selves as closely as possible, thus there was little evidence of transformation which was cited by Yee & Bailenson (2007) as the optimum condition for affecting change through the Proteus
Effect. Despite that, however, both participants felt more comfortable and confident using Spanish in Second Life when compared with other situations (e.g. classroom, travel, Facebook, or Skype). This supports previous research conducted by Martey and Consalvo (2011), Messinger et al. (2011), and Yuen et al. (2013) that looked at the affects of virtual worlds on anxiety. These author found that people who are normally shy or have social anxiety disorders in real life become more outgoing during there interactions in SL and according to these participants, the reason for this was that the avatar proved useful as a face-saving device, protecting their RL identities. Both Jessica and Melissa saw the avatar as a face-saving device, which lowered their inhibitions due to the fact that other interlocutors did not “know who they were,” which affirms speculations on the affordance of SL to provide this kind of protective feature to language learners (Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008; Thorne, Black & Sykes, 2009).

Jessica identified that the primary way the avatar benefited her was that it provided a face-saving device and gave her some anonymity. She, therefore, felt less anxious when interacting with OSSs in Second Life and was able to maintain her use of Spanish online, when she was unable to do so in real life. When asked about how having an avatar affected her experience in SL she said:

I guess anything virtual, it’s not a face, it’s not like a Skype or anything like that so you don’t have to, I don’t know how to say, you don’t have to impress them or be embarrassed without making yourself embarrassed in Second Life. You can do some actions that are embarrassing or whatever on Second Life […] Like, if I’m embarrassed because I said the wrong thing, they don’t see me blushing, it is just my avatar, you get what I’m
saying? So that takes away anxiety, or you can just stop talking to them if it gets weird, you know?

She also felt that SL was different from other online forms of communication because of the face-saving nature of the avatar. Since one of the interlocutors she met wanted to meet on Skype to have conversations, she compared SL several times with that platform. She determined that she felt more comfortable with SL because she was not using her real name or face as she would have on Skype. In the following quote she recounts her interaction with one interlocutor on Second Life who wanted to talk with her on Skype and how she did not feel comfortable with that level of connection:

I have had one of the gentlemen I’ve met on Second Life, he wants to learn English and I think he’s like my age, I don’t know where he’s from, but like I did make a separate Skype just for people that I meet on Second Life that I could talk, you know, in Spanish with. Just so it’s not my personal Skype, but just a separate one, so I haven’t talked to him on Skype yet, but maybe [laughs] maybe I will, I don’t know. I’m still kind of iffy about people.

When I followed up with her in our final interview about this, asking if she ever chatted on Skype with this person, she said:

No. no. It’s my other Skype so I don’t even think to try and sign in to my other one to see if he’s on and his name on second life, he hasn’t been on either so I’m just not going to stalk him on Skype, so no I haven’t.

The anonymity provided by the avatar seems to offer protective features both for her feeling of safety on the Internet and for her ability and desire to use the target language.
Due to the anonymity of the avatar, Jessica became more outgoing in her communications with unknown OSSs, and because of the feedback and confidence she received from those interactions that I discussed earlier, those changes in confidence were revealed in her RL behavior.

In my interview with Jessica’s professor, Tony, I asked about the changes he had seen in the participants over the course of the semester. He noted that Jessica clearly became more confident throughout the semester and was more willing to take risks in casual conversation in the classroom. “Jessica got more comfortable,” he said “she just seemed less nervous throughout the semester as things progressed.” He continued to know that, “Jessica gradually opened up more throughout the class and gradually kind of progressed, both as far as how much she was able to do and how much she was willing to do.” This transition was also evident throughout our interviews and in my own class observations of Jessica, where she clearly seemed more involved and attentive at the end of the semester than she was at the beginning.

Despite the absence of physical transformation in Jessica’s avatar appearance, there were still enough factors from her activities in Second Life that helped to produce changes in real life. In this case, it did not appear necessary for there to be full transformation of the RL self in SL in order for Jessica to reap the benefits of the Proteus Effect (Yee & Bailenson, 2007). While there were certainly other factors that contributed to this change (i.e. communicative classroom environment, interactions with Peruvians over the semester), Jessica still recognized the significant role that SL played in her development. When I asked her in our final interview about how she felt SL had prepared her for her upcoming trip she replied:
Better than if I wouldn’t have used it at all. It helped more than if I wouldn’t have done it at all. It just helped reassure that I know Spanish. I don’t know all of it, but its like I understand it, you’re not a lost cause at Spanish [laughs]. […] It definitely made me feel better about going down there and trying to speak Spanish instead of just being like 'no hablo español'!

This quote reveals how participation in activities in SL can affect a language learner, especially one preparing to study abroad. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, further investigation into how this can be applied to the study abroad context is necessary. However, Jessica was able to see the benefits of using SL to interact with more knowledgeable Spanish speakers and used that to her advantage to prepare herself for her time abroad.

In general, Melissa did not feel that the avatar specifically affected her motivation or anxiety in language learning. However, after some difficult interactions with unknown OSSs as I showed earlier, she chose to interact only with her classmates, which is likely to have affected this. Despite the fact that she did not feel a direct affect of having an avatar, she too acknowledged that it was easier to have conversations in Spanish in SL than in the classroom:

Well, the conversations I have in Second Life are definitely deeper than the ones you’d have in class, you know? Because you’re talking to real people and they are interested [in] getting to know people. They’re not just interested in going through things and getting what we need to get done, you know? They’re there because they actually want to converse with people.
She speculated that the reason for her perception of reduced anxiety was primarily due to the fact that she was communicating in writing, her more comfortable mode of communication. In our second interview, halfway through the semester she stated:

I really like writing in Spanish, I don't really like speaking it because I feel like it's too much. It just comes easier when I'm just writing so that's probably why it's easy in Second Life because I just have to type.

This was similar to the Jessica. However, Jessica ventured beyond writing to using the voice chat features of SL and Melissa did not. Because of this, she did not feel there was much of an affect on her foreign language anxiety, since the majority of her anxieties related to speaking and not writing:

I'm not sure that it [SL] really helped me. I mean obviously I'm practicing my Spanish so it helped somewhat, you know with practicing, but I don't think anxiety wise that it helped me because my anxiety is mainly about speaking and talking and on Second Life I was typing so I don't really have much anxiety when I'm writing things out in Spanish because I can kind of take more of my time.

Despite this, she still acknowledged that she felt more “outgoing” and comfortable with her Spanish online, just as Jessica did. In our last interview she said:

I think online I'm more outgoing with my Spanish you know? I'm more willing to use it and I don't have to sit there and think about ‘oh wait is my grammar perfectly correct’ or things like that where if I was talking to an actual Spanish speaker face-to-face I would probably be more embarrassed by mistakes I might make.
In our final interview, Melissa also revealed that the ability to log off, walk away, and being unknown actually did have some affect on her anxiety. She stated:

I guess in some ways it [the avatar] kind of affects [anxiety], you know? I can just kind of walk away if I want to, so I don’t have to be nervous about what I’m saying or if I’m saying it totally correct, or things like that, because no one knows that that’s you and their not going to be like ‘oh, that girl’s not very good at speaking Spanish,’ you know? Because they don’t know that it’s me.

As is evident from this quote and Jessica’s similar ideas that were discussed above, both Melissa and Jessica felt some security in having an avatar presence, even when speaking with their own classmates. This demonstrates that SL has the potential to provide, at minimum, a Spanish only environment that is not necessarily achievable in the classroom. Additionally, the avatar does, in these cases act as a face-saving device, minimizing the anxiety of the participants and allowing them to feel more comfortable interacting with OSSs, both known and unknown. This supports the hypothesis of this study and other researchers that the avatar can act in this way (Sykes, et al., 2008; Thorne, et al., 2009)

The fact that they were able to maintain using the Spanish language in the SL environment when they were unable to do so in the classroom holds several implications for the classroom, as well as other areas, like study abroad. These, along with other theoretical and pedagogical implications will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5. I will now look at how the use of an avatar in communications with OSSs may, or may not have affect overall participant motivation in this study.
**Avatars and motivation.** It was evident from the data that activities in SL did not affect motivation, but rather learner motivation affected how these participants used the platform for language learning, thus supporting the claims that motivation is one of the dominating factors in language learning success (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Gardner, 1985; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Ortega, 2009). Jessica’s primary motivational factor was her trip to Peru at the end of the semester. This seemed to drive all other classroom and online behaviors. The same was true for Melissa whose lack of a strong Ideal L2 Self made it easier for her to stay in her comfort zone.

I originally hypothesized in this study that because of the inverse relationship between motivation and anxiety as defined by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), that if anxiety in these cases went down, motivation would go up. However, motivation in these cases seemed to be more directly related to the concept of the Ideal L2 Self and the ability of the participants to envision the language as part of their future-self identities. While both participants agreed that there was some affect on anxiety due to the face-saving nature of the avatar, as I showed in the previous section, the level of the effect of the SL environment on anxiety, in these cases, seemed to be influenced by the pre-existing L2 motivation Self System and their chosen interlocutors (Dörnyei, 2009).

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Jessica, who had a very strong Ideal L2 Self image was more motivated to use the affordances of SL to their fullest; whereas Melissa, whose L2 Self Image was weaker in terms of how she envisioned Spanish playing a role, stayed within her comfort zone and limited her communications to classmates. Jessica made extra time to be online, spoke only to unknown OSSs, and, according to her teacher, put forth more of an effort to develop her linguistic abilities in
the classroom. The level of confidence that Jessica gained from SL manifested itself in the classroom, where she made noticeable improvements in linguistic knowledge and use, whereas the changes in Melissa were more negative, leading to weakened motivation in the language classroom (Gardner, 1985; MacIntyre, 2007). It seems for Melissa, that the anxiety produced by moving beyond her comfort zone and interacting with unknown OSSs was too much for her to overcome. Combined with other demotivating factors that she encountered over the course of the semester (see my discussion on Question 3), lowered her willingness to communicate with those that had more linguistic knowledge, a phenomenon described by MacIntyre (2007).

While she still maintained the use of Spanish, Melissa did not think the activities in SL had much of an affect on her motivations or anxieties. This may have been due to the fact that she did not try and use the voice feature, like Jessica did, and that she stayed within her comfort zone and only talked to her own classmates online. As I will demonstrate in the discussion for Question 3, factors outside the classroom also related to Melissa’s overall language learning motivations and anxieties.

Jessica, on the other hand, made an effort to change her avatar for holidays in order to have more conversation topics:

It was fun going on second life [sic] today and having a topic to talk about Halloween. It makes it easy [sic] than just trying to strike up a conversation. The people were out and about having fun. I stayed in virtual Spain talk to a few people. It is still becoming easier to understand and type it out.
This quote highlights how the avatar can be used as a conversation starter to provide content for conversation. Her willingness to make these changes may have also started to help her cross from duplication of herself in her avatar to improvement, which may have contributed to her stronger connection with the SL platform (Messinger et al., 2011; Parmentier & Rolland, 2009).

I have demonstrated in this section that Second Life had an affect on anxiety in both participants, but not little effect on motivation. The level of effect that SL had on anxiety was also determined by the pre-existing motivations that both participants had. This is especially evident in the case of Melissa, where several external factors came into play and determined the changes in her motivation. Melissa found it difficult to prioritize Spanish due to the work of her other classes and the requirements of her major. She did not register to study Spanish in her first years of university because of the requirements of her major, and still found it hard, that semester, to make room to devote herself to language learning. Since her major and future profession, in her mind, did not require the use of Spanish, she viewed it as a fun elective that was interesting, instead of a vital part of her Ideal L2 Self.

Jessica, on the other hand, made Spanish a priority as soon as she realized that her ideal future self included living in a Spanish speaking country. She was therefore able to prioritize the language learning experience and use SL to her benefit, rather than see it as just something she had to do. In the next section, I will develop more fully the external factors that may have contributed to the changes in Jessica and Melissa’s anxieties and motivations over the course of the semester.
Question 3: What Other Factors Contribute to the Spanish Language Learner’s Possible Changes in (a) Anxiety and (b) Motivation?

Melissa and Jessica both offered suggestions as to what other factors may have affected their anxiety and motivation. For Jessica, these included: the social dynamics of the Second Life (SL) platform, the ability to use writing to practice instead of speech, the communicative classroom environment and her upcoming return to Peru in December of that year. All of these factors were positive influences. The first two had positive affects on her anxiety and the latter two had positive effects on her motivation.

Melissa identified the inability to find interlocutors from outside of her class, the course workload for Spanish as well as her other classes, and her major at the university. She did not feel that there was anything in the classroom or online that affected her anxiety, although, as I showed earlier this chapter, data analysis revealed that she still felt more comfortable conversing online than in face-to-face situations.

Other influences on anxiety. Other than the avatar, Jessica identified other features of the SL platform that she felt contributed to lower anxiety when using the target language. The first was the social structure of SL and the second was using writing, the medium of communication she found more comfortable, to develop her thoughts. In terms of social structure, Jessica stated that it was easier to talk to people on SL because if you “embarrassed yourself you can just stop talking to them” and that made communicating “worry free” because “if I mess up I don’t have to talk to this person again, they don’t see me everyday.” Additionally, since people are on SL for the purpose of meeting others and socializing, this made it easier for her to make casual
conversation. When asked in our final interview about whether she felt it was easier or harder to speak with people in SL than in real life she said:

It’s a lot easier. You don’t know them, they don’t really know you. I could make up a whole bunch of stuff about myself, and really on Second Life you can ask all the weird questions and that’s expected, but if I would walk up and be like ‘hey, what are you doing?’, or I don't know, my last Spanish thing was ‘how do you celebrate Christmas where you live?’ you know? If I came up to someone of my peers and say ‘hey, how do you celebrate Christmas?’ that’s kind of like not a … just, you can ask random crazy questions online. [The purpose of Second Life] is to go on there just to find out what people do, where they’re from, how they’re different from you.

Jessica also noted that the social norms on second life contributed to her anxiety reduction, not just avatars. She found that since SL was a social space where people wanted to engage in conversation that is was easier to approach others. Additionally, since computers crash and SL is constantly rebooting the various islands, users are constantly logged in and out of the virtual world, this makes it easier for students to “disappear” when they do not want to converse with someone. Since this is a normal part of using SL, users are not offended when their conversation partners disappear, this gives language learners an extra tool to use when they no longer wish to engage in conversation with someone.

Jessica also felt that the ability to use the written chat feature in SL provided her with allowed her to be more thoughtful about her language use, while also forcing her to use the language in a more conversational way:
Just planning out how the conversation moves from different areas and be able to incorporate stuff from class and we’ve talked about food and cities and stuff like that so we can talk more about what their city’s like and all that type of stuff. So, I definitely don’t have as much anxiety.

These experiences along with Professor Tony’s communicative classroom environment helped increase her knowledge and understanding of the language, which closed the perceived gap between her linguistic knowledge and her Ideal L2 Self, reducing her anxiety. In our final interview she said:

When you have someone speaking for a long time, like Tony in the classroom, he’ll be giving instructions on an assignment and it’s like 3 minutes of just him explaining something, you’re just like ‘what are you saying, I don’t get it’ but now through Second Life and classes and getting ready to go to Peru, just being able to hear people and getting 95% of what they’re saying and then being able to work up something in my head to ask a question or a response or something like that, its [SL] definitely helped understanding.

The classroom environment did help her understand that she did not have to speak perfectly all of the time and that everyone was at different levels. “I guess a good thing in our class,” she stated, “I realize that everyone’s at different levels and I don’t have to be speaking like [a native speaker] all the time. I don’t have to pick it up as fast because everyone’s at different levels.” Combined with Tony’s use of authentic materials, such as music, movies and literature, she developed an appreciation for the
culture, which, combined with the other factors I have mentioned, motivated her to keep studying.

In further relation to anxiety, tests and presentations were named by both participants to be high stress situations. Both Jessica and Melissa noted that they were very anxious during tests and more formal language use situations. This is concurrent with research on anxiety that suggests that testing environments are more anxiety inducing than others. This is not limited to the foreign language classroom, but rather is a separate specific anxiety related to test taking (Horwitz et al., 1986; Kim, 2009; Young, 1991).

As I have already stated in this chapter, speaking situations are already more anxiety inducing in the foreign language classroom than writing or composition tasks (Kim, 2009; Young, 1991). When augmented with common testing anxieties and situations that focus on form and precise speech, this can make oral presentations and tests very difficult for foreign language learners. There did not appear to be any affect on these anxiety triggers in these participants as the testing environment out weighed the comfort and confidence in linguistic skill.

Melissa did not identify any other factors that may have attributed to her anxiety, either positively or negatively. At the beginning of the term, she mentioned that her anxiety resulted primarily from speaking situations, especially where there was an emphasis on perfection. I have already addressed this phenomenon early this chapter, but due to this she did not feel that her anxieties in this area had changed over the course of the semester. The primary changes that occurred in Melissa were in her motivations and these will be addressed in the next section.
Other influences on motivation. Melissa identified very different factors that she felt contributed to her motivation with learning Spanish. While she began the semester eager to learn, these factors worked against her motivation and caused her to lose her interest in learning the language. This was a change that was noticeable to her as well as to her teacher. Melissa’s first frustrations began, as I have mentioned previously, with the inability to find interlocutors from outside of her class. “It [speaking with a classmate] was easier than talking to others because she [the classmate] did not use slang and abbreviations like most of the people in Second Life do,” she noted in one of her journals. Again she shows a lack of motivation to move beyond her comfort zone and due to this she continued to interact only with others from her own classroom with whom she felt more comfortable.

Additionally, Melissa stated that the course workload for Spanish as well as her other classes had a significant affect on her desire to learn the language:

I think this semester we had so much homework due every week. I think I had more homework in Spanish than in any of my other classes this semester so [...] it’s harder to do that much homework than my major class like my chemistry classes and stuff like that and this is just an elective that I’m taking, you know?

This quote additionally demonstrates that her major and the course she was required to take for that had a significant influence over how she felt about taking Spanish at the end of that semester.

As Dörnyei (2009) posits, for the L2 Motivational Self System to be affective, the learner must have a strong vision of their Ideal L2 Self and how language learning plays
a role in that identity. Melissa, as I have already described, did not have a strong Ideal L2 Self. She did not see Spanish playing a significant role in her future job, or other aspects of her life, and therefore she prioritized other areas of study. In our final interview, when asked about other factors that influenced her decision to continue learning Spanish, she said,

My major definitely. I take 18 credits every semester so having five\textsuperscript{13} of them be Spanish is kind of a lot and it doesn’t help my major at all unless I minor in it so I’m debating on taking the intermediate one next semester just because its such a big chuck out of my 18 credits.

These factors seemed to have had a greater affect on her motivations and in turn, this lead to the choices that she made in how she used SL throughout the semester, thereby mitigating the affects it could have had on her foreign language anxiety. Instead of spending more time trying to find interlocutors, she spent the minimum required time on SL and she stopped looking for unknown OSSs and pre-arranged times to meet with her classmates online. This meant that she was not exposed to the same linguistic variety and feedback as Jessica and she did not need the face-saving affordances of the avatar.

Melissa felt comfortable with her language skills prior to enrolling in Beginning Spanish 2. She already found it easy to engage in casual conversation in low-pressure environments, where she could use the language she already knew. Throughout our interviews she indicated that she preferred to speak in casual environments where she

\textsuperscript{13} Spanish classes at Slate University are actually only 4 credits. This was just a mistake on the part of the participant when discussing the amount of credits the Spanish class took.
did not need to worry about communicating specific messages and that she preferred communications in SL with her classmates because she could use familiar vocabulary. For instance, she noted that speaking to a classmate on SL “was easier than talking to others because she did not use slang and abbreviations like most people in Second Life do.” During her trips Mexico, she indicated that she preferred engaging in casual conversation instead of having to convey specific messages: “if it’s a point that you have to get across like in one certain way that was a lot harder than just kind of having a random conversation. This attitude continued in the classroom where she expressed her additional anxiety in oral test or presentation situations rather than in small group work.

Her teacher also noticed this tendency to find her comfort zone and stay there. In our interview he stated that Melissa “felt confident that she knew what she needed to know for that day or that activity or that chapter and so she didn’t push herself that much further to try and progress more, so she seemed to stay at a level that she knew that she had to be at without trying to expand a whole lot more.” He felt that there were many students that surpassed her in the class as far as their ability and willingness to communicate, including Jessica.

There may have been a variety of reasons that this occurred. First, as she herself indicated, it was difficult for her to prioritize Spanish since it was not a formal part of her major. “It doesn’t help my major at all,” she said “unless I minor in it so I’m debating on taking the intermediate one next semester just because its such a big chunk out of my 18 credits.” This shows that Spanish did not play an integral role in her Ideal L2-Self Image.
Another explanation is that she was not in a class that was the right level for her and, therefore, the class did not provide her with enough of a challenge. Likewise, she may have had less room to grow as a language learner at this level. However, SL could have provided her with more challenging tasks and access to more knowledgeable Spanish speakers that would have helped her tailor the course more to her needs. Instead, she preferred to stay at that level instead of using SL to branch out and interact with more knowledgeable speakers. Due to this, she did not grow as a language learner during the class, but rather maintained the same level of linguistic knowledge.

This decrease in motivation, coupled with the experiences on SL that she felt were negative, affected her overall performance in the classroom and also affected the way she used SL. She ultimately spent the minimum required time on SL and she chose to speak with people she knew to make it easier. This translated into the classroom as well:

I’m about the same [speaking of motivation and participation in the classroom], I might even be a little bit less participating because at the beginning of the semester I was like super excited and now I’m kind of like ‘oh okay this semester is long, I’m getting sick of all the homework’ that’s not really related to second life at all.

Her desire for no-pressure, more casual conversation may have also lead her to seek out the comfort of interacting with students rather than moving beyond her comfort level and interacting with unknown OSSs. She seemed to settle in to what was easy instead of what might challenge her: “This was my first time talking to a classmate in
second life [sic]. It was easier than talking to others because she did not use slang and abbreviations like most of the people in second life [sic] do."

Melissa still felt that she was more outgoing online versus the classroom, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, however, she attributed this to the casual environment, being able to use language she already knew and was comfortable with, and writing, since she was already comfortable with that medium of communication. She felt more comfortable in this environment because it was not a testing environment and she did not have to leave her comfort zone to complete the tasks.

While Jessica had similar feelings about her comfort level on SL, she also made the distinction between SL interactions and real life interactions with her friends and colleagues in Peru. "I think I get more gratification out of speaking in person because you can see [...] how they react to what they’re saying, but it's definitely less nerve wrecking to do it on Second Life," she said in her final interview. For Jessica, these real world interactions provided more motivation and satisfaction, even though they were high anxiety situations, but Second Life helped give by giving her the confidence to interact in real life.

Finally, Melissa had many technical issues in Second Life that attributed to her indifference to the program itself and her lack of motivation to use the program more effectively by interacting with OSSs not in her class. She had many issues with the speed of the platform, lag, which made it more difficult for her to interact. In her second interview she stated:

My computer lags a lot and I tried downloading the other version of Second Life too and it still lags incredibly so that’s kind of negative because
sometimes it will take a while for me to read the message that they got
back to me or mine will take a while to send back to them and it takes a
long time for the worlds to load, it usually stays gray a good ten minutes
before finally things start to appears.

This is the most commonly cited issue with SL that is caused by a combination of low
Internet speeds and low processing power within the computer itself. It has also been
cited by numerous studies as one of the major sources of frustrations when using this
platform in the classroom (Balcikanli, 2012, Blasing, 2010; Deutschmann, Panichi, &
Molka-Danielsen, 2009; Jauregi, Canto, de Graaff, Koenraad, & Moonen, 2011; Liou,
2012; Peterson, 2005, 2006, 2010; Shih & Yang, 2008; Wang, Song, Ston, & Yan, 2009;
Wang & Shao, 2012; Wehner, Gump, & Downey, 2011; Zheng, Young, Brewer, &
Wagner, 2009).

As she mentioned previously, Jessica was also preparing for another trip to Peru
in December of that year, so she was also in contact with her colleagues and friends in
Peru through Facebook. While she stated that she talked to these friends more than she
interacted with OSSs on SL, she credits SL with helping her feel more confident
communicating with her Peruvian friends:

Jessica: It’s [SL] definitely helped understanding and having words I can
reply to. It’s one thing understanding it and then another thing to be able to
reply and conversate [sic].

Researcher: Do you think you would feel [as confident] if you had only
interacted with your friends from Peru on Facebook?
Jessica: No, no. Because […] at first I was like what are they saying to me, get my Spanish translator out and now I can pretty much get what they’re saying without using any type of translator.

This trip served as her primary motivation in learning the language and the choices she made, but it was her interactions in SL that gave her the confidence she needed to feel comfortable speaking with her Peruvian friends.

Additionally, Jessica appreciated interacting with different people from different cultures and the exposure that gave her to different varieties of the target language. “Because Second Life helped me understand different people’s way of saying things or whatever,” she said, “it helped me be more motivated because I can get this [understanding the language] and I can talk to them.” She viewed the social dynamic of SL as more open, which introduced her to a wide range of linguistic content and allowed her to feel more comfortable with experimenting with Spanish. This was something that she did not find in her real life social circles or classroom.

Both participants cited Professor Tony’s communicative classroom as having a possible affect on their anxiety and motivation. Jessica appreciated Tony’s consistent use of Spanish in the classroom and found the environment challenging because it helped her understand the spoken language. Melissa, on the other hand, found the environment more difficult because she was forced to use unfamiliar vocabulary and verb structures; this caused her increased anxiety in the classroom environment.

The external factors discussed in this section seem to have more influence on the motivations of these participants than SL. Similarly, their language learning motivations have more of an affect on how they viewed their Second Life experience.
and how they acted within the virtual world. While in these cases SL does not appear to affect motivation, it clearly had an affect on anxiety for both participants, although that affect is more evident for Jessica than Melissa. This supports current research on anxiety and virtual worlds (Wehner et al., 2011), but leads to a gap in the research about the possible affects of participation in virtual worlds on motivation.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the data that was obtained from my investigation. I first developed the background for each of my participants, Jessica and Melissa, and discussed their individual motivations, anxieties and SL experience as was determined by my research. I showed that Melissa already had a well-developed L2 Self that included learning Spanish as part of her desire to become a medical missionary in Peru. Jessica, on the other hand, stated that she was mostly learning the language for fun, because she wanted to, and because her mother was Mexican, but that she did not truly know why she was studying the language.

In the model presented on the this page (Figure 10), I illustrate how the various components of each of the participant’s language learning experience interacted with their motivations and anxieties. As is evident by the arrows that represent Jessica’s journey (blue), the foundation of her motivation to study Spanish was becoming a medical missionary. Combing that with her SL experiences, increased self-confidence and upcoming return trip, her motivation continued to grow over the semester. Her anxiety level decreased as she had more and more positive interactions in SL, which provided her with positive feedback on her language use.
In Melissa’s model, however, a variety of external forces combined with her lack of a vivid Ideal L2 Self Image resulted in a decrease in motivation over the course of the semester as I have shown in this chapter. For Melissa there was no change in anxiety, due to the fact that she stayed in her comfort zone and did not push herself to move beyond her starting linguistic level.

**Figure 10.** Changes in Motivation and Anxiety of the Participants.

This figure represents the changes, or lack thereof, in the motivations and anxieties of the two participants. We can see that Jessica’s motivation increased as a result of factors coming from both external forces and activities in SL. Her anxiety decreased from her positive interactions with OSSs in SL and using the avatar as a face-saving device. Melissa, on the other hand showed a decrease in motivation due to difficult major requirements and a weak Ideal L2 Self, therefore, there was little to no effect on her anxiety.
In regards to how the participants created their avatars, I showed that both
participants chose to create avatars that looked and dressed similar to their real-life
selves and that they tried to appropriate their own personalities on the avatar when
interacting with others online, or duplication as defined by Paramentier and Rolland
(2009). Although they did not use the physical appearance to shape their image of their
possible L2 Selves, both Jessica and Melissa, created characters that were only
Spanish speaking, a feat they were unable to accomplish in the real world.

The discussion of the affects of avatars, and by extension Second Life on anxiety
and motivation showed how the avatar specifically influenced these constructs. I noted
that both participants felt that the avatar presented a face-saving device that made them
feel more comfortable interacting with unknown OSSs in the target language. However,
this effect was not strong in the case of Melissa as it was with Jessica. This contradicts
speculation by Yee and Bailenson (2007) that designing an avatar through
transformation, changing look and personality from the RL self to the SL self, is
necessary to benefit from the Proteus Effect. In the case of Jessica, she was able to
transfer the self-confidence she gained from interactions in SL to her RL interactions
both in the classroom and with her Peruvian friends. No affects of the avatar or the SL
environment were noted on motivation; rather motivation seemed to affect both
participants and how they used the SL program.

Finally, I analyzed the data that looked at other factors from SL, their classrooms
or their lives that may have also affected their overall motivations and anxieties. I found
that the other factors that may have contributed to these constructs for Jessica were
preparing for her return trip to Peru, the communicative classroom environment, the
social dynamics of the Second Life (SL) platform, and the ability to use writing to practice instead of speech. For Melissa, these included the inability to find interlocutors from outside of her class, the course workload for Spanish as well as her other classes, and her major at the university. Technical issues may have also been an important factor.

For Jessica, these external motivation factors combined with her lowered anxiety and increased self-confidence that she obtained from speaking with unknown OSSs in SL allowed her to grow linguistically and become more confident and more of a risk taker in the classroom, increasing her motivation. Melissa, on the other hand, was so deterred by her other classes and the demands of her major, that Spanish became less of a priority to her during the semester and her motivation and willingness to communicate and participate in activities diminished.

In Chapter 5, I will look at the pedagogical and theoretical implications of this research, how researchers can approach additional investigations into these topics, the limitations of this research and the areas of further investigation that were revealed by this case study.
CHAPTER 5:
IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 5 concludes my research by highlighting what was learned from this study and how it can be applied to future research on programs using virtual worlds (VWs). In this chapter, I will discuss the theoretical implications of this study, through an examination of the similarities and differences between the cases. I will examine how the stories of these two participants align with or refute current research in virtual worlds and language learning. This will lead me to a discussion on how this research may help us to design better virtual world (VW) pedagogy and the role it might play in the classroom.

I begin the chapter with a discussion of the theoretical implications of this research. I will discuss their pre-existing motivations and anxieties and how those led to their individual treatments of the virtual world assignments. Both participants had very unique ideas about how they went about interacting in SL, which resulted from their motivations to learn Spanish and the strength of their Ideal L2-Self Images. Jessica’s experience demonstrated that her strong L2 Self Image determined how she used the virtual world (VW) to meet her goals, rather than the VW impacting her motivation. Melissa’s story showed how her lack of a vivid, future-self image impacted her motivation and way she used Second Life (SL) more negatively.
The analysis in Chapter 4 revealed that, in these cases, SL did have an affect on the anxiety of the participants, which is in line with current research (Balcikanli, 2012; Blasing, 2010; Deutschmann, Panichi, Molka-Danielsen, 2009; Jauregi, Canto, de Graaff, Koenraad, & Moonen, 2011; Liou, 2012; Peterson, 2005, 2006, 2010; Shih & Yang, 2008; Wang, Song, Ston, & Yan, 2009; Wang & Shao, 2012; Wehner, Gump, & Downey, 2011; Zheng, Young, Brewer, & Wagner, 2009). I also looked at the possible affects that other forces had on the level of affect on each participant, as Jessica identified a more prominent feeling of increased confidence than Melissa, which was unexpected prior to this investigation.

In the first sections, I present a discussion of the differences and similarities between the two cases. As I already mentioned above, both of the participants’ SL experiences were shaped by their language learning motivations, contrary to my hypothesis, but there was evidence to suggest that the SL experience affected their anxieties. The similarities and differences between these participants will allow me to make several inferences about the importance of this research.

This analysis will then lead me to a discussion on how this research can help us to formulate additional research projects looking that the use of Second Life (SL) in the classroom and also the implications of this research for classroom practice. While researchers such as Ushioda (2011) have suggested that the avatar may provide the opportunity for identity experimentation, requiring students to do so may not be the most effective way for them to benefit from the affordances of the virtual worlds.

Finally, I offer conclusions about what can be learned from this study and further areas for investigation. I suggest, along with others in the field, that motivation is the
dominating factor in language learning and, while SL was used to give these language learners opportunities for practice and increased confidence, their pre-existing motivations ultimately determined how they would use the environment. Further investigations will be necessary to see whether claims by researchers such as Ushioda (2011) that avatars can be used to create vivid self-images are indeed possible.

**Theoretical Implications**

At the beginning of this study, it was necessary to define virtual worlds and the key factors of motivation and anxiety that would be come integral to understanding the research questions. Since only one study conducted by Wehner et al. (2011) has really looked at the differences in anxieties between students using SL and those who were not, it is important to current research that more investigations are conducted to look at why this may or may not occur. It should not be surprising that since two different individuals are represented in this research that there were many differences between them and their experiences and how they chose to use SL. Additionally, it should not be surprising that the SL and classroom environments affected each participant in a different way.

In this study, I found that both participants mentioned they felt more comfortable speaking in the virtual world (VW) space than in other face-to-face (F2F) or online platforms, and they felt less anxious because other interlocutors did not know who they were. Thorne, Black, and Sykes (2009) hypothesized, the face-saving nature of the avatar could lead to lowered anxiety, which is what occurred in this study. Yuen et al. (2010) and Messinger et al. (2011) also found that people who are not as outgoing in
real life (RL) or suffer from social anxiety disorders also benefit from this affordance of
the avatar and exhibit more outgoing personalities in the VW.

It was clear from this study that Second Life had an affect on anxiety but not
necessarily on the motivation of these participants. This supports other research that
suggests that participation in interactions in SL can affect anxiety (Martey & Consalvo,
2011; Messinger et al., 2011; Wehner et al., 2011; Yuen et al., 2010), but does not
extend fully into the research that combines the affects of anxiety on motivation
(Gardner, 1985; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). It was hypothesized at the beginning
of this study that the reduced anxiety participants may experience would help to
increase their motivation to learn the language, because SL could help to create a more
vivid Ideal L2 Self image making that outcome more plausible and creating harmony
between the L2 Motivation Self System components (Dörnyei, 2009). This did not
happen. It was found that motivation played a stronger role in determining the
participant’s relationship with the SL project rather than their experiences in SL
determining their motivation.

Jessica, who had the more vivid perception of her Ideal L2 Self, spent more time
online throughout the semester (between 2-4 hours per week on average), was more
adaptable when finding times to go online, interacted only with other speakers of
Spanish (OSSs) from outside her classroom, and, by extension, reported lowered
foreign language anxiety. Melissa, on the other hand, did not have as vivid of an L2-self
image and, therefore, spent only the required amount of time online (average 1-1.5
hours per week), only logged in to SL one day per week, regardless of whether or not
there were other users online, and interacted only with classmates after the second
week. She, therefore, reported minimal changes in her anxiety levels and, due to external factors in her learning environment, her motivation diminished over the course of the semester.

Since Jessica was more motivated to learn the language, she made extra efforts to spend more time online to have meaningful conversations. Her upcoming trip to Peru motivated her to practice more and she found it easier to do so in SL, where she could maintain use of the language in a non-threatening environment. She found access to a good computer that would minimize her technical difficulties and she logged into SL frequently at different times of day during the week to see when others would be available. Because of this, she met more speakers and had longer conversations with Spanish speakers from other countries. This is consistent with my own previous research and the research of Yee and Bailenson (2007) on the Proteus Effect that has revealed how the students who fully integrate themselves into the SL community and use the system to explore the language to its fullest are also those who blossom in the classroom (Wehner, 2013).

Melissa, on the other hand, found it difficult to find other interlocutors outside of her classmates, mostly likely due to the fact that she only entered the virtual world one day per week. If there was no one available to speak, she would contact a classmate and they would interact online. While there was nothing in the requirements for the project that restricted this, it did mean that she did not grow as much as a language learner because she did not need to push herself to use new forms of the language and she did not receive feedback from more knowledgeable speakers like Jessica did.
Consequently, Melissa did not report any affects on her anxiety levels as was evident with Jessica.

Melissa’s motivation for studying Spanish decreased over the course of the semester and so did her willingness to interact with other speakers of Spanish (OSSs) online (MacIntyre, 2007). As I mentioned in Chapter 4, this is consistent with MacIntyre’s (2007) work on the construct of willingness to communicate. He found that motivation must be high and anxiety must be low in order for a student to be willing to communicate with other speakers of the target language. In Melissa’s case, her motivations at the end of the semester were low and, after so difficulties with technology, her SL anxieties were increased. This led her to choose to stay in her comfort zone and only converse with her classmates instead of venturing out to speak with more knowledgeable speakers. This translated to her classroom behavior. Tony, her professor, noted that while she seemed very motivated at the beginning of the semester, pressures from her other classes, work and life, caused her to become less motivated to learn and participate in her Spanish class. She stopped answering questions, turned in the minimum requirements for assignments and was no longer engaged.

Moreover, Melissa saw learning Spanish as “just for fun” it was not something she saw as being an integral part of her life, so it was easier for her to give up on it when it became “hard” or took too much time. As Dörnyei (2009) defined, for an Ideal L2 Self to be motivating, it must be “elaborate and vivid” (p. 18). Melissa’s Ideal L2 Self was not clear like Jessica’s and so her motivations to study waned more easily than Jessica’s. She still found it easier to communicate in SL, like Jessica, but her reason
was that she was not forced to use new, more advanced language and could simply use the information she already had:

It’s [interacting on SL] definitely easier because I can use the vocabulary that I know well, where in the classroom we’re learning new stuff and we have to use new stuff so it’s not as familiar so I’d say my conversations probably flow a lot more a lot better than they would do in the classroom because I’m using words that I know.

This shows that she was not willing to move beyond her comfort zone and preferred to maintain her level of Spanish where she was. There are several possible explanations: One, through the lens of the L2 Motivational Self System, I have already demonstrated that Melissa’s L2 Self was not well-developed and she did not see Spanish as playing an integral role in her future self image (Dörnyei, 2009). This would account for her lack of desire to apply herself in furthering her linguistic abilities, as she already felt comfortable with her linguistic abilities at the beginning of the semester.

Two, the workloads of her other classes eventually took their toll and caused her to feel frustration with her Spanish class, which was “just for fun” and “not part of her major.” She had to prioritize other classes and this made exerting herself in Spanish seem more overwhelming. Three, the negative interactions she experienced on SL combined with her speaking anxiety decreased her willingness to communicate with more knowledgeable speakers and she reverted to speaking with those who needed her help (MacIntyre, 2007).

Contrastingly, Jessica flourished in the classroom. She became more outgoing and was more willing to take risks in language use. This was primarily due to her pre-
existing motivations and vivid Ideal L2 Self, but also, as she reported, to the self-confidence she received during her interactions in SL. Professor Tony noted that she improved the most between the two of them and while she did not necessarily surpass Melissa in linguistic skill (Melissa already had a higher level of linguistic knowledge), he noticed that she did surpass Melissa in willingness to communicate. According to Jessica, this was a coupled effect of her motivation to learn the language before returning to Peru in December of that year, along with the extra practice, feedback and confidence she received from the activities in SL. As numerous studies have shown, this combination of factors is essential to the linguistic growth of a language learner (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Gardner, 1985; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Krashen, 1985; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; MacIntyre, 2007; Swain, 1985).

Jessica saw Spanish as an integral part in her future self and thus took the necessary steps to improve her knowledge and use of the language (Dörnyei, 2009). She spent more time in SL overall and went out of her way to speak with unknown OSSs. She developed more both in reduced anxiety and also linguistically. She was presented with more linguistic content from multiple Spanish language varieties and shows evidence of adapting some of those varieties into her speech (Gass & Selinker, 2008). For example, after learning the meaning of chido in a previous week as I showed in Chapter 4, she uses it herself in a new conversation in Week 7 with a female interlocutor from Mexico:

Jessica: que hora es allí?
JM: 11:36 pm
JM: haya? [sic] (meaning allá)
Jessica: mismo
Jessica: wow
JM :o
Jessica: que chido!

Jessica: what time is it there?
JM: 11:36 pm
JM: there?
Jessica: the same
Jessica: wow
JM: :o
Jessica: cool!
Melissa spent most of her time only speaking with others from class and did not venture outside her comfort zone. This may have been because she felt that she had difficulties finding others with whom she could converse, therefore, she did not develop as much linguistically. The fact that she had less room to grow linguistically since she was already a more advanced speaker may have also contributed to this, but SL can provide a space for already advanced learners to find ways to acquire language not available to them if they choose to use those features. Melissa still took on the role as most dominant speaker. She helped her classmates learn Spanish in SL, but did not seek out this challenge for herself. I believe that if she had taken the time to invest in relationships with more dominant speakers, she would have increased her linguistic knowledge, instead of plateauing (Wehner, 2013).

While it is evident that there were many differences between Jessica and Melissa, there were a couple of similarities as well. Both participants cited speaking as the primary source of their language learning anxieties (Kim, 2009; Ortega, 2009; Young, 1991). Both felt that they would be embarrassed if they made mistakes, which stemmed from the "one right way" conundrum presented by Coryell and Clark (2009). Their speaking anxieties increased when they had to speak in more formal situations and convey specific messages including conversations with hotel staff, and in-class tests and presentations. This is consistent with research that investigates the differences in anxieties and motivations between courses focusing on writing and those that focus on speaking. As Kim (2009) found, anxiety levels tend to be higher in conversation courses than they do in composition courses. In these cases, this was due
the fact that both participants did not want to come across as unintelligent or make mistakes in front of more knowledgeable OSSs.

One of the most interesting findings that presented itself in this research was the fact that both Jessica and Melissa were able to maintain the use of Spanish in the virtual world where they had difficulty doing so in the classroom. Regardless of with whom they chose to converse, both girls found it easier to use Spanish in the SL environment and to maintain that use, even when presented with speakers that spoke to them in English. This phenomenon has manifested itself in my previous research using virtual worlds as well (Wehner, 2013), and warrants further investigation.

The theory from this investigation is that these students were able to view the SL environment as Spanish only because a) the requirements of the SL Lab stated that students must use Spanish at all times, b) they communicated with interlocutors that gave them the level of interaction they wanted and c) the avatar was enough of a face-saving device that they were able to feel more comfortable using the language. As Jessica said in one of her interviews:

Your motive for being on Second Life is to completely speak in Spanish, so I know that’s our motive for class, but it’s a lot easier to do it when everyone around you isn’t kind of confused or needs to know what to say.

Both Jessica and Melissa were forced, in a sense, to use the language and found that they were able to maintain only Spanish during their time in SL. As Melissa reported:

The people that are on Second Life want to talk to you where in real life if you see a Spanish speaker that speaks English too you would speak English to them first, probably, well I would because I’m more comfortable
with it and because my Spanish isn't perfect, but on Second Life I'm more willing to not, you know, even if they speak English too, not to just speak to them in English then I can talk to them in Spanish first too.

In this quote, it is apparent that there is something about the virtual environment that allowed Melissa to feel freer to communicate in Spanish. While she could not elaborate on what it was, cross-examination of the data revealed that this might have been due to avatar presence (Martey & Consalvo, 2011; Messinger et al., 2011; Yeun et al., 2010).

The avatar provided enough of a face-saving device that both women felt more comfortable interacting, even if it was with just their classmates, and they were able to redefine relationships as Spanish speakers and not English speakers. As Jessica related:

Alright, so like an avatar, if I'm embarrassed because I said the wrong thing, they don't see me blushing it is just my avatar, you get what I'm saying? So that takes away anxiety or you can just stop talking to them if it gets weird, you know? So I guess it takes away anxiety like that [...] it's worry free. If I mess up I don't have to talk to this person again, they don't see me everyday.

Melissa explained:

I guess in some ways it [the avatar] kind of affects [anxiety], you know? I can just kind of walk away if I want to, so I don't have to be nervous about what I'm saying or if I'm saying it totally correct, or things like that, because no one knows that that's you and their not going to be like 'oh,
that girl’s not very good at speaking Spanish,’ you know? Because they don’t know that it’s me.

As is evident from these quotes, both Melissa and Jessica felt some security in having an avatar presence, even when speaking with their own classmates. This demonstrates that SL has the potential to provide, at minimum, a Spanish only environment that is not necessarily achievable in the classroom. That fact that they were able to maintain using the Spanish language in the SL environment when they were unable to do so in the classroom holds several implications for the classroom, as well as other areas, like study abroad. These along with a discussion of the research questions will be presented in the following section.

It was evident from the data that activities in SL did not affect motivation, but rather the learner’s motivation affected how these participants used the platform for language learning, thus supporting the claims that motivation is one of the dominating factors in language learning success (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Gardner, 1985; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Ortega, 2009). Jessica’s primary motivational factor was her trip to Peru at the end of the semester. This seemed to drive all other classroom behaviors and online. The same was true for Melissa whose lack of a strong Ideal L2 Self made it easier for her to stay in her comfort zone.

Melissa still felt that she was more outgoing online versus the classroom (Messinger et al., 2011; Yuen et al., 2010). She attributed this to the casual environment, being able to use language she already knew and was comfortable with and writing, since she was already comfortable with writing. She felt more comfortable
in this environment because it was not a testing environment and she did not have leave her comfort zone to complete the tasks.

I think online I’m more outgoing with my Spanish, you know? I’m more willing to use it and I don’t have to sit there and think about ‘oh wait is my grammar perfectly correct’ or things like that, where if I was talking to an actual Spanish speaker face-to-face I would probably be more embarrassed by mistakes I might make or things like that.

In this section, I demonstrated that this current investigation has shed light on the affordances of avatar presence in a virtual world. As was hypothesized, the avatar provided a face-saving device that allowed both participants to feel more comfortable using the language in the VW environment than in other situations, both online or F2F. However, the reduction of anxiety in these participants did not necessarily translate to higher motivations. There were clearly several factors other than SL that determined the motivation of these participants. In addition, this study revealed other affordances of VWs that may be beneficial for classroom use, including the ability to create a “Spanish only” environment and the possibility for exposure to linguistic diversity and feedback. In the next section, I will discuss how these findings relate to future research in the classroom and the possible pedagogical implications.

**Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations**

While this study was not able to identify effects of virtual worlds on motivation (rather the reverse appears to be true in these cases), it does present us with further evidence of the effects of virtual worlds on anxiety. Additionally, this research opened a new idea about the potential of virtual worlds to offer an environment that students are
able to view as “Spanish only.” These findings hold several implications for using virtual worlds in the foreign language classroom: (1) VWs can provide a Spanish-only environment not achievable in the classroom, (2) language learners may feel more comfortable communicating due to the face-saving nature of the avatar, and (3) there is a possibility for exposure to more linguistic diversity and feedback on linguistic skills than in the traditional foreign language classroom. There may not necessarily be advantages for language learning by using the avatar to experiment with identities, more research is necessary to determine this.

**Implications for Classroom Research**

In this research, I chose not to influence the participants in how to create their avatars or how to conduct themselves in the virtual world. They had to follow the guidelines of the SL Lab by maintaining the use of Spanish in-world and submit their journals, but there was little direction as to how they should design or develop their avatar. I did tell them to change their avatar from the original stock avatar but this was required for all students in the class who were using the program. Therefore, the students were able to design their avatar however they chose, and both participants of this study chose to follow the general trend of avatar creation as outlined by Messinger et al. (2011). They created humanoid representations of themselves and tried to duplicate their real life (RL) physical appearance and personalities.

It is possible that more effects of transformation leading to the Proteus Effect (Yee & Bahlenson, 2007) may be seen if participants were asked more specifically to play with their identities in SL and envision themselves as a Spanish speaker as Ushioda 2011 suggests, however, this may lead to a feeling of disconnect between the
participants and their avatar. It would be interesting to see how students would create an avatar given more specific instruction or given more time in world. Since this project only lasted nine weeks it was not enough time for the participants to really immerse themselves in the world and experience in order to see the true effects of the Proteus Effect.

Along these lines, if participants went through a number of courses at different levels that used the virtual world platform as an integral part of the course curriculum, there would be more time to see further effects of this nature. The fact that this was additional work for the participants on top of numerous other assignments may have made it difficult for participants to fully invest in their online experiences. Further research on SL should attempt to look at the program after being integrated completely in to a degree program.

The research from this study strongly supports that the use of SL can be beneficial to students by providing a Spanish-only environment where students can practice their language skills in RL conversations, even if it is only amongst themselves. Most of the current research on SL and language learning uses this premise (Jauregi et al., 2011; Peterson 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010). In the research conducted by Peterson (2005, 2006, 2009, 2010), he used the platform as an extension of the classroom, this has been the common idea behind most of the activities in SL. The students primarily engage in role-playing or conversation activities among themselves, just like they would in a F2F classroom, but do so online. While this does not fully use the affordances of SL, this research highlighted that even in conversations between classmates, both of these participants were able to only use Spanish. Neither participant reverted to English
in-world as they would have in the classroom. Avatar presence did play a stronger role when speaking with unknown other speakers of Spanish (OSSs), as in the case of Jessica, which ultimately provided more exposure to linguistic content and feedback, but there were not detrimental affects of SL when all interlocutors were from the same classroom.

The fact that Jessica felt a stronger face-saving presence of the avatar may have been due to the fact that Jessica was having conversations with people she did not know that were more advanced speakers of Spanish and, therefore, she felt protected from their judgment because of the avatar’s presence. Melissa, however, mostly interacted with people she knew and so she did not need the avatar to provide her this masked appearance. In our interviews, her discussions of the face saving nature of the avatar were only in relation to the conversations she had with OSSs who were not her classmates. Still, both girls saw SL as a Spanish only platform and were able to maintain their language use even when it was with classmates. This leads me to believe that through encouraging students to interact more fully with other speakers of Spanish and giving them the support to do so more students would be able to benefit from both the privacy provided by the avatar and the feedback they would receive from more knowledgeable interlocutors.

Both participants found the avatar served as a face-saving device when speaking with unknown speakers of Spanish, which is consistent with previous research that speculated on this affordance (Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008; Thorne et al., 2009; Ushioda, 2011). However, Melissa did not experience this to the extent that Jessica did. This may lead to the assumption that it would be better to force students to interact with
interlocutors outside their classroom, however, as Coryell and Clark (2009) discussed in their article on online CLOZE activities, there are dangers in making students perform activities that do not support their personal motivations for learning the language. This could cause activities on SL to raise anxiety levels rather than lower them.

Melissa was already nervous about using the second life platform and the SL culture because she did not have experience with them. In her first journal she wrote, “I was nervous about finding anyone to talk to [and] I was nervous about the outfit choices that were available in Second Life.” Therefore, not allowing her to interact with those that she chose might have increased her anxiety, whereas in this case there was no affect on anxiety.

**Pedagogical Recommendations**

Due to the evidence presented above, it would seem logical that combining activities where students are able to both speak with their classmates and with other OSSs in a more controlled environment may be more useful. Speaking to random strangers is not a task for everyone, so by providing OSSs in more of a exchange partner format by allow students to both feel comfortable speaking with more knowledgeable OSSs and expose them to the same linguistic diversity. In my first pilot using SL (Wehner et al., 2011), we did have a partnering institution in a Spanish-speaking country that allowed us to create exchange partners, however, due to time commitments it was not possible to continue. However, it seems that learners like Jessica could benefit from having a more controlled exchange program environment that partnering with another institution could provide.
Even though neither participant really realized it, SL did allow them to develop relationships as Spanish-speakers. They were able to maintain Spanish even when talking to classmates, because they were able to view SL as a separate Spanish-speaking environment, which differed from their regular classroom environments. This could be beneficial in study abroad preparation programs because students would have a chance to experience an environment and interact with other speakers in the target language prior to traveling abroad. More research is necessary how these environments could be used to encourage study abroad participants.

If a learner lacks motivation to really integrate the language as part of their Ideal-Self identity, can teachers use virtual environments to encourage a stronger visual representation of this self? In this research, I did not guide the students in how they should create their avatar or how they should see themselves in the virtual world, but perhaps by encouraging students to go through more of a transformation, as described by Parmentier and Rolland (2009), there would be an additional benefit of creating an image of the Ideal L2 Self. By encouraging students to experiment with their avatars more, perhaps they will find this can lead to more enriching interactions than they would find in other online or classroom environments. However, it may be possible that by pressing students to create an avatar that is too dissimilar from them will affect their connection with the avatar and the virtual environment in general. More research will be necessary to determine how much teachers can ask students to change their avatars from physical representations of themselves before a negative effect occurs.

There was also evidence in this study that showed that SL helps students learn about natural unscripted conversation. As I mentioned earlier, the most common
activities used in SL in current research are the same as those conducted in the classroom. While this is not necessarily an incorrect way to use the virtual world platform, it does take away the affordance of having real, unscripted conversations. As Jessica noted:

Second Life helps a lot with every day conversation, because in class we learn about the city and the people and history and all this stuff, but if you don’t know how to have and keep a conversation then your Spanish is, I don’t want to say useless, but you know you’re not going to sit there and be like ‘what’s the word for city?’ and then you just say one word, you’ve got to be able to ask and respond to questions.

This is an area that lacks in foreign language education since there is often limited or no access to speakers whose first language is target language (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Krashen, 1985; Ortega, 2009). Limited access to more proficient speakers is especially an issue in universities similar to the Midwestern university used for this study. Students are often engaged in conversations amongst themselves, but, as was mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is often difficult for them to maintain the use of the target language because they are all at the same level. Introducing virtual worlds may hold the potential to allow students to experience real life conversations. Further research is necessary to look for best practices in encouraging conversations between foreign language learners and target language speakers.

**Limitations of the Study**

With this type of qualitative investigation there is always the danger of generalizing the results to a larger population. This research does not attempt to
generalize, but rather highlight the experiences of two distinct foreign language learners. The results of this study are limited to two non-paid university students studying a foreign language in a second semester beginner class. Different results may be found in different levels, ages of students, genders and other population differences.

While multiple sources of data were collected for this research, the primary source were three 1-hour interviews with each of the participants. This research was therefore subject to the participant’s own perceptions of their motivations and anxieties and the subsequent changes in them. Further support for the analysis given in this paper was obtained through interviews with teachers, observations, journals and chat logs. As the researcher, I acknowledge my role in this investigation and therefore know that the presentation of these findings is not without bias, but through triangulation of data, I hope to have minimized my role and taken on more objective view of the data.

Additionally, this project only ran for nine weeks during one semester, which may not have allowed the participants to fully develop their in-world presence. I, therefore, have analyzed a very brief part of their language learning journeys and do not attempt to assume that either participant remained as they are described here. The conclusions offered by this investigation represent the journeys of these two participants over the course of one semester. Such factors should be considered be for generalizations are made.

Due to constraints of the university’s Spanish program, I was also reliant on a convenience sample comprised of volunteers for this study. Due to this, I was not able to build myself a sample that may have highlighted learners with higher anxieties in
foreign language learning. This also limited me to a sample of two language learners, where perhaps more would have been preferable.

Finally, neither participant competed all of the requirements for the Second Life program. Only Jessica completed all required weekly tasks; Melissa only completed eight tasks. This means that there may have been other evidence that could have been collected, but was not available. I was also reliant on the participants turning in completed chat logs and other information themselves, so there may have been some information that was not transferred to me, and some chat logs were lost in the beginning due to technical issues with Second Life.

Recommendations for Future Research

Qualitative studies are necessary in order to look for future avenues of investigation, and this research certainly presented a number of possible avenues. In addition to those mentioned above that include more research on the nature of language learning in virtual worlds, there were also a number of other themes that presented themselves as possible areas for future research. This study opened the doors for numerous areas of future research in virtual worlds, language learning, identity, motivation, and anxiety.

Further research will be necessary to see if more language learners like Melissa could benefit from activities in virtual worlds if they used them more frequently and over longer periods of time. This would help them become more comfortable with the platform and be able to move beyond their comfort zones. For users like Jessica, the adjustment was not as difficult because she was already used to gaming environments and had access to a computer and Internet with enough power to make the program
function properly. However, for users like Melissa, more research is necessary to see how programs can be developed to help encourage students like her to move beyond their comfort zones and explore their own linguistic knowledge.

Additionally, since this was a small qualitative case study, more research will be necessary to see if other students like Melissa and Jessica have similar or different experiences. For identity researchers, there is also interesting prospects in studying students like Jessica, who have familial tie to the target language, but that tie is not strong enough to be motivational. Further investigations into helping students identify more strongly how language-learning plays a role in their future selves is necessary in these cases.

Researchers could also investigate why students prefer to stay in their comfort zone and not push themselves to advance. In this study, it seemed that overall motivation was a key factor, but then how do teachers encourage students to rediscover their motivation for learning a language, instead of allowing them to begin to fossilize? Can virtual worlds contribute to a rejuvenation of original motivations, or will ultimately be controlled by their motivations as Melissa was in this case?

Both participants in this study expressed their anxiety in speaking the language versus writing the language. While this construct has been studied in the foreign language anxiety literature (see Kim, 2009; Ortega, 2009), what has not been studied is the difference between anxieties when speaking online versus face-to-face. Also, is there a difference between online platforms and how they affect speaking anxiety? The participants in this study felt that interacting in virtual worlds or platforms like Facebook, made it easier to converse, but in both of these platforms they were using written
language, their dominant communication style. Would there be a difference in anxieties in speaking in the target language between in-person communications, Skype communications and virtual world communications? Would we see more of an affect of the avatar on the anxieties of speakers in these situations? Or would the speaking anxiety be similar across the different methods of communication?

Finally, more research is necessary to see what kind of linguistic features are learned through platforms like Second Life or other online social spaces. Are students really able to acquire language in these spaces as they do in real life, or is the language learning process different? I hypothesize that in written communications in virtual environments like SL, there may be more attention drawn to language forms and use than would exist in strictly oral communication because the written platform allows the interlocutor to see how the language is being used and gives them more time to analyze this use and prepare their own responses to what they are seeing. Only further investigations into these areas will allow us to see if the data presented here is consistent across populations and platforms, but this research has provided a number of possible investigations that would add to our knowledge of how languages are learned and how technology can be used to assist in that development.

**Concluding Remarks**

This study has added to the existing research by demonstrating that, in these participants, there were positive affects of the virtual world platform on anxiety, but not motivation. Existing motivations continued to be the driving force behind these participants causing them to use the SL platform in different ways, thereby having different experiences. One unexpected result of this study was that SL, no matter how
the platform was used, was able to supply both Jessica and Melissa with an
environment that they were able to view as “Spanish only,” something they could not do
in the classroom.

As suspected, the avatar did act as a face-saving device in these cases that
allowed both participants to feel more comfortable when speaking with unknown OSSs,
despite the lack of transformation in the physical appearance of the avatar. The exact
outcomes of activities in SL as they relate to language knowledge or linguistic gain are
determined, in these participants, by how they used the platform and their overall
motivations for learning the target language. More research will be necessary to verify
the existence of the Proteus Effect and how that can be used to affect change in the real
life personas of language learners. For now, this study supports others that postulate of
the affordances of virtual environments to decrease foreign language anxiety.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Sample of exercise from Spanish 2 textbook

*Note: In the book all instructions and activities are in Spanish in the original.

Ciudades del mundo (World Cities)

Piensa en una ciudad mundialmente famosa y escribe cuatro frases para describirla. El resto de la clase va a adivinar que ciudad es.

(Think of a famous world city and write four sentences describing it. The rest of the class will guess what the city is.)

Ejemplo (Example):

* Es una ciudad donde hay muchos rascacielos. (It is a city where there are many skyscrapers).
* Es una ciudad a la que van muchos turistas. (Many tourists go to this city.)
Appendix B: Sample Exam from Spanish 2 Course at Slate University

Español 102: Examen 1: Unidad 7

Nombre: _________________________
Fecha: _________________________

Introducir Eduardo y Carolina (___ / 12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>¿Cómo se llaman?</th>
<th>27. El Salvador</th>
<th>31. Las Vegas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿Cuántos años tienen?</td>
<td>Leer revistas</td>
<td>Correr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué les gusta hacer?</td>
<td>Ir al cine</td>
<td>Leer novelas de ficción</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De dónde son?</td>
<td>Secar fotos</td>
<td>Tener café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué metas tienen en sus vidas?</td>
<td>Abrir su propio café</td>
<td>Trabajar como ingeniero para Apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué tienen en común?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use the clues next to each profile above to write 1-2 paragraphs introducing Eduardo y Carolina. Be sure to use complete sentences and answer each question for both of them.

Carta a mi abuela,... (___ / 14)

Complete the letter below by changing the verbs from original letter (on display) into the future tense.

El año que viene yo ________ a la Universidad del Estado de Minnesota, en Mankato. Antes de mudarme en agosto, mamá y yo ________ una lista de cosas que necesitamos hacer. Ya tenemos algunas de las cosas importantes en la lista:

- ________ que estudiar mucho para completar el examen ACT. Lo bueno es que puedo estudiar con mis hermanas porque ellas también la ________.
- Mi papá ________ a la universidad para ver cuánto ________ la matrícula*. Estoy seguro de que ________ que ahorrar mucho dinero. Sé que mi mamá ________ parte del costo, pero no sé cuánto.
- Mi hermana menor ________ una fiesta de despedida para mí. Sé que ella se ________ muy triste cuando yo salga.
- Pienso que mis amigos la ________ con la fiesta.
- ¿Qué más piensas que ________ hacer antes del otoño?

Espero verte pronto, abuela. ¿Dónde ________ la semana que viene? ¿Todavía nos ________? ¡Espero que sí!
¿Dónde está el burro y cómo puede llegar al Lago Enriquillo? (___/10)
Write a short paragraph describing where Burro is located within the Dominican Republic and how he can get to Lago Enriquillo. Be sure to use each of the terms below at least once:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>al este</th>
<th>al norte</th>
<th>al sur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cerca de</td>
<td>a ... kilómetros/millas de</td>
<td>lejos de</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al oeste</td>
<td></td>
<td>hacia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Crédito extra
(máximo de medio punto para cada pregunta)

¿Qué diferencia hay entre muchas las casas latinoamericanas y las casas de los Estados Unidos?

¿Qué animales viven en la selva? (Nombrar dos.)

¿Por qué es importante aprender sobre otras culturas?
Calificación ____/36 [Instructor Use Only]

Introducir Eduardo y Carolina (____/12)
6 preguntas a 1 punto para cada persona.
Tiene que ser comprensible:
Verbo correcto - Ser, Llamar, Tener
- 5 por faltas de acentos en verbos.
- Por ahora, no quitaré puntos por otros acentos, en el futuro sí.
- 5 for missing A ___ le gusta

Carta a mi abuela ( ____/14)

conjugación/verbo = 1 punto
acento = .5 puntos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examen I</th>
<th>Examen I (B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>asistiré</td>
<td>Empezará</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prepararemos</td>
<td>tenderá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tenderé</td>
<td>preparará</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tomarán</td>
<td>tendrán</td>
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<tr>
<td>llamará</td>
<td>estarán</td>
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<tr>
<td>costará</td>
<td>estaré</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tenderemos/tendré/tendrá</td>
<td>cocinarán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pagarán</td>
<td>visitarás</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizará</td>
<td>será</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentirá</td>
<td>irá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ayudarán</td>
<td>veremos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>necesitaremos/necesitaré/necesitará</td>
<td>necesitamos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>estarás</td>
<td>llegaremos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visitarás</td>
<td>comenzará</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dónde está el burro y cómo puede llegar al Lago Enriquillo (____/10)

Start with 10/10 points.
-2 for each question that is not answered
-1 if it is incomprehensible
-1 for vocab words used incorrectly
-5 for incorrect accents on verbs
-.5 for each word not used
- 1 for Ser instead of Estar

Talk about "...a # millas de____, vs. a # milla por hora" - didn’t count off

Crédito extra ( ____/1.5)
Appendix C: Sample Exercise from Online Workbook

*Note: Online instructions are given in English and activities are conducted in Spanish similar to the tests, but different from the book.

Example:

El Pretérito:

Describe important events in the lives of the following people by completing the sentences with the correct preterite form of the verbs in parentheses. Remember to use reflexive pronouns in your answers.

1. Marco y Juana _________ (comprometerse) en abril de 1995, y cinco meses después _________ (casarse).
2. Yo _________ (divorciarse) de Lana en 2001 y después _________ (trasladarse) a Montevideo, Argentina.
3. Cuando Jesus María _________ (darse cuenta) de que no estaba enamorado de Alana, _________ (divorciarse) de ella.
4. Ustedes _________ (unirse) al equipo de voluntarios antes de nacer su hijo Pablo.
5. Nosotros _________ (trasladarse) a otro estado cuando _________ (casarse).
6. En el 2008 Sara y Angel _________ (preocuparse) por la crisis financiera en los Estados Unidos.
7. Tú _________ (trasladarse) a Concepción después del terremoto del 2009
Appendix D: Syllabus for SL Lab

Online Spanish Second Life Lab Level II
Slate University

Description: This lab is designed in alignment with current research into using Second Life for foreign language education to provide students with an opportunity to engage with other speakers of Spanish in a low-risk environment (Second Life) and allow students to apply what they learn in class to authentic conversations and contexts.

Outcomes:

1. Students will adapt classroom content to naturalistic settings.
2. Students will engage with Spanish culture and authentic materials.
3. Students will create personal relationships with other speakers of Spanish, improving pragmatic awareness and motivation.
4. Students will gain confidence and experience with using Spanish in authentic settings and in a variety of contexts.
5. Students will identify and test linguistic forms in naturalistic settings.
6. Students will use Spanish language creatively to interact with other speakers of Spanish.
7. Students will become members of Hispanic communities and gain sustainable access to these communities, the Spanish language, and Hispanic cultures through Second Life.

Materials: (All of these can be found in the existing language lab)

1. Computer that meets minimum Second Life specifications. (No netbooks, iPads or other tablets)
2. A Second Life viewer,
4. Access to Internet speeds that meet minimum Second Life specifications.

Grading: For this lab, students are graded on the level of completion of a variety of tasks, interactions and reflections conducted with the virtual world Second Life. These tasks will be broken into 2 categories: orientation and self-designed free tasks. There will be 10 total assigned tasks. Students must complete all 3 orientation sessions (including video tutorials and online exercises) and 7 free tasks with a grade of at least 70% each.

Orientation Tasks (3 tasks @ 100pts)
The orientation tasks are designed to provide students with a guided orientation to the Second Life program, its features, and to provide them with resources to help them in subsequent lab activities.
2. Avatar creation, modifying, and shopping
3. Group joining

Self-designed free tasks (7 tasks @ 100 pts)
In this series of Free Tasks, students will be allowed to set the goals for each task in groups, with either other students or other speakers of Spanish, and turn in the resulting Journal document (Word format) according to the dates on the syllabus, through the course management system. The student is responsible for negotiating each task with the other members of their group in Spanish and for describing for the instructor how the task they designed aligns with what is currently being studied in the classroom. These tasks should result in at least 60 minutes of time spent in SL.

You will have 10 weeks to complete 7 free tasks. That means that you will have 3 weeks where you do not have to turn in an assignment. This is to allow with issues with technology that we know can impede progress. You may only turn in one journal per week so you must turn in journals at least 7 of the 10 weeks in order to complete this assignment.

The Journal must include (see rubric below for grading criteria):

1. The Goal of the assignment.
2. The chat log where the students negotiated the goal in Spanish and then achieved it.
3. Photos taken in SL of the students achieving the goal.
4. A very brief discussion of why the students think the goal helps with the course objectives and how the task relates to the current coursework.
5. A description of how the students achieved the goal; the processes, challenges and rewards.
6. Any recommendations for other students who would undertake the same goal.
7. A full heading in the upper-left corner:
   - Name
   - Date Due
   - Name of Instructor
   - Class
   - Name of Assignment
8. The file must be saved with the student first name, last name, & assignment title or no credit will be given.

The Most Successful Students Will:
* Grades are not based on these these recommendations. They are for those who want to get the most out of this assignment.
1. Log-in to Second Life several times per week to assess whether or not there are enough people to speak with
2. Step outside their comfort level and engage in interactions with native speakers of Spanish instead of only working with classmates (working with your CSGs is fine, but try and move beyond that as well)
3. Use the voice chat feature and not just the written chat to improve oral communication.

***Students must complete 7 free tasks by the end of the semester. They may only turn in one free task per week. It is the student’s responsibility to manage their time to complete the assignments. Double submission of assignments (more than one assignment per week) will not be accepted. No submissions after the final due date will be accepted.***
Contract for Beginning Spanish II
Second Life Lab
FALL 2013

I understand that this lab will serve to fulfill the requirement explained in my Spanish II Syllabus. I understand that I must complete all requirements described in this Syllabus in order to pass the lab, and that I must attend all 3 Orientation sessions in addition to completing 7 additional Free Tasks to meet this requirement. I must complete the Second Life lab and all assignments mentioned in this syllabus. I also understand that I must have access to the specified technology requirements (standard laptop or desktop, good internet, Second Life viewer, etc.) that are required to complete this course. If I do not have the appropriate materials, I agree to use the equipment provided to me in the language lab or other labs on campus.

Name ___________________________ Date ____________________

Copyright Amy Wohner & Brandon King  Fall 2013-Spring 2014
### Tentative Schedule:
Journals are due by 5pm on Fridays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fecha</th>
<th>Sma</th>
<th>Lunes</th>
<th>Martes</th>
<th>Miércoles</th>
<th>Jueves</th>
<th>Viernes</th>
<th>Sab</th>
<th>Dom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/26 – 8/30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Primer Día de clases</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>9/2 – 9/6</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/9 – 9/13</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Orientation 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/16 – 9/20</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Orientation 2</td>
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<td>9/23 – 9/27</td>
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<td>Orientation 3</td>
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<td>9/30 – 10/4</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/7 – 10/11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Begin working on Free Task Assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work on Free Tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10/14–10/18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work on Free Tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/21–10/25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work on Free Tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/28–11/1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work on Free Tasks</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11/4–11/8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work on Free Tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/11–11/15</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Work on Free Tasks</td>
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<td>11/18–11/22</td>
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<td>11/25–11/29</td>
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<td>Work on Free Tasks</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/2–12/6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work on Free Tasks Final submission of SL Assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D.1: Grading Rubric For SL Lab

Grading Rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Follows instructions</th>
<th>The file is labeled with the first and last name &amp; assignment title. Document includes an MLA heading. All sections are present and well-labeled. This rubric is included as the first page.</th>
<th>Does not follow directions! Shows a desire to not receive credit for assignment by excluding heading, labels, and/or sections from assignment.</th>
<th>Does not follow directions! Shows a desire to not receive credit for assignment by excluding heading, labels, and/or sections from assignment.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20-18%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta</td>
<td>The document includes a well thought out goal that is well aligned with specifically named course outcomes and also negotiated in Spanish in the chat log.</td>
<td>The document includes some kind of goal that is aligned with course outcomes and is stated in Spanish in the chat log.</td>
<td>Does not follow directions! Shows a desire to not receive credit for assignment by excluding goal setting from assignment and/or negotiates in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-8%</td>
<td>7-6%</td>
<td>4%-0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>The chat log shows a well-developed attempt to negotiate goals, work completely in Spanish to achieve goals, and make use of SL resources. More than adequate time spent achieving goals is evident in chat log(s).</td>
<td>The chat log shows a well intended attempt to negotiate goals, work almost completely in Spanish to achieve goals, and make use of SL resources. Adequate time spent achieving goals is evident in chat log(s).</td>
<td>Does not follow directions! The chat log doesn’t show an attempt to negotiate goals, work in Spanish to achieve goals, and make use of SL resources. Inadequate time spent achieving goals is evident in chat log(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45-40%</td>
<td>39-30%</td>
<td>29-0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fotos</td>
<td>Well-contextualized photos that are relevant to the chat log and goals are inserted into the document. Evidence of working with SL resources to achieve goals is artfully portrayed.</td>
<td>Contextualized photos that are relevant to the chat log and goals are inserted into the document. Evidence of working with SL resources to achieve goals is present.</td>
<td>Does not follow directions! No contextualized photos relevant to the chat log and goals are inserted into the document. Evidence of working with SL resources to achieve goals is absent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-4%</td>
<td>3-2%</td>
<td>1-0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumen</td>
<td>The document includes an excellent description of how the student attempted to achieve the goal(s). It’s evident that the student has made ample use of SL resources and Spanish.</td>
<td>The document includes a description of how the student attempted to achieve the goal(s). It’s evident that the student has made some use of SL resources and Spanish.</td>
<td>Does not follow directions! The document does not include a description of how the student attempted to achieve the goal(s). It’s evident that the student has not made use of SL resources and Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-8%</td>
<td>7-6%</td>
<td>5-0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discusión</td>
<td>The document includes a well developed discussion of the processes, challenges and rewards of the assignment, while offering excellent considerations for future interactions and assignments.</td>
<td>The document includes a discussion of the processes, challenges and rewards of the assignment, while offering some considerations for future interactions and assignments.</td>
<td>Does not follow directions! The document doesn’t include a discussion of the processes, challenges and rewards of the assignment, and/or omits considerations for future interactions and assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-9%</td>
<td>8-7%</td>
<td>6-0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Journal Requirements for SL Lab Assignments

The Journal must include (see rubric below for grading criteria):

1. The Goal of the assignment.
2. The chat log where the students negotiated the goal in Spanish and then achieved it.
3. Photos taken in SL of the students achieving the goal.
4. A very brief discussion of why the students think the goal helps with the course objectives and how the task relates to the current coursework.
5. A description of how the students achieved the goal; the processes, challenges and rewards.
6. Any recommendations for other students who would undertake the same goal.
7. A full heading in the upper-left corner:
   - Name
   - Date Due
   - Name of Instructor
   - Class
   - Name of Assignment
8. The file must be saved with the student first name, last name, & assignment title or no credit will be given.
Appendix F: Call for Participation Email

Subject: Call for research participation

To the students of Tony Flint’s class at Slate University,

My name is Amy Wehner and I am currently conducting a study on student experiences using Second Life, a 3D virtual world, to interact with other speakers of Spanish and its effects on motivations to learn Spanish. You are currently participating in activities using Second Life and I am looking for volunteers to participate in a study that will examine you in-world experiences.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and will require minimal extra time outside of class. You will be asked to sit for 3, 1-hour interviews and turn in your Second Life activities to me. There will be no additional out of class time.

If you are interested, please contact me and set up an appointment for further information about the study.

I am looking forward to meeting the interested parties. Thank you for your time and consideration for participating in this important research project.

Sincerely,

Amy K. Wehner
Appendix G: Participant Consent Form

Study ID: Pro00014220 Date Approved: 10/28/2013 Expiration Date: 10/28/2014

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

MSU Student

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

IRB Study # 14220

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.

We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called:

Designing and Developing the L2 Self: A Study of Three Spanish Language Learners’ Attempts to Mediate Foreign Language Anxiety and Motivation in Virtual Worlds

The person who is in charge of this research study is Amy Wehner. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge.

The person explaining the research to you may be someone other than the Principal Investigator. Amy Wehner will be your contact for this study.

I am being guided in this research by my faculty advisor, Dr. John Liontas, at USF. The research will be done at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to:

Determine whether or not activities in which you have participated in Second Life have an affect on your motivation and foreign language anxiety. We will use the data obtained from this study to inform best practices for using virtual worlds in language education.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to

- Complete a questionnaire at the beginning and end of the semester about your motivations for taking your particular foreign language course. Each questionnaire can be completed in less than half an hour and involves several short answer questions to get an understanding of your current motivations and anxieties. The survey will be given online on GoogleDocs. You may go to that site anytime during the first and last week of the semester to complete the form.
- You will also be asked to participate in three 1-hour recorded interviews over the Wehner L2 Self Student Consent v1 10.22.13
course of the semester with the primary investigator. Interviews will be conducted in the primary investigator’s office at a time of the participants choosing. These interviews will be used to gain an in-depth understanding of your motivations in language learning, your feelings about the Second Life program, and your feelings about interactions with other native speakers.

- Allow access to the assignments you turn in as part of the SL project.
- Agree to let the PI observe you while you interact with other speakers of Spanish in Second Life. These observations may be unplanned.
- Allow permission for your quiz, test and final grades to be collected and used without your names on the data.

Number of Participants

If more than 5 people volunteer, all volunteers will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire about your language learning backgrounds. Participants will then be chosen from the pool based on those participants who have the least amount of language learning experience.

Alternatives

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

Benefits

We don’t know if you will get any benefits by taking part in this study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for participation in this research. Participation is completely voluntary.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There are no known conflicts of interest with any of the primary or secondary researchers.

Confidentiality

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. All information provided will be entered anonymously by you, the participant, and will be stored on a password-protected computer.

- Survey, journal, interview recordings and grade information will be kept for 5 years
- They will be used for a period of 5 years.

Wehner L2 Self Student Consent v1 10.22.13

Page 2 of 4
• All information will be kept on a password-protected personal computer to which only one of the researchers has direct access.

• Only the researchers on this project will see the answers and will not be able to see any identification of whom the answers belong to. However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

• The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all other research staff.

• Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.) These include:

• The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Other individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight may also need to look at your records.

• The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are.

Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study, to please the investigator or the research staff. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status, course grade, or job status. Information collected for this research will not be used to determine grades of any kind. If you wish to withdraw from this study at any time please contact your teacher or Amy Wehner at the contact information listed below.

Questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or if you experience any unanticipated problems related to the research, call Amy Wehner at 813-732-3067 or email her at afuller@mail.usf.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-9343.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

Wehner L2 Self Student Consent v1 10.22.13

Page 3 of 4
I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:

What the study is about.

What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used.

What the potential benefits might be.

What the known risks might be.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix H: Instructor Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

MSU Instructor

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

IRB Study # 14220

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.

As an instructor using the program Second Life as part of your Spanish curriculum, we are asking you to take part in a research study that is called:

Designing and Developing the L2 Self: A Study of Three Spanish Language Learners’ Attempts to Mediate Foreign Language Anxiety and Motivation in Virtual Worlds

The person who is in charge of this research study is Amy Wehner. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge.

The person explaining the research to you may be someone other than the Principal Investigator. Amy Wehner will be your contact for this study.

I am being guided in this research by my faculty advisor, Dr. John Liontas, at USF. The research will be done at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to:

- Determine whether or not activities in which you have participated in Second Life have an affect on your motivation and foreign language anxiety. We will use the data obtained from this study to inform best practices for using virtual worlds in language education.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to

- Participate in a recorded interview that will ask question about how you conduct your class on a day-to-day basis as well as your observations of your students in the class and their progress, motivations and anxieties in class.
- Provide the researcher with the class grades and assignments of the participants of this study that are in your class.
• Agree to let the PI observe your class during 2 separate occasions to observe your class environment and students.

Number of Participants

Up to five students and up to 4 teachers will be chosen for this study.

Alternatives

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

Benefits

We don’t know if you will get any benefits by taking part in this study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for participation in this research. Participation is completely voluntary.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There are no known conflicts of interest with any of the primary or secondary researchers.

Confidentiality

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. All information provided will be entered anonymously by you, the participant, and will be stored on a password-protected computer.

• Survey, journal, interview recordings and grade information will be kept for 5 years after the final report is submitted to the IRB

• They will be used for a period of 5 years after the final report is submitted to the IRB.

• All information will be kept on a password-protected personal computer to which only one of the researchers has direct access.

• Only the researchers on this project will see the answers and will not be able to see any identification of whom the answers belong to. However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:
• Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.) These include:

• The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Other individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight may also need to look at your records.

• The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHIS). We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are.

Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study, to please the investigator or the research staff. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status. Information collected for this research will not be used to determine grades of any kind. If you wish to withdraw from this study at any time please contact your teacher or Amy Wehner at the contact information listed below.

Questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or if you experience any unanticipated problems related to the research, call Amy Wehner at 813-732-3067 or email her at afullert@mail.usf.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-5638.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

______________________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study Date

______________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

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Page 3 of 4
I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:

☐ What the study is about.
☐ What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used.
☐ What the potential benefits might be.
☐ What the known risks might be.

______________________________

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix I: Sample Field Notes Form

Date: ____________________   Participants: _____________________

Time: ____________________    _____________________

Location: ____________________   _____________________

Setting:

Observations

Researcher Notes and Thoughts:
Appendix J: Interview Protocol 1

These questions provided the starting point for each interview and were subject to change due to the nature of the semi-structured interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interview Protocol 1 questions were based on answers from each individual participants Background and Motivations Questionnaire (Appendix K). These questions are examples of the types of I asked during the first round of interviews.

1. Why are you studying a foreign language?
2. Tell me about your previous language learning experiences or experiences with other cultures (through travel, work, etc.)
3. How do you see Spanish playing a role in your life in the future?
4. Why did you choose to participate in the SL Lab?
5. What would you like to get out of the SL Lab?
6. Do you feel you are anxious in the foreign language classroom?
Appendix K: Interview Protocol 2

As in Protocol 1, Interview Protocol 2 questions were adapted as they were informed by previous interviews and observations of the participants. These are examples of more in-depth questions that I asked based on those observations.

1. How have your experiences been in SL so far?
2. What is it like having an avatar as a representation of you?
3. Tell me about your avatar and why you have chosen to create it the way that you did?
4. How do you feel people see you in Second Life? Are they friendly, are they open to conversation? Do you feel that you could change these feelings by modifying your avatar?
5. How are you feeling when using Spanish now? Do you feel more or less anxious? Are you more or less comfortable when communicating?
6. How do you feel using SL has affected your classroom behavior?
Appendix L: Interview Protocol 3

As in Protocols 1 and 2, Interview Protocol 3 questions were adapted as they were informed by previous interviews and observations of the participants. These are examples of more in-depth questions that I asked based on those observations and previous interviews.

1. Tell me about the changes your avatar has gone through over the course of the semester.

2. How do you feel that having an avatar as affected your anxiety with Spanish language learning and use?

3. How do you feel about interacting with Spanish speakers in Second Life versus with your peers in the classroom or with other speakers of Spanish in face-to-face contexts?

4. How do you feel your experiences so far in Second Life have impacted you motivation to use and continue learning Spanish?

5. What role has your avatar played in how you feel about your interactions and experiences with learning Spanish in this way?
Appendix M: Teacher Interview Protocol

These questions are examples of those from the teacher interview and were subject to change due to the nature of the semi-structured interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Questions for the teacher interview focused on the teacher’s observations of the participants in his class starting at the beginning of the semester and provide material for developing the Interview 3 protocol.

1. Have you had any feedback or discussion with Participant A about their activities in Second Life?
2. What are your observations about the behaviors of your student in the classroom?
3. Have you noticed any changes in your student’s behavior over the semester?
4. Have you noticed any changes in your student’s attitudes towards using Spanish in the classroom?
Appendix N: Background and Motivations Questionnaire

Survey of motivations and anxieties in foreign language learning.
Instructions: Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability and as completely as possible in the space provided.

Background: This series of questions will ask you about your personal history and language learning background.
1. Age: __________
2. Sex: F M
3. Ethnicity: _______________
4. How long have you studied a language? ___yrs ___mo
5. How long have you studied Spanish? ___yrs ___mo
6. How many languages have you studied?
7. What languages have you studied?

Ideal L2 Self
8. Tell me about how, when, and where you intend to use Spanish in your life.
9. Is studying a language important to you personally? Why?

Ought-to Self
10. Why have you chosen to study a language?
11. Why have you chosen to study Spanish?
12. What do you consider to be the strongest influences on your choice to study a language at this time?

Attitudes towards learning Spanish
13. What are your feelings towards your previous language classroom experiences?
14. What have been your experiences with people from Spanish-speaking countries or backgrounds?
15. If you had the chance to go to a Spanish-speaking country, where would you go and why?
Appendix O: Sample Member-Check Form

Dear ______________________,

Thank you for the insightful and powerful interview(s). Attached please find a draft of the transcripts for your review. Please check for accuracy and that your responses are being reported correctly. Please feel free to contact me at ______________________ or via e-mail at ______________________ should you have any questions.

By your act of reading the transcript(s), if I do not hear from you within 5 working days, I will assume you are in agreement with the transcript(s).

Sincerely,

Amy Wehner
October 28, 2013

Amy Wehner
World Languages
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00014220
Title: Designing and Developing the L2 Self: A Study of Three Spanish Language Learners’ Attempts to Mediate Foreign Language Anxiety and Motivation in Virtual Worlds

Study Approval Period: 10/28/2013 to 10/28/2014

Dear Ms. Wehner:

On 10/28/2013, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Wehner L2 Self Protocol v1 10.22.13.docx

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Wehner L2 Self Instructor Consent v1 10.22.13.docx.pdf
Wehner L2 Self Student Consent v1 10.2.13.docx.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category: