Cultural Appropriation, Postcolonial Fetishism, and Indigenous-Settler Relations in Blizzard Entertainment’s World of Warcraft

by

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ABSTRACT

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Few studies have examined the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity in video games. This thesis therefore investigates whether such appropriations occur in one of the most popular video games made, World of Warcraft, and considers how such appropriations might affect Indigenous-Settler relations. I undertook a discourse analysis of 85 forum discussions in which 682 players discussed the perceived similarities between the ‘races’ in Warcraft and real world ethnocultural groups. An open-ended online survey was also used, which received 29 responses. The results revealed that players believe, first, that Warcraft engages in the appropriation of Indigeneity and, second, that the Tauren most appropriate elements of Indigeneity. By using postcolonial fetishism, I theorize that the Tauren might serve as a fetish ‘object’ for those Settlers who play World of Warcraft, which transforms the Indigenous ‘Other’ into a fixated form that might mask its more foreboding revelations and thereby stabilizes Indigenous-Settler relations.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1

Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................................................................. 10
   The Moral Dimensions of Cultural Appropriation ................................................................. 10
   The Effects of Cultural Appropriation on Indigenous Peoples ............................................... 14
       Cultural Degradation ........................................................................................................... 14
       Material Deprivation ........................................................................................................ 19
       Jurisprudential Subversion ............................................................................................ 21
   Literature Gap and Research Questions .............................................................................. 24

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................... 27
   Settler Colonialism and the Logic of Elimination ................................................................. 28
   Strategies of Elimination and Settler Unease ....................................................................... 30
   Postcolonial Fetishism as a Defence Mechanism ............................................................... 32

Chapter Four: Methodology ....................................................................................................... 36
   Blizzard Entertainment and the *World of Warcraft* Franchise ........................................ 36
   Redefining the MMORPG: *World of Warcraft* ............................................................... 40
   Research Design .................................................................................................................. 45

Chapter Five: Findings ............................................................................................................... 51
   The Humans of Stormwind ................................................................................................... 52
   The Dwarves of Ironforge ..................................................................................................... 53
   The Night Elves of Darnassus ............................................................................................. 54
   The Gnomes of Gnomeregan ............................................................................................... 55
   The Exodar Draenei ............................................................................................................. 56
   The Gilnean Worgen ............................................................................................................ 57
   The Orcs of Durotan ............................................................................................................. 58
   The Forsaken ....................................................................................................................... 59
   The United Tauren Tribes .................................................................................................... 60
   The Darkspear Trolls .......................................................................................................... 61
   The Blood Elves of Quel’Thalas ......................................................................................... 62
   The Bilgewater Cartel Goblins ........................................................................................... 63
   The Tushui and Huojin Pandaren ...................................................................................... 64
   Most Indigenous ‘Race’ ........................................................................................................ 65

Chapter Six: Discussion ............................................................................................................. 66
   Cultural Appropriations in *World of Warcraft* ............................................................... 67
   The Tauren as a Potential Fetish ‘Object’ ........................................................................... 81
   Displacing and Condensing the Indigenous ‘Other’ ......................................................... 83
   The Regularly Knowable, Domesticated Indigenous ‘Other’ vs. the Unknowable, Threatening Indigenous ‘Other’ ................................................................. 89

Chapter Seven: Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 95
   Significance ........................................................................................................................ 97
   Limitations and Recommendations .................................................................................... 97

References .................................................................................................................................. 100
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Ethnocultural Group(s) Appropriated, As Per Player Comments........................................... 71

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Tauren In Blizzard Entertainment’s World Of Warcraft ................................................. 6
Figure 2: High Chieftain Baine Bloodhoof In Thunder Bluff, Mulgore .............................................. 7
Figure 3: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Humans Seem To Appropriate .............................. 52
Figure 4: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Dwarves Seem To Appropriate ............................ 53
Figure 5: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Night Elves Seem To Appropriate ....................... 54
Figure 6: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Gnomes Seem To Appropriate ............................... 55
Figure 7: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Draenei Seem To Appropriate ............................. 56
Figure 8: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Worgen Seem To Appropriate ............................ 57
Figure 9: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Orcs Seem To Appropriate .................................. 58
Figure 10: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Forsaken Seem To Appropriate ......................... 59
Figure 11: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Tauren Seem To Appropriate ............................. 60
Figure 12: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Trolls Seem To Appropriate ............................... 61
Figure 13: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Blood Elves Seem To Appropriate ..................... 62
Figure 14: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Goblins Seem To Appropriate ............................ 63
Figure 15: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Pandaren Seem To Appropriate ......................... 64
Figure 16: ‘Race’ That Most Seems To Appropriate North American Indigeneity ......................... 65
Figure 17: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Tauren Seem To Appropriate ............................. 73
Figure 18: ‘Race’ That Most Seems To Appropriate North American Indigeneity ............................ 73
Figure 19: A Male Tauren In Mulgore ................................................................................................. 74
Figure 20: Camp Narache, Mulgore ................................................................................................. 75
Figure 21: Bloodhoof Village, Mulgore ............................................................................................. 76
Figure 22: Thunder Bluff, Mulgore .................................................................................................. 76
Figure 23: Longhouse In Thunder Bluff, Mulgore ............................................................................... 77
Figure 24: Another Longhouse In Thunder Bluff, Mulgore ............................................................... 77
Figure 25: Dream Catchers In Thunder Bluff, Mulgore ................................................................. 78
Figure 26: Totem Pole In Bloodhoof Village, Mulgore ....................................................................... 78
Figure 27: Teepees In Thunder Bluff, Mulgore .................................................................................. 79
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity, those symbols, objects, images, artefacts, histories, and ways of knowing, among other cultural elements, that belong to the Indigenous Peoples of North America. In accordance with the definitions Rebecca Tsosie (2002, PP. 300, 310-311) and Celia Haig-Brown (2010, P. 929) chart, cultural appropriation refers to the use of those properties and/or attributes of a subaltern culture by members of a more powerful culture, often without the former’s consent or even awareness at times. These properties and attributes are, in turn, transformed to suit the needs and purposes of the dominant cultural group. As Thomas Heyd (2003) explains, “To appropriate something is to make it one’s property, which entails a right to privileged use and to restrict access to it” (P. 37).

James Young (2000, PP. 302-303; 2005, P. 136; 2008, PP. 5-7) offers a useful typology through which to understand the diverse manifestations of this phenomenon. The three forms he identifies include object appropriation, content appropriation, and subject appropriation. Object appropriation occurs when one takes tangible objects that belong to a culture to which he or she is not a member. Content appropriation occurs when cultural creations from one culture are mimicked to produce seemingly original creations in another. And subject appropriation occurs when cultural outsiders, often through audio-visual mediums such as film or artwork, depict individuals from, or aspects of, another culture. While these three forms can and often do overlap, it is subject appropriation that is the main concern of the research conducted herein.

The literature available on subject appropriation pivots on, first, the moral dimensions surrounding cultural appropriation and, second, the theoretical harms appropriative acts might inflict upon Indigenous Peoples. Scholars such as Richard Rogers (2006), Peter Shand (2000),
and Bron Taylor (1997), among others, have written about the moral dimensions of cultural appropriation, seeking to develop some sort of mechanism through which to assess the extent to which appropriative acts can be considered of moral or immoral status. In pursuing such a mechanism, these authors have argued that appropriative acts differ on the extent to which these are of voluntary and balanced nature, crafting conceptual classifications of appropriation in accordance with these fluctuating variables. The four main conceptual classifications identified within the literature are transculturation, cultural exchange, cultural exploitation, and cultural dominance, each of which will be elaborated upon in full within the literature review below.

Rosemary Coombe (1993; 1997), Tsosie (2002), Young (1994; 2000; 2008), and Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao (1997) are just five of those scholars who have theorized about the potential harms appropriative acts might inflict upon Indigenous Peoples. The diverse harms that these and other scholars have identified within the literature often overlap, and have thus been grouped into three principal harms that Indigenous Peoples might experience. These harms include cultural degradation, which occurs when cultural elements become imbued with alien meanings; material deprivation, which occurs when members of a dominant culture materially benefit at the expense of a subaltern culture; and jurisprudential subversion, which occurs when a subaltern culture loses the power to prohibit a dominant culture from using its cultural elements (Coombe, 1993, P. 258; Tsosie, 2002, P. 313; Ziff & Rao, 1997, P. 9). These theoretical harms will be further explored within the literature review below.

In seeking to explore these moral dimensions and potential harms, the above scholars have relied upon a plethora of diverse mediums such as film, television, literature, associations, sports, and more. Some of the examples discussed within the literature review include, for instance, the National Arts Centre of Canada’s (2012) King Lear, an adaptation of Shakespeare’s
The Tragedy of King Lear set in the Algonquin Nation during the seventeenth century; Disney’s (1995) Pocahontas, an animated film about a romantic relationship between the daughter of an Algonquin Chief and an English Settler; and Robert Bringhurst’s (1999) A Story As Sharp As A Knife, a collection of stories, poems, and myths of the Haida Peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast.

While considerable research efforts have been devoted to examining the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity within these spheres, comparatively little attention has been paid to examining this phenomenon in video games. This is a critical oversight as video games have become, as will be detailed in the literature review below, immensely popular as a mode of entertainment. The aim of this thesis was to therefore assist in addressing this gap in the literature through exploring the following two research questions:

1. Does the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity occur in video games, according to those individuals who play such games?

2. How might the potential appropriation of North American Indigeneity in video games affect Settler relations with North American Indigenous Peoples, if at all?

In order to investigate, first, whether or not the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity occurs in video games according to players and, second, how such potential appropriations might affect Settler relations with Indigenous Peoples, this thesis opted for a single in-depth case study approach. The use of a single case study approach is ideal for the purposes of this research as it allows for a focused and thick description, which can help facilitate an initial understanding of the cultural appropriation that might be evident within video games, with some of the findings obtained and arguments developed being of potential relevance in other contexts.
This thesis used as its case study one of the most popular online video games ever made: Blizzard Entertainment’s *World of Warcraft*. *World of Warcraft* is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), a genre of gaming in which players control an in-game character that enters a persistent world where a large number of other players exist and interact with each other. This persistent world continues to exist and change in real time, even while some players are offline (“Beginner’s Guide,” 2016).

In *World of Warcraft*, players can opt to play as a member of one of two factions, each of which is composed of several ‘races.’ The first faction is referred to as the Grand Alliance, which is composed of playable Humans, Dwarves, Gnomes, Night Elves, Draenei, and Worgen. The second faction is referred to as the Horde, which is composed of playable Orcs, Trolls, Tauren, Undead, Blood Elves, and Goblins. Players can also opt to play as a Pandaren, which is a neutral ‘race’ that must eventually choose to join one of the two main factions described above (“Beginner’s Guide,” 2016).

Each of these ‘races’ have their own aesthetics, in-depth backstories, and cultural attributes that seem similar to certain ethnocultural groups from the real world, as players themselves have suggested in forum discussions with such titles as “Warcraft Races and Their Real World Parallels” or “Themes of Race in Comparison to IRL [In Real Life] Cultures.” The two research questions posed above were therefore further refined to better explore this case:

1. Does *World of Warcraft* appropriate North American Indigeneity, according to those individuals who play or have played *World of Warcraft*?
2. How might the potential appropriations of North American Indigeneity in *World of Warcraft* affect Settler relations with North American Indigenous Peoples, if at all?
To explore these two research questions, this thesis investigated each of the 13 ‘races’ found within *World of Warcraft* to determine which ‘race’ most appropriated elements of North American Indigeneity. To that end, this thesis utilized both discourse analysis and open-ended surveying.

The first of these methods, discourse analysis, is a research method in which communicative mediums are examined in an attempt to understand a given phenomenon. Locating nine forum websites associated with *World of Warcraft* on which players seemed to discuss the perceived similarities between the cultural objects and attributes of the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft* and those of real world ethnocultural groups, I collected a total of 85 forum discussions in which 682 unique players explicitly discussed such perceived similarities. The second of these methods, surveying, is a research method in which information is collected from individuals who belong to a specific group through asking them to respond to a list of questions. I developed a series of seven open-ended questions that I presented to individuals who had, at some point or another, played *World of Warcraft*. Identifying myself as a Master of Arts Candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Guelph, I posted this open-ended survey to three forum websites associated with *World of Warcraft* which, from October 21 to November 4, 2015, garnered a total of 29 responses.

There were, in total then, 711 players who discussed the perceived similarities between the cultural elements of the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft* and those of real world ethnocultural groups. The number of in game ‘races’ each player discussed varied though, meaning that while some players only mentioned the cultural similarities between one or two of the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft* and real world ethnocultural groups, others mentioned similarities for each of the 13 ‘races’ found within the game.
The results obtained from these research methods revealed, first, that players believe that *World of Warcraft* engages in the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity and, second, that the Tauren are perceived amongst players as the ‘race’ that most seems to appropriate North American Indigeneity. There were 356 players who identified a total of five ethnocultural groups from which the Tauren were conceptualized, just one of which was not related to North American Indigeneity – the ‘Greek,’ to which only 11 players (3.1%) equated the Tauren. The other 345 players (96.1%) asserted that the Tauren appropriated North American Indigeneity in some variant or another. Further, from a total of 371 players who drew parallels between certain aspects of certain ‘races’ in *World of Warcraft* and those of North American Indigeneity, 335 (90.3%) drew parallels between North American Indigeneity and the Tauren.

![Figure 1: The Tauren In Blizzard Entertainment’s World Of Warcraft](image-url)
Having situated the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft*, I then sought to address the second research question of interest; that is, how appropriations of North American Indigeneity in *World of Warcraft* might affect Settler relations with North American Indigenous Peoples. To do so, this thesis relied on both the settler colonial logic of elimination and the theory of postcolonial fetishism as its theoretical framework, as fully described in chapter three.

According to Lorenzo Veracini (2010, P. 33) and Patrick Wolfe (2006, P. 389), the logic of elimination stipulates that if Settlers are to supplant Indigenous Peoples as the rightful inhabitants of the land, and thus complete the settler colonial project, Indigenous Peoples must disappear so that Settlers can inherit all that was and is Indigenous. It involves, in essence, the Indigenization of Settlers so as to convert an historical connection – “We came here” – into a natural connection – “The land made us” (Veracini, 2010, PP. 21-22). These authors assert that the very presence of Indigenous Peoples challenges Settlers in delegitimating such claims to
Indigenization, in that the contemporaneous relationship that Indigenous Peoples have with the land undermines Settlers’ attempts to assert a similar connection that is of equivalent status, thus fostering cognitive unease.

According to Stuart Hall (1997, P. 266) and Louise Kaplan (2006, P. 6), postcolonial fetishism is a defensive mechanism in which a fetish ‘object’ substitutes for some sort of powerful, immaterial, and perhaps dangerous force or essence. Its purpose, according to these authors, is to transform an unknown and intangible ‘something’ or ‘someone’ into something that is known and tangible. In doing so, the powerful, immaterial, and perhaps dangerous force or essence of the ‘something’ or ‘someone’ in question is supposed to be masked and extinguished (Hall, 1997, PP. 267-268; Kaplan, 2006, P. 6).

I theorize that the Tauren might serve as such a fetish ‘object’ for those Settlers who play World of Warcraft, potentially substituting itself for the Indigenous ‘Other.’ As such, the Tauren might transform the Indigenous ‘Other’ into a fixated, more palatable form that might mask some of its more foreboding revelations. It could therefore be the case that the Tauren might produce an Indigenous ‘Other’ that first, assuages the cognitive dissonance some Settlers have been theorized to experience; and second, supports the ongoing logic of elimination upon which settler colonialism relies, principally in creating a fictitious and regularly knowable Indigenous ‘Other’ that enables a tenacious and wilful ignorance amongst Settlers with respect to the full breadth of experiences associated with North American Indigeneity. The appropriation of North American Indigeneity evident within World of Warcraft, then, maintains the negative relations Settlers have with Indigenous Peoples, failing to transform them in any meaningful way.
**Structure of the Thesis**

This chapter introduced readers to the concept of cultural appropriation and outlined the parameters of the research undertaken herein. The next chapter aims to acquaint readers with the knowledge and ideas that have already been published on subject appropriation in an effort to better situate this thesis within, and outline its modest contribution to, the broader literature available on cultural appropriation. The third chapter introduces readers to both the settler colonial logic of elimination and the theory of postcolonial fetishism, which, together, serve as the basis upon which I discerned observations and conclusions.

The fourth chapter introduces readers to *World of Warcraft* and describes, in greater detail than that provided here, the methods utilized to situate the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft*. The fifth chapter describes my findings based on the discourse analysis and open-ended surveying I employed in this research, while the sixth interprets those findings and, in doing so, advances the argument that the Tauren in *World of Warcraft* might serve as a fetish ‘object’ for Settlers, protecting the settler colonial logic of elimination upon which settler colonialism relies. The seventh chapter summarizes the contents of the thesis and notes the strengths and weaknesses inherent within this research, proposing potential directions for future research.
Prior to investigating whether or not the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity occurs in video games, according to players, and how such potential appropriations might affect Settler relations with Indigenous Peoples, this thesis will first establish the basis upon which these research questions were conceived through reviewing the relevant academic literature available on cultural appropriation. In doing so, this chapter aims to familiarize readers with the knowledge and ideas that have already been published on this topic.

This chapter will first survey the moral dimensions surrounding appropriative acts, focusing on the classifications that have been developed and used to judge the extent to which instances of appropriation can be considered of virtuous character. It will then explore both the theoretical and empirical effects that appropriative acts might have on Indigenous Peoples, citing relevant examples from a diverse range of mediums including film, literature, theatre, sports, and merchandising. This chapter will then draw attention to the fact that, at the time of this writing, few academic publications have been dedicated to exploring the appropriation of North American Indigeneity in video games, and explain why this sphere merits such investigation.

The Moral Dimensions of Cultural Appropriation

Rogers (2006), Shand (2000), and Taylor (1997) are just three of a handful of scholars who have explored the moral dimensions of cultural appropriation, seeking to develop some sort of mechanism through which to determine when instances of appropriation can be considered harmful to the source culture in question. In this pursuit, Rogers (2006, P. 499) and Taylor (1997, P. 205) have theorized that appropriative acts differ on the extent to which these are of voluntary and balanced nature, and have developed diverse classifications of cultural
appropriation that are based on these fluctuating variables. These diverse classifications can be perceived as a continuum of sorts, in which some forms of appropriation are considered natural, inevitable, and benign, while others are considered selective, exploitative, and deleterious.

At one end of this perceptual continuum lies what Rogers (2006, PP. 491-492) refers to as transculturation, under which cultures are perceived as relational phenomena that are themselves the products of appropriative acts (See Also Clifford, 1988, PP. 11-14). The attributes of a given culture, according to Rogers’ (2006, P. 491) explanation of transculturation, are forged through appropriative acts that take from, and are undertaken by, multiple cultures at the same time, each of which possess multiple positions of power in a number of intercultural relationships. Taylor (1997, P. 198) likewise argues that, in an era in which few societies remain in isolation and there is an unprecedented circulation of people, ideas, and goods, cultures cannot help but be formed through appropriative processes. With multiple cultures engaging in cultural appropriation on a concurrent basis, identifying and defining cultures in singular terms becomes a challenging task, as these cultures are fluid and always changing with the boundaries between and among them multiple and overlapping (Lull, 2000, PP. 242-245; Rogers, 2006, PP. 491-493). Under transculturation, then, appropriative acts are considered a natural occurrence in cross-cultural communication that actually shape the attributes cultures possess.

The next form of cultural appropriation is labelled cultural exchange. Appropriative acts that fall under this category are, according to Rogers (2006, P. 478), reciprocal exchanges between two cultures that possess roughly equivalent levels of power. In such scenarios, cultures engage in the mutual sharing of cultural properties and attributes with the aim, as Susan Scafidi (2005, P. 8) explains, of fostering greater intercultural comprehension and appreciation. Christian Huck (2012, P. 78) argues that appropriations of this sort are therefore of voluntary and
balanced nature, with each of the two cultures exerting influence over the ways through which their properties or attributes are appropriated and used in the other. Because of the non-coercive environment cultural exchange transpires in, these appropriative acts might be perceived as legitimate. At the same time, Rogers (2006, P. 478) contends that there are few instances of appropriative acts that would meet the criteria of cultural exchange charted above, especially the requirement that cultures possess near equivalent levels of power. He instead asserts that the category serves more as an ideal that should be pursued, or a target that should be used to evaluate instances of appropriation, rather than a contemporary reality (P. 478).

The third form of cultural appropriation found along this perceptual continuum is referred to as cultural exploitation. As Kathleen Ashley and Véronique Plesch (2002, P. 3) and Hartmut Lutz (1990, P. 168) describe, appropriations of this variant involve a dominant culture’s taking of a subordinate culture’s properties or attributes, without their permission and with the full support of the socio-political structure in place. As a result of such appropriative practices, Lutz (1990, P. 168) and Shand (2000, P. 4) argue that the origin of the properties or attributes in question are disowned, with both the historical relations between the dominant and subordinate culture and the original meanings and significances attached to these properties and attributes being erased. Rogers (2006, P. 486) thus asserts that there is a significant power imbalance inherent within these kinds of appropriative acts, as the dominant culture that is stronger in both political and economic respects finds itself unconstrained in its outright stealing of another culture that is powerless to prevent such thefts.

Even when appropriative acts are done in seemingly positive connotations and come across as favourable evaluations of the subaltern culture, Rogers (2006, P. 486) argues, these appropriative acts still serve to reinforce the pre-eminent position of the appropriating culture.
Elizabeth Coleman (2001, P. 391) explains, for instance, that the appropriated properties and attributes are foremost used to fulfill the political, economic, or social needs of the dominant culture, rather than those of the subaltern culture. She cites, as an example, a Gumatj of the Yolngu Indigenous People in Australia named Galarrwuy Yunupingu, who has spent much of his life as a land rights activist:

Every week we find that other non-Aboriginal people are stealing our designs and paintings for decorating T-shirts, dress fabrics, restaurant menus and so on. They are using the same old tactics of assimilation, except this time they are trying to assimilate our culture into their world because it is fashionable in their eyes and will make money. (Cited in Coleman, 2001, P. 391)

Appropriations that fall under the scope of cultural exploitation are therefore cast as immoral within the literature.

The fourth variant of cultural appropriation is what Rogers (2006, P. 477) refers to as cultural dominance. He contends that these kinds of appropriations occur when dominant cultures attempt to eradicate subaltern cultures through eroding the cultural foundations upon which those groups exist, thereby triggering cultural disintegration and dislocation (PP. 477, 479-480). As such, these kinds of appropriative acts are considered immoral. Two processes seem to characterize the appropriations that transpire under this domain.

In the first process, as Rogers (2006, P. 480) describes it, the dominant culture imposes its cultural attributes onto the subaltern culture as a means to induce assimilation. The ‘Indian Residential School System’ in Canada serves as an explicit example of this process, through which Indigenous children were removed from their families and relocated to boarding schools that were funded by the government of Canada and administered by Christian churches (Coombe, 1993, P. 274). Under this system, as Coombe (1993, P. 274) explains, Indigenous children were forbidden from acknowledging their culture or speaking their home languages, and
were forced to adopt Euro-Canadian norms, actions, and values as a means to assimilate them into Canadian society (See Also Haig-Brown, 2010, P. 932).

In the second, seemingly simultaneous process that Coombe (1993, P. 272) alludes to, the cultural properties and attributes belonging to the subaltern culture are seized by the dominant culture and used for its own purposes, even though it continues to impose its culture upon the subaltern group. The confiscation of artefacts used in potlatch ceremonies after the 1884 prohibition of potlatches serves as an illustrative example of this secondary process. Coombe (1993, P. 277) explains that when members of the Kwakiutl People of the Pacific Northwest Coast were tried in 1922 for violating the potlatch prohibition, the government declared that the individuals charged did not have to serve jail time if the participating communities would forfeit the ceremonial artefacts used in these potlatches. The artefacts were subsequently confiscated and divided among the private and public collections of Settlers and museums across Canada and overseas, the repatriation of which is still sought after today (P. 277).

**The Effects of Cultural Appropriation on Indigenous Peoples**

Besides the moral dimensions outlined above, scholars such as Coombe (1993; 1997), Tsosie (2002), Young (1994; 2000; 2008), and Ziff and Rao (1997) have also theorized about the effects cultural appropriation might inflict upon Indigenous Peoples. While these and other authors have identified a number of diverse harms, there seems to be some overlap among these. As such, these can be grouped into three clusters of harms that Indigenous Peoples might endure. These harms include cultural degradation, material deprivation, and jurisprudential subversion.

**Cultural Degradation**

One of the most obvious harms identified within the literature available on cultural appropriation is that of cultural degradation. Young (2000, PP. 313-314; 2008, P. 56) explains
that when individuals of one culture appropriate the properties and attributes of another, these outsiders might misrepresent the lives of the insiders to which that culture belongs. These outsiders, he maintains, might not have experienced firsthand what life is like as an insider, and must therefore call on their own assumptions and limited experiences when appropriating the properties and attributes of the source culture in question (See Also Jojola, 2003, P. 13).

According to Heyd (2003, P. 38), as well as Ziff and Rao (1997, P. 9), cultural appropriation can therefore damage or transform the properties, attributes, and/or practices of the source cultures in imbibing them with alien meanings. These alien meanings, as Scafidi (2005, P. 106) likewise contends, often devalue the original cultural meanings and significances attached to these properties, attributes, and/or practices, thereby impeding the source cultures from using or perceiving of these as intended. “Appropriation,” as Ziff and Rao (1997) further elucidate,

Can have corrosive effects on the integrity of an exploited culture because appropriative conduct can erroneously depict the heritage from which it is drawn. To the extent that the depiction is misleading, tears can appear in the fabric of a group’s cultural identity. (P. 9)

One of the means through which appropriative acts can result in cultural degradation is commodification. As Lisa Aldred (2000, P. 345) and Rogers (2006, P. 488) explain, commodification transforms items, services, ideas, and/or practices, among other cultural elements, into tradable commodities that can be bought and sold on the market. In doing so, these authors argue, commodification abstracts the context in which these items, services, ideas, and/or practices were conceived, replacing both the original meanings and functions of these cultural elements with artificial ones. In other words, elements of the appropriated culture become, as Aldred (2000) writes, “Another fad to be sampled (and ultimately discarded) among a smorgasbord of entertainment options for consumers in a culture that cultivates an insatiable appetite” (P. 345).
Nell Newton (1997, PP. 195-224) points to the case of Crazy Horse Malt Liquor as an illustrative example of the means through which commodification in subject appropriation can degrade Indigeneity. Tasunka Witko, more commonly known by his English translation of ‘Crazy Horse,’ was a War Leader of the Oglala Lakota during the nineteenth century. He is said to have played a pivotal role in the Battle of the Little Bighorn alongside Sitting Bull and Chief Gall, launching a surprise attack on Brigadier General George Cook so as to delay his forces from reinforcing Major General George Custer. He also fought in the Battle of the Little Bighorn. According to Newton (1997, P. 201), Witko is thus a revered Lakota Leader whose name and feats are frequently invoked among the Lakota Peoples as part of their ongoing identity formation.

Despite the deep respect Lakota Peoples have for Witko, and the fact that he condemned the introduction and use of alcohol among the Oglala Lakota, the G. Heileman Brewing Company and the Hornell Brewing Company appropriated the English translation of his name to market its 40-ounce bottle of malt liquor, naming it ‘Crazy Horse Malt Liquor’ (Newton, 1997, P. 200). Crazy Horse Malt Liquor used as its logo an ‘Indian Chief’ wearing a feathered war bonnet, and replaced Witko’s narrative with a fictional tale of an ‘Indian Chief’ named Curley who used ‘Crazy Horse’ as a mere nickname (Newton, 1997, P. 201).

Witko was thus, according to Newton (1997, PP. 200-201), commodified through appropriation; the original narrative attached to his name was stripped and replaced with an artificial one so that the G. Heileman and Hornell Brewing Companies could better market their product. A legal battle between the Crazy Horse Estate and the G. Heileman and Hornell Brewing Companies that began in 1992 led to the eventual renaming of Crazy Horse Malt Liquor.
to ‘Crazy Stallion Malt Liquor’ in 2004, along with a modest redesign that removed the ‘Indian Chief’ from the bottle (LaDuke, 2005, P. 147).

The obstruction of cultural self-expression is yet another way appropriation can trigger cultural degradation. According to Coombe (1993, PP. 279-280), cultural self-expression refers to the practice among cultural insiders of communicating, to themselves and others, the properties, attributes, traits, practices, thoughts, and ideas that make up the cultures to which they belong. In other words, it refers to a process through which cultural insiders define and establish their own individual and collective identities.

When outsiders appropriate the elements of other cultures, as Heyd (2003, P. 38), Tsosie (2002, P. 313), and Selvaraj Velayutham and Amanda Wise (2001, P. 153) argue, these outsiders impede cultural self-expression by displacing the power of insiders to define themselves and establish their own identities. Brenda Farnell (2004) likewise contends that appropriations “Empower Whites, not only to claim a superior right to determine the representations [of Indigenous Peoples] but also to silence Native voices, insisting with neo-colonial impunity that Whites will determine what Indians will mean” (P. 49). Métis Filmmaker Loretta Todd further explains that,

Cultural autonomy signifies a right to one’s origins and histories as told from within the culture and not as mediated from without. Appropriation occurs when someone else speaks for, tells, defines, describes, represents, uses, or recruits the images, stories, experiences, dreams of others for their own. (Cited in Coombe, 1993, P. 279)

Yvette Nolan (2014, PP. 228-229) points to the National Arts Centre of Canada’s King Lear as an example of how subject appropriation can degrade Indigeneity through obstructing cultural self-expression. Running in May of 2012, King Lear was an adaptation of Shakespeare’s The Tragedy of King Lear that was set in the Algonquin Nation during the seventeenth century.
While the production featured an ‘all-Aboriginal’ cast, Nolan (2014, P. 228) argues that there was not one Indigenous person who held a position of power. Suzanne Keeptwo, the ‘Aboriginal Advisor and Community Liaison’ for the project, expressed a number of concerns about the final production:

The problem is that the first publicity sets up the play for some very serious cultural and historical inaccuracies… The Algonquin never signed a treaty with the British, the French, or the government of Canada. They never divided lands; they occupied traditional territories… [T]here will be palisade fencing to depict the Algonquin village, but the Algonquin of this territory never used fencing to envelop their communities… Hairstyles are another important symbol. How a person’s hair is worn and styled, cut, or braided has deep significance and provides cultural distinctions… These are details that need to be understood. (Quoted in Finken, 2012, Para. 20)

Despite overlooking these important details, Nolan (2014, P. 229) argues that the production still tried to make its characters appear as authentic as possible through using real animal skins and feathers to construct costumes that were, in the end, based off of the selective and subjective interpretations of cultural outsiders. One of the character’s costumes, for instance, featured a cape made out of multiple coyote tails, which, to Nolan (2014, P. 229), came across as wasteful and antithetical to the Algonquin practice of thanking and showing respect to each animal for its sacrifice.

The subject appropriation involved in *King Lear* thus seemed to impede cultural self-expression in crafting stereotypical, reductionist misrepresentations that prevented real Indigenous Peoples from defining themselves in ways that diverge from those deemed acceptable to outsiders. Pauline Strong (2003) argues that these kinds of selective and subjective appropriations are also evident within Disney’s animated film *Pocahontas*, arguing that,

In imagining *Pocahontas*, the filmmakers relied to some extent on consultation with Native people and scholars, but more on what resonated with their own experiences, desires, and sense of “authenticity.”... Lyricist Stephen Schwartz said of the composition of “Colors of the Wind” that “We were able to find the
parts of ourselves that beat in synchronicity with Pocahontas,” while animator Keane declared, “I’m cast as Pocahontas in the film.” (P. 197)

**Material Deprivation**

The second kind of harm cultural appropriation causes is a pecuniary harm referred to within the literature as material deprivation. Young (1994, P. 417; 2008, P. 20) explains that because the objects, stories, and visual images of a given culture were conceived through its members’ creative efforts, and because these have attained great cultural or religious significance, cultural insiders theoretically own these tangible and intangible cultural elements. As such, Heyd (2003, P. 38) and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (1997, P. 72) therefore argue that when outsiders appropriate these objects, stories, and visual images without first seeking permission from, or establishing compensatory agreements with, cultural insiders, outsiders are essentially committing an act of theft. These acts of theft, according to Tsosie (2002, P. 313), deprive insiders of the profits and potential royalties that would be accrued from the sale of such cultural elements. Appropriative acts thus enable members of the dominant culture to materially benefit at the expense of the subaltern culture (See Also Ziff & Rao, 1997, PP. 14, 24).

Appropriation, Young (1994, P. 416; 2000, P. 314; 2008, P. 25) further explains, might also deny to the subaltern culture access to the markets where these appropriations are sold. In committing appropriative acts, outsiders do not just seize the properties and attributes of the subaltern cultures concerned, but might also seize the consumers and audiences to which these cultural properties and attributes might appeal in overrunning the commercial field with misappropriated knockoffs.

Keeshig-Tobias (1997, P. 72) and Ziff and Rao (1997, P. 14) similarly explain that as the number of appropriative products on the market increases, the subaltern culture is presented with fewer and fewer opportunities to sell its own cultural goods, as it must compete with seemingly
similar products that already have an established foothold within the market. Young (2008, PP. 114-115) therefore contends that appropriation can have a significant impact upon the economic well being of the subaltern culture as a whole, if the dominant culture has seized the audience of a particular good that accounts for a significant portion of the subaltern’s economic base.

Forrest Carter’s ‘autobiography,’ *The Education of Little Tree*, which was first published in 1976 by Delacorte Press, serves as an illustrative example that both Paul Chaat Smith (2009, PP. 15-16) and Shari Huhndorf (2001, PP. 129-161) discuss at length. *The Education of Little Tree* recounts the upbringing of Forrest ‘Little Tree’ Carter, who, at the age of five, lost both of his parents and was forced to live among his Cherokee grandparents in the Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee (Huhndorf, 2001, P. 129). According to Chaat Smith (2009, P. 15), the environmental message inherent within the book, combined with the alluring presence of Indigeneity, attracted a modest following. After the University of New Mexico Press republished the book, interest in Carter’s Cherokee upbringing was reignited and *The Education of Little Tree* became one of *The New York Times*’ non-fiction best sellers in 1991 (Huhndorf, 2001, P. 130).

Unbeknownst to readers though, ‘Forrest Carter’ was, in actuality, Asa Carter, an infamous white supremacist who had no connection to Cherokee heritage at all. In response to the widespread revelation of this discovery, *The Education of Little Tree* was merely reclassified from non-fiction to fiction (Huhndorf, 2001, P. 131). As Chaat Smith (2009) explains,

It didn’t really matter that the first Indian autobiography to win a mass audience of young people in the United States was both fake and written by a committed racist. It seems the penalty for fraudulent Indian books these days is getting moved from one best-seller list to another. (P. 15)

Chaat Smith (2009, PP. 15-16) therefore asserts that, in writing and publishing *The Education of Little Tree*, Asa Carter not only committed an act of subject appropriation, but also appropriated
the audience to which such narratives appealed, overshadowing the autobiographies authored by real Indigenous Peoples.

**Jurisprudential Subversion**

The third and final means through which cultural appropriation could cause harm is through jurisprudential subversion. Coombe (1993, P. 269), Jonathan Hart (1997, P. 143), and Rogers (2006, P. 487) assert that appropriative acts are permitted to transpire because of the fact that current intellectual property rights regimes favour dominant cultures’ conceptions of property and ownership over subaltern cultures’ conceptions. Central to these intellectual property rights regimes, as Young (2000, P. 307) argues, is the belief that no individual or group of individuals can possess a right to control ‘general’ ideas, as these ideas are considered discernable by anyone.

Young and Conrad Brunk (2009, P. 105) identify two important exceptions within these regimes under which this belief is overlooked. The first is referred to as a copyright, which allows for specific *expressions* of ideas to be owned for designated periods of time. Copyrights enable authors, artists, musicians, or other creative professionals to obtain the exclusive legal right to produce and distribute their books, articles, paintings, photographs, songs, or other original works. The second is referred to as a patent, which allows for specific *applications* of ideas to again be owned for designated periods of time. Patents enable individuals to obtain the exclusive legal right to produce, use, and sell a unique product, contraption, method, or process that might be useful and inventive. According to both Coombe (1997, P. 77) and Young and Brunk (2005, P. 105), both of these exceptions are premised upon a distinction between ‘general’ ideas that exist on a standalone basis, and unique *articulations* or *implementations* of ideas that have been conceived through the creative efforts of an individual or group of individuals.
A Story As Sharp As A Knife serves, according to Nicholas Bradley (2007, PP. 890-912) and Young (2000, PP. 306-308), as an illustrative example of the legal logic that is used to sanction appropriative acts in Canada. A Story As Sharp As A Knife is a collection of stories, poems, and myths of the Haida Peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Beginning in October of 1900, the linguist and ethnographer John Swanton undertook fieldwork among the Haida Peoples for about a year, during which time he transcribed the stories, poems, and myths of the Haida Peoples as told to him by the Poets Skaay and Ghandl. Skaay and Ghandl were compensated in exchange for the sharing of these stories and were, apparently, cognizant of the fact that Swanton was transcribing them. Working off of these manuscripts almost a century later, Canadian author and poet Robert Bringhurst translated these transcriptions into English and published them as A Story As Sharp As A Knife in 1999 (Young, 2000, PP. 306-307).

In response, the Council of the Haida Nation argued that Bringhurst had not received permission to translate, let alone publish, the stories that Swanton had transcribed, and accused him of cultural appropriation. A host of scholars and authors such as Margaret Atwood came to his defence, asserting that Bringhurst had not merely repeated some specific variant of the stories, poems, and myths of the Haida Peoples, but had rather retold them through his own unique and artistic interpretations (Bradley, 2007, P. 898). A Story As Sharp As A Knife was, therefore, a specific expression of the ‘general’ ideas embodied within these stories, poems, and myths, which, according to Young (2000, PP. 306-307), no one – neither Skaay, nor Ghandl, nor the Council of the Haida Nation, nor Bringhurst – had a right to control.

The dominant culture’s conceptions of ownership thus seem to protect the rights of individuals and groups of individuals that have bestowed upon some idea an ‘added-value,’ rather than the rights of the cultures that first conceived these supposedly ‘general’ ideas.
According to Coombe (1993, P. 269), the stories that are orally passed down from generation to generation, or the songs that have been sung since time immemorial, are therefore not recognized in the dominant culture’s legal apparatus as forms of property that can be legally protected, an argument the example above seems to support. Likewise, Young (2000, P. 306) asserts that, as mere ‘general’ ideas, the cultural significance of these stories, songs, or symbols to the source cultures in question holds no legal standing or weight in determining issues of ownership.

In failing to reflect alternative conceptions of ownership, appropriative acts inflict at least two distinct injuries upon Indigenous Peoples. First, Tsosie (2002, P. 356) and Ziff and Rao (1997, P. 15) argue that Indigenous Peoples’ conceptions of both cultural sovereignty and cultural rights are subsumed within a foreign legal apparatus belonging to the dominant settler colonial culture, which perverts or trivializes these conceptions if not ignoring them altogether. Through this process, Indigenous Peoples lose the power to prohibit the dominant culture from using or adapting their cultural properties or attributes in ways that violate their understandings of ownership and appropriate use.

Second, George Nicholas and Alison Wylie (2012, P. 201), Andrea Smith (2005, P. 100), and Young (2008, P. 125) argue that the perversion of Indigenous Peoples’ conceptions of cultural rights transforms Indigeneity into what is referred to as ‘common property’ under the dominant culture’s legal apparatus. Through this process, legal mechanisms establish the claim that Indigeneity can be treated as falling within the purview of the ‘public domain,’ which enables anyone to take and use the properties or attributes of these cultures for their own purposes.

Three of these legal mechanisms, according to Nicholas and Wylie (2012, P. 201), include lapsed protection due to the age of the cultural properties in question, uncertainty about
the attribution of the properties to living cultures, and doubt about the affiliation of descendant cultures to the properties. To illustrate, Nicholas and Wylie (2012, PP. 209-210) point to an incident that occurred at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, during which the Russian figure skating team defended the use of faux didgeridoo music and Aboriginal Australian costumes within their routine on the premise that such attributes were of non-proprietary standing.

**Literature Gap and Research Questions**

Absent from the discussions above is reference to an in-depth investigation of cultural appropriation in video games. As the aforementioned examples illustrate, both the moral dimensions surrounding, and the theoretical and empirical consequences stemming from, appropriative acts have been explored in a plethora of diverse mediums, such as film, television, literature, associations, sports, and more.

Sierra Adare’s (2009) *Indian Stereotypes in TV Science Fiction* and Peter Rollins and John O’Connor’s (2003) *Hollywood’s Indian* are just two of the foundational texts that investigate the subject appropriation of Indigenous Peoples in cinema and television, for instance. Likewise, Philip Deloria’s (1998) *Playing Indian* and Sharon Wall’s (2009) *The Nurture of Nature* explore the appropriation of North American Indigeneity in clubs and social movements, while Richard King’s (2010) *The Native American Mascot Controversy* and Carol Spindel’s (2002) *Dancing at Halftime* investigate the same phenomenon as found in the construction of sporting mascots. These are just several of the more renowned publications that have investigated the subject appropriation of Indigenous Peoples in some medium or another.

Despite the vast amount of literature that has been published on the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity in these spheres, there have been comparatively few
investigations of such appropriative acts in video games conducted as of this writing. This is a critical oversight as video games have become immensely popular as a mode of entertainment. In 2013 alone, for instance, the number of gamers surpassed 1.2-billion worldwide and global video game sales reached $75.5-billion, more than double Hollywood’s 2013 global box office sales of $35.9-billion (Newzoo, 2014, Para. 5; Motion Picture Association of America, 2013, P. 2; Spil Games, 2013, P. 4). Jane McGonigal (2010, Para. 2) asserts that, worldwide, gamers spend a collective 3-billion hours playing video games each week. In the United States alone, 34 million ‘core gamers,’ defined as individuals who play video games for at least five hours each week, devote an average of 22 hours to video game playing on a per week basis (NPD Group, 2014, Paras. 1-2).

Besides the sheer popularity of these video games, there are two distinct features that make this entertainment medium so much more powerful than other forms of mass media. The first is interactivity, which, as Jeroen Jansz and Raynel Martis (2007, P. 142) and Angeline Khoo (2012, P. 419) explain, refers to the potential within video games for players to exert influence over the content, actions, and outcomes experienced in the video games in question through the input of commands. Unlike in the consumption of television, movies, music, and literature, where individuals merely have to surrender themselves to the plotlines these mediums share for a limited amount of time, Isabela Granic, Adam Lobel, and C.M.E. Engels (2014, P. 67) argue that video games require the active engagement of users for the plot to advance.

The second is realism, which, as Melissa Monson (2012, P. 52) seems to suggest, is an approach to video game design in which the graphical, contextual, and behavioural aspects inherent within a given video game are depicted in as realistic a manner as possible. Monson (2012, P. 52) asserts that realism can be established through a number of diverse mechanisms,
including, for instance, the use of geographies that are recognizable from the real world or historical settings that mimic those of real life.

According to Jansz and Martis (2007, P. 142), there are two main consequences that stem from the presence of interactivity and realism in video games. The first consequence is that players become less conscious of the mediated nature through which these video games are experienced, as players find themselves increasingly drawn into these virtual worlds. The second is that players develop a sense of identification with the characters that are created and played on within these virtual worlds, in a way ‘becoming’ the characters through which these video games are explored (See Also Khoo, 2012, P. 419). Nick Yee (2006) offers an articulate summarization of the effects of interactivity and realism, as well as the importance of video games in modern societies, in describing video games as,

Places where alternative identities are conceived and explored. They are parallel worlds where cultures, economies and societies are being created. They are environments where the relationships that form and the derived experiences can rival those of the physical world. They are new platforms for social science research. They are places where people fall in love, get married, elect governors, attend poetry readings, start a pharmaceutical business and even commit genocide. Whatever MMORPGs are, or will become, one thing is clear. They are not just games. (P. 325)

Given the widespread appeal of video games in modern societies, combined with the powerful effects that stem from their interactivity and realism, an investigation of cultural appropriation in this sphere becomes all the more pressing. This thesis therefore sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity occur in video games, according to those individuals who play such games?

2. How might the potential appropriation of North American Indigeneity in video games affect Settler relations with North American Indigenous Peoples?
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In exploring how the potential appropriation of North American Indigeneity in video games might affect Settler relations with Indigenous Peoples, this thesis will utilize both the settler colonial logic of elimination and the theory of postcolonial fetishism as its theoretical framework. A theoretical framework refers to a specific lens through which a topic is investigated, serving as a basis upon which observations, interpretations, and conclusions about certain aspects of human existence are made.

The settler colonial logic of elimination, as Veracini (2010, P. 33) and Wolfe (2006, P. 389) explain, posits that if Settlers are to supplant Indigenous Peoples as the rightful inhabitants of the land, Indigenous Peoples must disappear so that Settlers can inherit all that was and is Indigenous. As Hall (1997, P. 266) describes it, postcolonial fetishism refers to a representational practice that involves the substitution of an object for some sort of immaterial and perhaps dangerous force or essence. This object is theorized to enable a transformation of that force or essence into some more palatable form. Together, these theories serve as a useful framework through which to interpret why Settlers appropriate North American Indigeneity and what point these appropriations might serve.

The purpose of this chapter is to therefore introduce readers to, first, the settler colonial logic of elimination and, second, the theory of postcolonial fetishism as used in this thesis. This chapter will first explain what settler colonialism is, and elucidate why its success has been theorized to be dependent upon the settler colonial logic of elimination. It will then describe the cognitive unease some Settlers might experience in response to the contemporary presence of Indigenous Peoples within settler colonial societies. This chapter will then outline the theory of
postcolonial fetishism as developed by such theorists as Homi Bhabha (1994), Derek Hook (2005), Kaplan (2006), and Anne McClintock (1995).

SETTLER COLONIALISM AND THE LOGIC OF ELIMINATION

Settler colonialism refers to an indefinite structural imposition in which there is a large-scale influx of Settlers into a foreign region (Cavanagh & Veracini, 2013, P. 1). According to Veracini (2010, PP. 3-4), the term ‘Settlers’ refers to individuals that move to, and establish political orders in, a foreign region that does not belong to them. He asserts that it also refers to those individuals who are the contemporary descendants of said founders. He distinguishes these Settlers from migrants who can be perceived as appellants to existing political orders that, while susceptible to co-optation within settler colonial societies, lack the inherent rights Settlers possess as founders of these orders. As James Belich (2009) writes, an “Emigrant joined someone else’s society, [whereas] a Settler or colonist remade his own” (P. 53).

Wolfe (1999, P. 163) asserts that, in contradistinction with other variants of colonialism, where the overriding purpose might be to extract surplus value from Indigenous labour and/or natural resources, settler colonialism is predominantly preoccupied with access to land. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Young (2012) write, “Land is what is most valuable, contested, [and] required” (P. 5). It is, according to these authors, the foundation upon which Settlers establish these new political orders and the sources of livelihood that sustain them. Audra Simpson (2011, P. 205) therefore comments that, under settler colonialism, there transpires a territorial possession on the part of the Settlers and, as a consequence, a territorial dispossession of Indigenous Peoples.

In his operationalizing of the term, Veracini (2010, P. 33) argues that settler colonialism is predicated on two essential stipulations. The first of these stipulations is the capacity of a
colonial power to shift a substantial number of individuals from one region to another, often over significant and hazardous distances. The second and perhaps more important of these stipulations is the disappearance of the Indigenous Peoples within that region, which empowers these would be Settlers to supersede Indigenous Peoples as the rightful inhabitants of the land (Veracini, 2010, P. 33). Wolfe (2006, P. 387) describes this requirement as the logic of elimination.

According to Wolfe (2006, P. 388), Indigenous Peoples have historically obstructed Settlers in their venture to access more lands and resources. He explains that, “So far as Indigenous People[s] are concerned, where they are is who they are,” and thus, citing Deborah Bird Rose (1991, P. 46), “To get in the way of settler colonization, all the Native has to do is stay at home” (P. 388). Tuck and Young (2012) offer a similar, more exact interpretation in explaining that,

Indigenous Peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how we/they came to be in a particular place – indeed how we/they came to be a place. Our/their relationships to land comprise our/their epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies. (P. 6)

It follows, according to Wolfe (2006, P. 389), that Settlers must eliminate Indigenous Peoples in order to establish themselves upon the territories concerned, and to supplant Indigenous Peoples as the rightful inhabitants of these territories. This eliminatory aspect, Veracini (2010, PP. 21-22) asserts, therefore involves the Indigenization of Settlers, through which Settlers inherit all that is Indigenous – foremost of which is the status itself. In doing so, Settlers convert an historical connection – “We came here” – into a natural connection – “The land made us” (PP. 21-22). Smith (2010) echoes this argument in contending that Indigenous Peoples,

Must always be disappearing, in order to enable non-Indigenous Peoples’ rightful claim to land. Through this logic of genocide, non-Native Peoples then become the rightful inheritors of all that was Indigenous – land, resources, Indigenous
spirituality, and culture. Genocide serves as the anchor of colonialism: it is what allows non-Native Peoples to feel they can rightfully own Indigenous Peoples’ land. It is acceptable exclusively to possess land that is the home of Indigenous Peoples because Indigenous Peoples have disappeared. (Para. 4)

Stephen Pearson (2013, P. 177) argues that this evanescence thus erases the original genocidal violence perpetrated in the settler colonization of the United States, replacing it with a historic genesis that began with European settlement of the land and/or the inheritance of Indigeneity.

**STRATEGIES OF ELIMINATION AND SETTLER UNEASE**

Veracini (2010, P. 33) identifies a plethora of different kinds of tactics that can be utilized against Indigenous Peoples to, as he terms it, ‘cleanse’ the settler politic of its ‘alterities.’ He lists, in total, 26 different strategies through which Indigenous Peoples can be ‘transferred’ away from settler colonial societies (PP. 35-50). Consider, as an example, ‘transfer by performance.’ As Veracini (2010, P. 47) explains it, transfer by performance occurs when Settlers dress up as Indigenous Peoples and/or pretend to be Indigenous, a phenomenon Deloria (1998) calls ‘playing Indian’ and Huhndorf (2001) calls ‘going Native.’ Veracini (2010, P. 47) explains that this tactic can occur at both a literal level through disguise, or at a more figurative level in drawing upon the cultural characteristics of Indigenous Peoples. In both cases though, he asserts that “As Settlers occupy Native identities, Indigenous People[s] are transferred away,” thus serving the settler colonial logic of elimination that undergirds the United States (P. 47).

Deloria (1998, P. 5) argues that the precariousness of American identities emanates from the incapacity of the United States to manage its relationship with the Indigenous Peoples of the continent. “Americans,” he explains, “Wanted to feel a natural affinity with the continent, and it was Indians who could teach them such aboriginal closeness. Yet, in order to control the landscape they had to destroy the original inhabitants” (P. 5). Deloria (1998) argues that these simultaneous requirements were fulfilled in playing Indian, through which Settlers appropriated
the roles of Indigenous Peoples in self-justifying ways so as to solidify a shared cognizance of themselves as Americans – “Their freedom an ancient thing linked intrinsically to the continent, its customs, and its nature” (P. 32).

According to Deloria (1998, PP. 3, 191) though, as well as Pearson (2013, P. 177) and Veracini (2010, PP. 33-34), the very presence of Indigenous Peoples challenges Settlers in delegitimizing their claim to Indigenization. The intricate and contemporaneous relationship that Indigenous Peoples have with the land, Pearson (2013, P. 177) argues, undermines Settlers’ attempts to assert a similar connection that is of equivalent status. “This relationship,” he writes, “And attempts to figure the Settler as inheritor of the Indigenous, is contradicted by the realities of settlement – exploitation, expropriation, conquest, and genocide” (P. 178). He elaborates in explaining that,

The presence (physical or otherwise) of Indigenous Peoples their predecessors raped, massacred, and dispossessed as part of their colonization of the region threatens [Settlers’] claims to being a [settled] people with an unproblematic, Indigenous claim to the land. (P. 177)

In Veracini’s (2010, PP. 33-34, 81) judgement, Settlers thus experience a cognitive unease over the contemporary presence of Indigenous Peoples within settler colonial societies. Such cognitive dissonance stems principally from the fear that, as he puts it, “The land will ultimately turn against the settler project” (P. 81). The presence of Indigenous Peoples who make claims to land and previous ways of being remind Settlers, according to Tuck and Young (2012, P. 9), that the settler project remains incomplete. In the United States, for instance, frequent protests occur in which some Indigenous Peoples protest against the eliminatory policies that have been, and continue to be, used against them.

On Monday July 20, 2015, as but one example, members of the San Carlos Apache Nation concluded a cross-country caravan from their reserve in Southeastern Arizona to
Washington, DC. This caravan protested and raised awareness about a proposed copper mine that, at the time of this writing, is still set to be constructed on lands that the Apache Peoples consider sacred (Rose, 2015, Paras. 1, 5). Former Tribal Chairman of the San Carlos Apache Nation Wendsler Nosie asserts that, in doing so, members of the San Carlos Apache Nation, as well as supporters from other Indigenous Nations that joined the caravan or protests in Washington, reasserted their immemorial rights to the land (Rose, 2015, Para. 9). Such protests, as Simpson (2011) contends, induce an apprehension amongst Settlers about the rightful ownership of the lands Settlers live on and/or exploit for natural resources. She elaborates in explaining that Settlers are afraid of,

Indians reacquiring their own land, governing themselves, accumulating capital, doing so under the sign of nationhood and sovereignty, and making decisions regarding their land and property. Most uncomfortably for non-Indians (and some Indians) are matters such as political membership – the absolute unit of sovereign assertions of power. (PP. 210-211)

**Postcolonial Fetishism as a Defence Mechanism**

As a means of coping with such cognitive unease, Settlers can, according to Hook (2005, P. 724), transform the disturbing presence of the ‘Other’ into some more bearable form that might mask some of its more foreboding revelations. Hall (1997, P. 266) asserts that this obfuscation is the main function of an important representational practice referred to as fetishism. As he notes, “Fetishism takes us into the realm where fantasy intervenes in representation; to the level where what is shown or seen, in representation, can only be understood in relation to what cannot be seen, what cannot be shown” (P. 266). Its principal architects include such postcolonial theorists as Bhabha (1994), Kaplan (2006), and McClintock (1995). McClintock (1995) offers perhaps the clearest conceptualization, defining fetishism as
“The displacement onto an object (or person) of [social] contradictions that the individual cannot resolve at a personal level” (P. 184).

Hall (1997, P. 266) explains that fetishism involves, in essence, the substitution of an object for some sort of powerful, immaterial, and perhaps dangerous force or essence. Kaplan (2006, P. 6) likewise argues that it is a defensive mechanism through which individuals transform an intangible and ambiguous ‘something’ or ‘someone,’ endowed with its own vitalities, into something that is tangible and unambiguous. In doing so, she maintains, the powerful and immaterial force or essence of the ‘something’ or ‘someone’ in question is extinguished. McClintock (1995) similarly explains that, “By displacing power onto the fetish, then manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities” (P. 184).

Hall (1997, P. 266) seems to describe two steps through which this transformation might transpire. First, he explains that the ‘something’ or ‘someone’ is disassembled into its relevant components through reductionism. Reductionism, as he conceives of it, is a means through which one comes to understand the nature of intricate phenomena via reducing them to their simpler and more fundamental parts. Second, he explains that these simpler and more fundamental components are then amalgamated into a single composite trope that is imbued with all the energies and meanings of these simplistic component parts. As an example of such processes, Hall (1997, P. 266) points to Frantz Fanon’s (1986) account of how he felt disintegrated and then rearranged in response, as a black person, to the gaze of a white person:

The glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self [Emphasis Added]. (P. 109)
The end result of these two processes is a fetish ‘object’ that serves, in Hook’s (2005, P. 727) view, as both an object of displacement and as an object of condensation.

Hook (2005, PP. 727-728) argues that it serves as the former in substituting a limited number of related parts for the totality of the ‘something’ or ‘someone’ in question. Together, these related parts serve as a stand-in for the original on the assumption that these components have an associative connection to the whole of the subject. He argues that it serves as the latter in compacting the attributes through which the ‘something’ or ‘someone’ is referenced, with the ‘bits’ of the subject preserved serving as a condensed summary of the entirety of the original (See Also Gilman, 1985, P. 88). Hook (2005) uses voodoo dolls as a means to illustrate these two functions, explaining that,

The idea of the voodoo doll makes for a useful illustration of the functional qualities of the fetish object (or process). An object of magical manipulation, this doll is both metonym and metaphor. It is associated, by virtue of content, to the person to whom its magic is directed, containing actual material elements of the subject in question. Clearly here we see a relationship of contiguity; it is a metonym, a ‘stand in’ for the original object in which we see a displacement relation embodied. The doll though also resembles the object of its desired affect, calling them to mind on the basis of likeness, and is such also a metaphor, a substitution of an object from one given category (figurines, dolls) for another (living human beings). (P. 728)

The fetish ‘object’ might thus, as Hook (2005, P. 714) and Kaplan (2006, P. 6) assert, contribute to the overall success of disavowal, thereby enabling one to recover from the apprehensive revelations exposed in the encounter of the ‘something’ or ‘someone’ in question. According to Hook (2005, P. 714), disavowal is a defensive mechanism in which there is a refusal to acknowledge the actuality of a perception on the basis of its traumatic effect, instead manipulating the composition of that perception into a more bearable form. The fetish ‘object’ therefore serves, Hall (1997, PP. 267-268) argues, as one of these more bearable forms, and as such, fetishism and disavowal are complicit in allowing for a displaced form of representation to
emerge of the ‘something’ or ‘someone’ considered taboo. Kaplan (2006) emphasizes this function in explaining that,

The dramatic and vivid visibility of the fetish object serves to dazzle and confuse, blinding the viewer from other, potentially more troubling implications that are thus cast into the shadows. The surface layer, the images that captivate the visual field, the words that clamor to be heard, are masquerades. (P. 6)

In the context considered here, the ‘something’ or ‘someone’ considered taboo is the Indigenous ‘Other,’ given the cognitive dissonance Indigenous Peoples might induce among Settlers in the United States, as theorized above with reference to Pearson (2013, P. 177), Simpson (2011, PP. 210-211), Tuk and Young (2012, P. 9), and Veracini (2010, PP. 33-34, 81). The fetish ‘object’ is, in Bhabha’s (1994) words, “That particular ‘fixated’ form of the colonial subject which facilitates colonial relations, and sets up a discursive form of racial and cultural opposition in terms of which colonial power is exercised” (P. 78). Ayse Deniz Temiz (2006) sums up this cognitive unease and the role of fetishism succinctly in describing that,

The primal scene is the moment of inception of the subject’s memory, which coincides with the moment when the illusion of a perfect origin, as a state of plenitude without conflicts, is disturbed for the first time by the acknowledgement of the other’s presence. This painful acknowledgement of the other that undermines the sovereignty of the subject, however, often takes place alongside a disavowal, a split consciousness and denial of the other’s presence on the blank slate of the self’s memory. Thus simultaneously recognized and negated, the other becomes a fetish for the self, namely that which the self approaches as its limit, without ever acknowledging it as its corollary, a full-fledged subject. The subject’s condition for recognizing the other as fetish is to deny him/her agency or the capacity for change by pinning him/her down with a fixed image. (Para. 4)
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

To investigate whether or not the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity occurs in video games, according to players, and how such appropriations might affect Settler relations with Indigenous Peoples vis-à-vis the theoretical framework described in the previous chapter, this thesis opted for a single in-depth case study approach. I opted to use one of the most popular online video games ever made: Blizzard Entertainment’s World of Warcraft. Given the fact that little knowledge exists about the appropriation of North American Indigeneity in video games, the use of a single case study approach is ideal as it allows for a focused and thick description of this as of yet under-explored phenomenon. This focused and thick description might help facilitate an initial understanding of cultural appropriation in video games, as some of the findings obtained, arguments developed, and theoretical tenets applied might be relevant and translatable to other contexts besides World of Warcraft.

This chapter introduces readers to the methodology that has structured this thesis. This chapter will first offer a brief historical overview of Blizzard Entertainment, focusing on both its initial ventures and its evolution of the Warcraft franchise. It will then explain what World of Warcraft is, describing the inspiration behind its development, the basic fundamentals of the game, and the successes it has achieved. Subsequently, this chapter will detail the research design used in this study, listing the two sub-questions posed and the methods that were used to answer those sub-questions.

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT AND THE WARCRAFT FRANCHISE

Blizzard Entertainment, the company that created World of Warcraft, was conceived and founded by Michael Morhaime, Frank Pearce, and Allen Adham on February 8, 1991 (“Blizzard
Timeline,” 2000). Morhaime, Pearce, and Adham had all attended the University of California, Los Angeles, where they graduated in 1990 with Bachelor of Science Degrees in Engineering and/or Computer Science (Clayman, 2010, P. 1, Para. 3).

Under its original name of Silicon & Synapse, the company focused on creating video game ‘ports’ for other studios. These ‘ports’ were redesigned versions of those studios’ original video games, the purpose of which was to convert the coding within them so that these games could be run on other gaming platforms besides the originals intended (Clayman, 2010, P. 1, Para. 4). Some of Silicon & Synapse’s earlier ‘ports’ included Radical Psycho Machine Racing for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, Battle Chess and Shanghai for Windows, as well as Battle Chess II and Lord of the Rings for Amiga (“Blizzard Timeline,” 2000).

Working on these earlier conversions, according to David Clayman (2010, P. 1, Para. 4), helped the founders, programmers, and artists become comfortable with coding, game mechanics, and art design. It was not until 1993 though that Silicon & Synapse started to release its own original software, releasing both Rock & Roll Racing and The Lost Vikings for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System via publisher Interplay that year (“Blizzard Timeline,” 2000). In 1994, Silicon & Synapse was acquired by Davidson & Associates for $6.75-million, and renamed itself Chaos Studios (“Blizzard Timeline,” 2000). The company was forced to change its name once more upon discovering that another company had already incorporated itself as Chaos Studios, ultimately opting for Blizzard Entertainment. Later that year, Blizzard Entertainment released its first popular hit, Warcraft: Orcs and Humans (“Blizzard Timeline,” 2000).

*Warcraft: Orcs and Humans* was a real-time strategy game in which players collected resources and skilfully built and managed a small number of forces that were used to complete in
game objectives ("Classic Games," 2016). In this game, a fictional world called ‘Azeroth’ in which Humans live is invaded by Orcs that originated on another planet called ‘Draenor.’ This invasion, it is later discovered in the series, was set in motion by a demonic army known as ‘The Burning Legion.’ The Burning Legion contacted an Orc named Gul’dan and, after bestowing Gul’dan with the unfathomable powers of a Warlock, together manipulated the Orc Clans of Draenor into drinking demonic blood that transformed them into bloodthirsty minions of The Burning Legion. The Burning Legion and Gul’dan then opened a gateway between Draenor and Azeroth called ‘The Dark Portal,’ through which the Orcish invasion of Azeroth occurred. The war that ensued between the Orcs of Draenor and the Humans of Azeroth, which culminated in the destruction of the Human Kingdom of Stormwind, was called the ‘First War’ (See “First War,” 2016).

In 1995, Blizzard Entertainment continued the series with its release of Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness. Another real-time strategy game, Warcraft II focused on the events of the ‘Second War.’ Human survivors of the First War fled the ruined Kingdom of Stormwind via the Great Sea en route to the Kingdom of Lordaeron that lay to the North. Upon learning of the Orcish threat, the King of Lordaeron used his diplomatic expertise to create the Alliance of Lordaeron, which was composed of several Human Kingdoms as well as Dwarves, Gnomes, and High Elves. Six years after the Kingdom of Stormwind was sacked, the Orchish Horde advanced northward to defeat the Alliance of Lordaeron. While the Orchish Horde achieved some initial success, the Second War saw the Alliance drive most of the Orcs out of the North and back through The Dark Portal, which was then destroyed so as to prevent their return. Those Orcs that remained on Azeroth were kept in internment camps or built isolated, hidden strongholds away from Human civilizations (See “Second War,” 2016).
In 2002, *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* was released as the next instalment of the franchise. In this real-time strategy game, The Burning Legion invaded Azeroth itself. In hopes of achieving this endeavour, The Burning Legion destroyed the mortal form of an Orc named Ner’zhul and transformed his spirit into an empowered entity known as ‘The Lich King’ that was bound to the ‘Frozen Throne’ in Azeroth. The Lich King released a ‘Plague of Undeath’ in Northern Lordaeron through the food supplies stored in its granaries, which killed those who became infected and raised them as corpses bound to his will. The Lich King’s forces purged Lordaeron of its citizens and summoned Archimonde, the Field Commander of The Burning Legion, into Azeroth.

Meanwhile, the Orcs sailed across the Great Sea to the other forgotten continent of Azeroth, ‘Kalimdor,’ upon hearing of The Burning Legion’s return. The Orcs had freed themselves from the internment camps over the years and had distanced themselves from The Burning Legion’s control. While traveling across the Great Sea, the Orcs stumbled across Trolls that joined them in their journey to Kalimdor, and upon their arrival, the Orcs and Trolls encountered the Tauren. After helping the Tauren quell a local threat, the Tauren swore allegiance to the Orcs. It was not long until the Human survivors of Lordaeron also arrived on Kalimdor, having fled from The Burning Legion. The Humans and Orcs soon encountered the immortal Night Elves, who were the native inhabitants of Kalimdor.

After some initial skirmishes amongst all three factions, the arrival of The Burning Legion on Kalimdor forced the Humans, Orcs, and Night Elves to form a Great Alliance dedicated to delaying The Burning Legion’s advance on the World Tree of Kalimdor. The World Tree was the source of immense arcane power and of the Night Elves’ immortality, which Archimonde wanted to consume for himself and The Burning Legion. The Great Alliance
successfully delayed The Burning Legion’s assault long enough for hundreds of thousands of ancestral spirits to gather and detonate a massive explosion that destroyed Archimonde and a significant number of his demonic armies, as well as incinerating the World Tree. These events constitute the ‘Third War’ (See “Third War,” 2016).

**Redefining the MMORPG: World of Warcraft**

In September of 2001, Blizzard Executive Bill Roper announced the development of a massively multi-player online game at the European Computer Trade Show in London that would be called *World of Warcraft* (Fahey, 2009, P. 1, Para. 5). As can be inferred from the preceding overview of the *Warcraft* franchise, Blizzard Entertainment had specialized in the development of real-time strategy games since 1994; however, as Fahey (2009, P. 1, Para. 8) explains, the developers perceived a massively multi-player online game as the next natural progression in the telling of the story of *Warcraft*. In massively multi-player online role-playing games (MMORPGs), players adopt the role of and control an in-game character that enters a persistent world in which a large number of other players exist and interact with each other. This persistent world continues to exist and change in real time while players are offline (“Beginner’s Guide,” 2016).

Given the number of diverse geographic zones that were introduced within *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans, Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness, and Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos*, the developers felt that players should be able to enter the world of Azeroth and explore these regions and the lore surrounding them in-full on their own personally customized characters (Fahey, 2009, P. 3, Paras. 2, 7). The addition of several new ‘races’ in both *Warcraft II* and *Warcraft III* – such as Ogres, Trolls, Goblins, High Elves, and Dwarves in the former; and Tauren, Undead, and Night Elves in the latter – was another variable that positioned the
franchise well to create a MMORPG as a sequel. Such a game would enable players to select and experience these distinct ‘races,’ each of which had its own aesthetics and in-depth backstory. As Chris Metzen, the Senior Vice President of Story and Franchise Development, explains,

> What games like this allow for is the sheer scope of the world, the breadth of the kingdoms and the races, with their own internal strife and their own internal stories, the overarching villains as well as the regional conflicts… It keeps you immersed, it keeps a carrot in front of you, it leads your sense of exploration. We wanted story to be the vehicle through which you experience the world. (Cited in Fahey, 2009, P. 3, Paras. 5, 7)

In addition to this need to create even more immersive gameplay for players, the developers were also heavily influenced by the other video games that were on the market at the time. Indeed, Metzen attributes some of the motivation to develop *World of Warcraft* to the fact that a lot of the developers were themselves playing massively multi-player games at the time, such as *EverQuest* and *Ultima Online* (Fahey, 2009, P. 1, Para. 12). Although unsure what shape it would take in the end, Metzen recounts that, as “Fans of games like *EverQuest*, the discussion at the time was, well, maybe we [Blizzard] can do one of these” (Cited in Fahey, 2009, P. 1, Para. 12). Blizzard Entertainment successfully accomplished this endeavour and released *World of Warcraft* on November 23, 2004. As a subscription-based MMORPG, *World of Warcraft* featured a monthly subscription fee of $14.99 US and introduced new content on a regular basis that advanced the game’s plot (“Beginner’s Guide,” 2016).

In *World of Warcraft*, players return to Azeroth sometime after the events of *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos*. The Third War had resulted in countless deaths and had fundamentally altered the world of Azeroth. With the Kingdom of Lordaeron annihilated, the smaller City of Stormwind that had been rebuilt after the First War became the new safe haven of the Humans, sheltering the few refugees of Lordaeron that had escaped The Burning Legion. The Dwarves returned to Ironforge after assisting at the World Tree, becoming the closest geographical ally of
the Humans of Stormwind. The Gnomes of Gnomeregan, who had assisted in the Second War but were unable to help in the Third due to a Trogg invasion of Gnomeregan, had lost their city and were forced to flee to live with the Dwarves of Ironforge. These three ‘races,’ who were part of the original Alliance crafted by the now deceased King of Lordaeron, continued to honour the partnership. In Kalimdor, the Night Elves had lost their immortality when the World Tree was incinerated. Now vulnerable due to the loss of the World Tree, the Night Elves sought formal alliances with the other citizens of Azeroth, opting to join the Alliance as the earlier skirmishes with the Orcs upon their arrival on Kalimdor had fostered a deep animosity between the two ‘races’ (See “Alliance,” 2016).

For their part, the Orcs, Tauren, and Trolls settled near each other on the Western continent of Kalimdor and formed an alliance between them known as the new ‘Horde.’ A segment of the Undead broke free from the will of The Lich King and named themselves the Forsaken, taking control of the ruined City of Lordaeron from those agents of The Burning Legion that still occupied it and transforming its sewers into their home. In need of allies that would prevent the Alliance from retaking Lordaeron and eradicating the Forsaken, the Forsaken reached out to the Horde. While the Orcs and Trolls were cautious, the Tauren believed that the Forsaken could redeem themselves and convinced the other ‘races’ to allow them entry into the Horde as an alliance of convenience (See “History of the Horde,” 2015).

The uneasy truce between the Alliance and the Horde that was first formed to defeat Archimonde and The Burning Legion slowly dissolved and an on-going war between the two emerged. In World of Warcraft, players can opt to play as a member of the Grand Alliance, which is composed of playable Humans, Dwarves, Gnomes, Night Elves, Draenei, and Worgen; or as a member of the Horde, which is composed of playable Orcs, Trolls, Tauren, Undead,

Another expansion pack, World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria (2012), introduced another playable ‘race’ called the Pandaren (“Story of Warcraft,” 2016). The Pandaren start off as a neutral ‘race,’ but must eventually choose to join one of the two main factions described above (“Beginner’s Guide,” 2016). After selecting one of these ‘races,’ players create a character that enters the world of Azeroth, killing creatures through physical combat and/or spells and completing quests to progress through the world and its numerous plot lines while gaining levels and powerful equipment to help them do so. Players can also participate in group activities called dungeons or raids with other players to kill more challenging foes for rewards, and fight players of the opposing faction in open world player versus player combat, battlegrounds, or arenas (“Beginner’s Guide,” 2016).

The game has been immensely popular since its release. Within the first twenty-four hours of its launch, World of Warcraft sold over 240,000 copies worldwide, a new day-one sales record for personal computer games (Autrijve, 2004, Para. 1). The game also surpassed records for hosting the most concurrent number of players online upon reaching 200,000 users, and had to temporarily cease shipping to provide the development team with enough time to add and test additional servers for the game (Bell, 2004, Paras. 1, 6). By the end of its first quarter of 2005, World of Warcraft had garnered 1.5-million active subscribers (“WoW Subscription Numbers,” 2015). Its first three expansion packs sold even quicker, each time surpassing the day-one sales
record for personal computer games that Blizzard Entertainment established with its previous expansion.

In their first twenty-four hours of release, *The Burning Crusade* (2007) sold 2.4-million copies; *Wrath of the Lich King* (2008) sold 2.8-million copies; and *Cataclysm* (2010) sold 3.3-million copies (Boyes, 2007, Para. 3; Cohen, 2008, Para. 1; Peckham, 2010, Para. 1). The release of these expansions increased the game’s popularity, with its subscription-base climbing to 12-million in Blizzard Entertainment’s third and fourth quarters of 2010 (“WoW Subscription Numbers,” 2015). *World of Warcraft’s* next expansions, *Mists of Pandaria* (2012) and *Warlords of Draenor* (2014), also sold well at 2.7-million and 3.3-million copies in the first twenty-four hours, respectively; however, neither of these sales figures surpassed the day-one sales record for personal computer games at the time (Elise, 2014, Para. 3; Petitte, 2012, Para. 1).

In recent years, the game has also lost some of its subscribers as mobile gaming has become easier to access, declining to 5.5-million at the end of its third quarter in 2015 (“WoW Subscription Numbers,” 2015). Although this is a significant decline, the game is still, to date, the most popular subscription-based MMORPG, and one of the most popular online video games ever made. On January 28, 2014, Blizzard Entertainment reported that *World of Warcraft* had been played in at least 244 countries and territories around the world, with more than 100-million unique accounts having been created since the game was first released (“Azeroth by the Numbers,” 2014). This number is the equivalent of the populations of Germany, Belarus, and Sweden combined, or twice as many individuals as the population of South Korea (“Azeroth by the Numbers,” 2014). It is also the highest grossing video game ever developed, having grossed over $10-billion as of July 2012 (Douglas, 2012, P. 10). With more than 6-million words of text reported in 2014 – the equivalent of 12 copies of *Lord of the Rings – World of Warcraft* has one
of the richest lores ever conceived with a range of unique and captivating plot lines (“Azeroth by the Numbers,” 2014). The game is, in sum, one of the most vibrant online communities ever developed.

**Research Design**

Each of the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft*, as mentioned above, possess their own aesthetics, in-depth backstories, and cultural attributes that seem to have been bestowed upon them throughout the development of the franchise. As a player, I noticed what seemed to be a handful of similarities between the cultural aesthetics and attributes of the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft* and those of certain real world ethnocultural groups, both past and present. A number of players have likewise picked up on this, drawing parallels between the ‘races’ in *World of Warcraft* and specific ethnocultural groups from the real world. The official forums for the game are replete with discussions surrounding the topic, for instance, with titles such as “Warcraft Races and Their Real World Parallels” or “Themes of Race in Comparison to IRL [In Real Life] Cultures.” The two overriding research questions guiding this study were therefore further narrowed down to better explore this case:

1. Does *World of Warcraft* appropriate North American Indigeneity, according to those individuals who play or have played *World of Warcraft*?

2. How might the potential appropriations of North American Indigeneity in *World of Warcraft* affect Settler relations with North American Indigenous Peoples, if at all?

To explore these two research questions, this thesis examined each of the 13 ‘races’ in *World of Warcraft*. This approach was used to situate the ‘races’ within the game, revealing which of the ‘races’ most seemed to appropriate the objects and attributes of North American Indigeneity. Two sub-questions were used to orient the research that I undertook:
1. From which real world ethnocultural groups, both past and present, do players believe Blizzard Entertainment appropriated to construct the ‘races’ in World of Warcraft? What are the material objects and cultural attributes of those real world ethnocultural groups that seem to have been appropriated?

2. Which ‘race’ in World of Warcraft do players believe was most constructed through appropriations of North American Indigeneity? What are the material objects and cultural attributes of North American Indigeneity that seem to have been appropriated?

To answer the sub-questions posed above, this thesis utilized discourse analysis and open-ended surveying. Discourse analysis is a research method in which written, vocal, or other communicative mediums are examined in an attempt to understand a given phenomenon; in this case, the appropriation of North American Indigeneity that might be evident within World of Warcraft (Halperin & Heath, 2012, P. 310).

In undertaking this discourse analysis, I located forum websites based out of North America that were associated with World of Warcraft and/or the MMORPG genre in general. Forum websites are online discussion websites where individuals hold conversations with each other in the form of posted messages that, once posted, website users and/or visitors can then view. To find these forum websites, I searched Google using the following search queries:

- “WoW” AND “Forums”
- “World of Warcraft” AND “Forums”
- “MMORPG” AND “Forums”
- “Massively Multi-Player Online Role Playing Games” AND “Forums”

In total, I found nine forum websites on which seemingly relevant discussions about World of Warcraft were held. These forum websites included the official World of Warcraft forums,
Using the search functions provided on each of these forum websites, I then searched for relevant discussions using the following search queries:

- “Warcraft” AND “Races” AND “Real Life”
- “Warcraft” AND “Races” AND “Real Life” AND “Comparison”
- “Warcraft” AND “Races” AND “Real Life” AND “Similarities”
- “Warcraft” AND “Races” AND “Appropriation”
- “Warcraft” AND “Races” AND “Cultural Appropriation”
- “Warcraft” AND “Races” AND “Real” AND “Cultures”
- “Warcraft” AND “Races” AND “Real Life” AND “Cultures”
- “Warcraft” AND “Native American”
- “Warcraft” AND “Aboriginal”
- “Warcraft” AND “Indigenous”

From the results retrieved, I selected forum discussions in which users discussed the perceived similarities between the cultural objects and attributes of the ‘races’ within World of Warcraft and those of real world ethnocultural groups. For the purposes of this thesis, a forum discussion refers to a unique thread of posts authored in response to an initial question or topic that a user poses. All relevant forum discussions spanning from the game’s release date on November 23, 2004 up until the last day I collected these forum discussions – October 22, 2015 – were selected.

Through these preliminary searches, I found 133 forum discussions that seemed to discuss the perceived similarities between the cultural objects and attributes of the ‘races’ within
World of Warcraft and those of real world ethnocultural groups. After going through each of these forum discussions in more depth, and removing those that did not seem as pertinent as originally believed, I had a total of 85 forum discussions: 52 came from the official World of Warcraft forums; 17 from MMO Champion; eight from WoW Head; three from GameFAQs; two from World of Warcraft’s Reddit; and one each from Terra Nova, Extra Curricular, and XKCD. I did not find any forum discussions on Icy-Veins worth examining.

There were a total of 2007 unique players who posted a total of 3619 posts on these 85 forum discussions. Of these 2007 unique players, 682 explicitly discussed the perceived similarities between the cultural elements of the ‘races’ within World of Warcraft and those of real world ethnocultural groups. It is important to note though that not all of these 682 players discussed such similarities for each and every ‘race’ in World of Warcraft. That is to say, some users only mentioned the cultural similarities between one or two of the ‘races’ within World of Warcraft and real world ethnocultural groups, while others mentioned similarities for all of the ‘races’ found within the game.

In addition to the use of this discourse analysis, I also used open-ended surveying. Surveying is a research method in which information is collected from individuals who belong to a specific group through asking them to respond to a list of questions (Halperin & Heath, 2012, P. 230). In undertaking this method, I developed a series of open-ended questions that I presented to individuals who had, at some point or another, played World of Warcraft. The survey was approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Guelph and featured the following seven questions:
1. Do you think any of the races in *World of Warcraft* reflect any cultures from the real world? If so, could you indicate which cultures and describe how these races might reflect them?

2. Do you think these cultural reflections are accurate? Why or why not?

3. Do you think these cultural reflections are done in a positive or negative way? Why?

4. Do you think these cultural reflections are done in respectful ways? Why or why not?

5. Which of the races in *World of Warcraft* do you believe most borrow cultural elements of Native North Americans, if any? Why?

6. Do you personally think there is anything wrong with *World of Warcraft* using elements from real world cultures to construct its in game races? Why or why not?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share?

After seeking formal permission from site administrators and/or moderators, I posted this open-ended survey to the following forum websites: WoW Head, Icy-Veins, and *World of Warcraft*’s Reddit. On each of these forum websites, I made a new discussion topic entitled “Survey For Master’s Thesis” under the general discussion sections of each website. I identified myself as a Master of Arts Candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Guelph, explained the topic and aims of the survey, and estimated the length of time it might take for respondents to complete it. I ended these posts with a link to the survey that was hosted by Qualtrics. The survey was active from October 21, 2015 to November 4, 2015. I received, in total, 29 survey responses. The structure and the content of these survey responses were similar enough to those comments authored on the forums that both sets of data were collapsed together, providing a total pool of 711 players who discussed the perceived similarities between the
cultural elements of the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft* and those of real world ethnocultural groups.

The forum discussions retrieved and the survey responses obtained were imported into *MAXQDA: Qualitative Data Analysis Software*. *MAXQDA* is a software program that allows for computer-assisted qualitative analysis. Using *MAXQDA*, I coded these forum discussions and survey responses through two approaches. The first approach was a quantitative one, through which forum posts and survey responses were coded in terms of, first, the actual term that posters and respondents used to identify an ethnocultural group from which Blizzard Entertainment might have appropriated and, second, the number of times these posters and respondents asserted that Blizzard appropriated that real world ethnocultural group to construct one of the specific ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft*. The second approach was a qualitative one, through which forum posts and survey responses were coded in terms of recurring themes and/or patterns that were observed.

When refining and finalizing the codes, a one-percent frequency threshold was imposed on the quantitative data so as to limit the prospects of ‘trolling.’ Trolling refers to the practice of posting inflammatory or irrelevant messages on online communication channels, such as forum websites, with the aim of starting arguments, provoking emotional responses, and/or disrupting on-topic discussion, often for the poster’s own entertainment (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014, P. 97). The use of a one-percent frequency threshold removes such inflammatory and/or irrelevant messages from consideration, allowing for a more focused investigation of those comments and responses of most relevance to the topic at hand.
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

In exploring whether or not World of Warcraft appropriates North American Indigeneity, according to the individuals who play or have played World of Warcraft, this thesis examined each of the 13 different ‘races’ within the game. As described in the previous chapter, this approach was used to situate the ‘races’ within World of Warcraft as a means to reveal which ‘race’ most appropriated the properties and attributes of North American Indigeneity. I used two sub-questions to orient this approach:

1. From which real world ethnocultural groups, both past and present, do players believe Blizzard Entertainment appropriated to construct the ‘races’ in World of Warcraft?
2. Which ‘race’ in World of Warcraft do players believe was most constructed through appropriations of North American Indigeneity?

As previously mentioned, there were a total of 711 players who, on the forums retrieved and/or surveys collected, discussed the perceived similarities between the cultural elements of the ‘races’ within World of Warcraft and those of real world ethnocultural groups. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to report the findings that were obtained from the discourse analysis and open-ended surveying employed in this research so as to provide a basis upon which the ‘races’ can be situated in chapter six. In doing so, this chapter will focus on the quantitative findings, reporting the number of times players said that Blizzard Entertainment appropriated a certain real world ethnocultural group to construct one of the specific ‘races’ in World of Warcraft.

This chapter will first report those findings of relevance to the first sub-question used to structure the research conducted herein, detailing the real world parallels players drew for each of the 13 different ‘races.’ It will then report those findings of relevance to the second sub-
question used to orient this research, detailing which in game ‘races’ players believe was most constructed through appropriations of North American Indigeneity.

**The Humans of Stormwind**

There were a total of 255 players who identified a total of five ethnocultural groups from which the Humans in *World of Warcraft* seemed to appropriate. Of these 255 individuals, 135 (52.9%) identified the source culture as ‘Medieval Western European,’ 80 (31.4%) as ‘American,’ 21 (8.2%) as ‘Medieval British,’ 11 (4.3%) as ‘Classical Roman,’ and 8 (3.1%) as ‘Medieval French.’

![Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Humans Seem To Appropriate](image)

*Figure 3: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Humans Seem To Appropriate*
THE DWARVES OF IRONFORGE

There were a total of 482 players who identified a total of six ethnocultural groups from which the Dwarves seemed to appropriate. Of these 482 players, 238 (49.4%) identified the source culture as ‘Scottish,’ 99 (20.5%) as ‘Irish,’ 81 (16.8%) as ‘Norse,’ 25 (5.2%) as ‘Russian,’ 23 (4.8%) as ‘Celtic,’ and 16 (3.3%) as ‘Germanic.’

Figure 4: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Dwarves Seem To Appropriate
THE NIGHT ELVES OF DARNASSUS

There were a total of 527 players who identified a total of nine ethnocultural groups from which the Night Elves seemed to appropriate. Of these 527 players, 167 (31.7%) identified the source culture as ‘Japanese,’ 87 (16.5%) as ‘Classical Greek,’ 75 (14.2%) as ‘Celtic,’ 59 (11.2%) as ‘Asian,’ 53 (10.1%) as ‘Korean,’ 30 (5.7%) as ‘Norse,’ 25 (4.7%) as ‘Native North American,’ 24 (4.6%) as ‘Classical Roman,’ and 7 (1.3%) as ‘Chinese.’

![Figure 5: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Night Elves Seem To Appropriate](image-url)
The Gnomes of Gnomeregan

There were a total of 142 players who identified a total of 20 ethnocultural groups from which the Gnomes seemed to appropriate. Of these 142 players, 29 (20.4%) identified the source culture as ‘Japanese,’ 21 (14.8%) as ‘Industrial-Era German,’ 16 (11.3%) as ‘American,’ 11 (7.7%) as ‘Swiss,’ 11 (7.7%) as ‘Irish,’ 7 (4.9%) as ‘Asian,’ 5 (3.5%) as ‘European,’ 5 (3.5%) as ‘Dutch,’ 5 (3.5%) as ‘Swedish,’ 5 (3.5%) as ‘Jewish,’ 4 (2.8%) as ‘South Korean,’ 4 (2.8%) as ‘Austrian,’ 3 (2.1%) as ‘Canadian,’ 3 (2.1%) as ‘Polish,’ 3 (2.1%) as ‘Victorian-Era English/British,’ 2 (1.4%) as ‘Chinese,’ 2 (1.4%) as ‘Italian,’ 2 (1.4%) as ‘French,’ 2 (1.4%) as ‘Scottish,’ and 2 (1.4%) as ‘Classical Athenian.’

Figure 6: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Gnomes Seem To Appropriate
THE EXODAR DRAENEI

There were a total of 477 players who identified a total of 14 ethnocultural groups from which the Draenei seemed to appropriate. Of these 477 players, 134 (28.1%) identified the source culture as ‘Russian,’ 84 (17.6%) as ‘Indian,’ 50 (10.5%) as ‘Romani,’ 47 (9.9%) as ‘Eastern European,’ 29 (6.1%) as ‘Greek,’ 28 (5.9%) as ‘Jewish,’ 26 (5.5%) as ‘Middle Eastern,’ 25 (5.2%) as ‘Arabic,’ 13 (2.7%) as ‘Ancient Persian,’ 11 (2.3%) as ‘Slavic,’ 11 (2.3%) as ‘Turkic,’ 9 (1.9%) as ‘Romanian,’ 5 (1%) as ‘Classical Byzantine,’ and 5 (1%) as ‘Egyptian.’

Figure 7: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Draenei Seem To Appropriate
The Gilnean Worgen

There were a total of 269 players who identified a total of five ethnocultural groups from which the Worgen seemed to appropriate. Of these 269 players, 250 (92.9%) identified the source culture as ‘Victorian-Era English/British,’ 7 (2.6%) as ‘Eastern European,’ 5 (1.9%) as ‘Transylvanian,’ 4 (1.5%) as ‘Russian,’ and 3 (1.1%) as ‘Romanian.’

Figure 8: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Worgen Seem To Appropriated
The Orcs of Durotan

There were a total of 432 players who identified a total of 14 ethnocultural groups from which the Orcs seemed to appropriate. Of these 432 players, 112 (25.9%) identified the source culture as ‘Medieval Mongolian,’ 79 (18.3%) as ‘Tribal African,’ 36 (8.3%) as ‘Norse,’ 36 (8.3%) as ‘Hunnic,’ 33 (7.6%) as ‘African American,’ 33 (7.6%) as ‘Turkic,’ 20 (4.6%) as ‘Medieval Japanese,’ 19 (4.4%) as ‘Nomadic Central Asian,’ 16 (3.7%) as ‘Spartan,’ 14 (3.2%) as ‘Germanic,’ 10 (2.3%) as ‘Zulu,’ 9 (2.1%) as ‘Gothic,’ 8 (1.9%) as ‘American,’ and 7 (1.6%) as ‘Native North American.’

Figure 9: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Orcs Seem To Appropriate
THE FORSAKEN

There were a total of 147 players who identified a total of 11 ethnocultural groups from which the Forsaken seemed to appropriate. Of these 147 players, 36 (24.5%) identified the source culture as ‘Nazi German,’ 30 (20.4%) as ‘German,’ 16 (10.9%) as ‘Medieval Eastern European,’ 16 (10.9%) as ‘Medieval English/British,’ 15 (10.2%) as ‘Gothic,’ 12 (8.2%) as ‘Victorian-Era European,’ 7 (4.8%) as ‘Transylvanian,’ 5 (3.4%) as ‘North Korean,’ 4 (2.7%) as ‘American,’ 4 (2.7%) as ‘Medieval French,’ and 2 (1.4%) as ‘Russian.’

![Figure 10: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Forsaken Seem To Appropriate](image)
THE UNITED TAUREN TRIBES

There were a total of 356 players who identified a total of five ethnocultural groups from which the Tauren seemed to appropriate. Of these 356 players, 306 (86%) identified the source culture as ‘Native North American,’ 29 (8.1%) as ‘Plains Native American,’ 11 (3.1%) as ‘Greek,’ 6 (1.7%) as ‘Pacific Northwest Native American,’ and 4 (1.1%) as ‘Sioux.’

Figure 11: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Tauren Seem To Appropriate
THE DARKSPEAR TROLLS

There were a total of 585 players who identified a total of 12 ethnocultural groups from which the Trolls seemed to appropriate. Of these 585 players, 202 (34.5%) identified the source culture as ‘Jamaican,’ 84 (14.4%) as ‘Caribbean,’ 74 (12.6%) as ‘Tribal African,’ 68 (11.6%) as ‘Aztec,’ 37 (6.3%) as ‘Mesoamerican,’ 31 (5.3%) as ‘Native South American,’ 28 (4.8%) as ‘Mayan,’ 24 (4.1%) as ‘Haitian,’ 13 (2.2%) as ‘Polynesian,’ 11 (1.9%) as ‘Incan,’ 7 (1.2%) as ‘Brazilian,’ and 6 (1%) as ‘Cuban.’

![Figure 12: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Trolls Seem To Appropriate](image)
**The Blood Elves of Quel’Thalas**

There were a total of 252 players who identified a total of 17 ethnocultural groups from which the Blood Elves seemed to appropriate. Of these 252 players, 47 (18.7%) identified the source culture as ‘Ancient Persian,’ 47 (18.7%) as ‘Early Modern French,’ 36 (14.3%) as ‘Medieval Arabic,’ 22 (8.7%) as ‘Classical Roman,’ 21 (8.3%) as ‘Medieval Middle Eastern,’ 20 (7.9%) as ‘Renaissance Italian,’ 9 (3.6%) as ‘Japanese,’ 9 (3.6%) as ‘Upper-Class British,’ 8 (3.2%) as ‘Classical Greek,’ 6 (2.4%) as ‘Soviet Russian,’ 5 (2%) as ‘Asian,’ 5 (2%) as ‘Norse,’ 4 (1.6%) as ‘German,’ 4 (1.6%) as ‘Turkic,’ 3 (1.2%) as ‘American,’ 3 (1.2%) as ‘Spanish,’ and 3 (1.2%) as ‘Renaissance European.’

**Figure 13: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Blood Elves Seem To Appropriate**
**THE BILGewater CARTEL GOBLINS**

There were a total of 452 players who identified a total of seven ethnocultural groups from which the Goblins seemed to appropriate. Of these 452 players, 117 (25.9%) identified the source culture as ‘Jewish,’ 99 (21.9%) as ‘New Yorker,’ 79 (17.5%) as ‘New Jerseyan,’ 63 (13.9%) as ‘American,’ 47 (10.4%) as ‘Italian American,’ 42 (9.3%) as ‘Italian,’ and 5 (1.1%) as ‘Medieval Arabic.’

![Pie chart showing percentages of players identifying different ethnocultural groups as source cultures for Goblins.]

Figure 14: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Goblins Seem To Appropriate
THE TUSHUI AND HUOJIN PANDAREN

There were a total of 169 players who identified a total of five ethnocultural groups from which the Pandaren seemed to appropriate. Of these 169 players, 114 (67.5%) identified the source culture as ‘Chinese,’ 25 (14.8%) as ‘Asian,’ 18 (10.7%) as ‘Japanese,’ 9 (5.3%) as ‘Korean,’ and 3 (1.8%) as ‘Tibetan.’

Figure 15: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Pandaren Seem To Appropriate
Most Indigenous ‘Race’

There were a total of 371 players who drew parallels between certain aspects of certain ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft* and those of North American Indigeneity. 335 (90.3%) of these 371 players drew parallels between North American Indigeneity and the Tauren; 25 (6.7%) between North American Indigeneity and the Night Elves; 7 (1.9%) between North American Indigeneity and the Orcs; and 4 (1.1%) between North American Indigeneity and the Trolls. No other ‘race’ was compared to North American Indigeneity enough to surpass the 1% threshold used to limit the prospects of internet trolling.

![Most Indigenous ‘Race’](image)

**Figure 16:** ‘Race’ That Most Seems To Appropriate North American Indigeneity
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

Chapter five described the findings that were obtained from the discourse analysis and open-ended surveying employed in this research. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to interpret those findings and, in doing so, advance postcolonial fetishism as a means through which to understand the appropriation of North American Indigeneity evident within *World of Warcraft*. This chapter will first list, in brief, the specific ethnocultural groups from which Blizzard Entertainment seems to have appropriated to construct the ‘races’ in *World of Warcraft*. It will then explain, in accordance with the findings detailed in the preceding chapter, how the Tauren seem to be an embodiment of certain cultural properties and attributes appropriated from North American Indigeneity. Having situated the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft*, this chapter will then seek to answer the second overriding research question of interest; that is, how appropriations of North American Indigeneity in *World of Warcraft* might affect Settler relations with North American Indigenous Peoples.

I theorize that the Tauren might serve as a fetish ‘object’ for those Settlers who play *World of Warcraft*, potentially substituting itself for the Indigenous ‘Other.’ In doing so, the Tauren might transform the Indigenous ‘Other’ into a fixated, more palatable form that might mask some of its more foreboding revelations. It could therefore be the case that the Tauren might produce an Indigenous ‘Other’ that first, assuages the cognitive dissonance some Settlers have been theorized to experience; and second, supports the ongoing logic of elimination upon which settler colonialism relies, principally in creating a fictitious and regularly knowable Indigenous ‘Other’ that enables a tenacious and wilful ignorance amongst Settlers with respect to the full breadth of experiences associated with North American Indigeneity. The appropriation of
North American Indigeneity evident within *World of Warcraft*, then, maintains the negative relations Settlers have with Indigenous Peoples.

**Cultural Appropriations in World of Warcraft**

Although the ‘races’ in *World of Warcraft* are branded as fictitious creations, the results presented within the preceding chapter illuminate the fact that parallels seem to be drawn between these ‘races’ and certain real world ethnocultural groups. As one player explained, “We can all pretty safely peg most of the races of [World of Warcraft] as being analogous to, or drawing inspiration from, different real-world cultures” (Viridianscity, 2013, Forum Comment #1). In drawing such parallels, players have cited a range of variables as evidence, such as the visual elements, spoken accents, material objects, and temperaments associated with each ‘race.’

The following table lists the most frequent ethnocultural groups from which players assert Blizzard Entertainment seems to have appropriated to construct each ‘race’ in *World of Warcraft*. It also provides an illustrative comment or two pertinent to each ‘race’ that captures the specific properties and/or attributes players cite when drawing these parallels. Note that most of these ‘races’ seem to have been constructed through appropriations of multiple ethnocultural groups as opposed to one single group. For example, in constructing the Darkspear Tribe of Trolls, Blizzard Entertainment seems to have appropriated properties and attributes from, first, a blend of ‘Jamaican’ (34.5%), ‘Caribbean’ (14.4%), ‘Haitian’ (4.1%), and ‘Cuban’ (1%) ethnocultural groups; second, a blend of ‘Aztec’ (11.6%), ‘Mesoamerican’ (6.3%), ‘Mayan’ (4.8%), and ‘Incan’ (1.9%) ethnocultural groups; and third, ‘Tribal African’ (12.6%) ethnocultural groups.

It is also worth noting that the ethnocultural appropriations that seem to be inherent within certain ‘races’ are more explicit and less contested than in others. For example, 92.9% of
269 players perceived the Gilnean Worgen as appropriating properties and attributes from the ‘Victorian-Era English/British.’ In contrast, only 142 players attempted to determine from which ethnocultural groups Blizzard Entertainment might have appropriated to construct the Gnomes of Gnomeregan, together positing 20 different potential options. Fifteen of these 20 different ethnocultural groups failed to garner more than 5% in support amongst players, and only three surpassed more than 10% in support – ‘Japanese’ (20.4%), ‘Industrial-Era German’ (14.8%), and ‘American’ (11.3%).

In drawing such parallels with the ‘Japanese,’ ‘Industrial-Era German,’ and ‘American’ ethnocultural groups, players relied almost exclusively in their comments upon the notion that Gnomes are “Renowned mechanics, engineers, and technicians, widely respected for their knowledge of the scientific facets of the world” (“Gnomes – Game Guide,” 2016, Para. 2). The limited number of cultural properties and/or elements referenced in these comparisons, combined with the lack of consensus evident amongst players discussing the Gnomes, seems to suggest that the Gnomes might be a unique, original creation that borrows little from the real world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Game ‘Race’</th>
<th>Ethnocultural Group(s) Appropriated, As Per Player Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Humans of Stormwind</td>
<td>Blend of ‘Medieval Western European’ (52.9%), ‘Medieval British’ (8.2%), and ‘Medieval French’ (3.1%). Some ‘American’ (31.4%) aspects as well.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Visually, they seem to combine some Roman themes with Medieval ones. But in practice they are so focused on modern technology that they don’t honestly seem to have any one solid influence. In typical fantasy, humans are themed after European cultures. Here though, it seems like Blizzard tried to theme them after American culture, more or less. Which doesn’t really work for a Medieval setting, in my opinion. (Draile, 2015, Forum Comment #20)</td>
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<td>The Dwarves of Ironforge</td>
<td>Blend of ‘Scottish’ (49.4%), ‘Irish’ (20.5%), ‘Norse’ (16.8%), ‘Celtic’ (4.8%), and ‘Germanic’ (3.3%). Some ‘Russian’ (5.2%) aspects as well.</td>
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<td>Dwarves are clearly a mix of Norse culture mixed with 19th century industrial Britain, what with the Scottish accents and love of engineering. Also some German influences with Brewfest and the [beer] culture. (Kaleis, 2015, Forum Comment #80)</td>
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<td>In Game ‘Race’</td>
<td>Ethnocultural Group(s) Appropriated, As Per Player Comments</td>
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<td>The Night Elves of Darnassus</td>
<td>Blend of, first, ‘Japanese’ (31.7%), ‘Asian’ (11.2%), ‘Korean’ (10.1%), and ‘Chinese’ (1.3%); second, ‘Classical Greek’ (16.5%) and ‘Classical Roman’ (4.5%); and third, ‘Celtic’ (14.2%) and ‘Norse’ (5.7%). Some ‘Native North American’ (4.7%) aspects as well.</td>
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<td>In the case of the Night Elves, yes, they do seem to have an Oriental bent, but it is rather weak. You have lanterns, roof structures, and some foods indicating Korean design, but then you also have a matriarchal society run by women warriors and male druids, very much a Celtic thing, and the grand scale and monumental stonework and colonnades of places such as Darnassus look far more Greco-Roman than they do Oriental. (Brenri, 2012, Forum Comment #15)</td>
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<td>The Gnomes of Gnomeregan</td>
<td>Players had difficulties identifying source cultures from which Blizzard appropriated to construct the Gnomes. Responses ranged from ‘Japanese’ (20.4%) to ‘Industrial-Era German’ (14.8%) to ‘American’ (11.3%). Few properties and/or attributes besides the fascination Gnomes have with technologies were referenced.</td>
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<td>Gnomes I’ve never been able to pin down to anything short of Industrial Revolution America. At that time, everyone believed science and machines could solve every problem. The Gnomes aren’t much different. (Kittensnark, 2011, Forum Comment #39)</td>
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<td>It’s because of how advanced the Japanese are in robots, and how the Gnomes like robots as a field of technology. (MFDOOM, 2010, Forum Comment #76)</td>
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<td>The Exodar Draenei</td>
<td>Blend of, first, ‘Russian’ (28.1%), ‘Slavic’ (2.3%), ‘Eastern European’ (9.8%), and ‘Romanian’ (1.9%); second, ‘Indian’ (17.6%); third, ‘Middle Eastern’ (5.4%), ‘Arabic’ (5.2%), ‘Ancient Persian’ (2.7%), ‘Turkic’ (2.3%), and ‘Egyptian’ (1%); fourth, ‘Romani’ (10.5%); and fifth, ‘Greek’ (6.1%).</td>
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<td>Draenei are a combination of several cultures. They have Indian (association with Eleks, the males have Tunak Tunak Tun as their /dance), Greek (several names are Greek or pseudo-Greek in nature), and Russian (same as Greek example) themes. Couple in their status as wanderers and exiles with this multinational influence, it would probably be best to think of them as based on Gypsies/Romani. (Cirno, 2014, Forum Comment #17)</td>
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<td>The Gilnean Worgen</td>
<td>Blend of, first, ‘Victorian-Era English/British’ (92.9%); and second, ‘Eastern European’ (2.6%), ‘Transylvanian’ (1.9%), ‘Russian’ (1.5%), and ‘Romanian’ (1.1%).</td>
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<td>The amount of criticism Blizzard [has] had about the Worgen’s ‘British’ accent and use of slang terms and expressions, and the only reply they would give was “They’re not British, they’re Gilnean.” Fair point, and can’t really argue. Still, talking to female Worgen [Non-Player Characters] so far makes my skin crawl as they stumble through several different accents that all sound different... They’re obviously based on the Victorian British, but loosely and stereotypically. (Laevus, 2010, Forum Comment #23)</td>
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<td>In Game ‘Race’</td>
<td>Ethnocultural Group(s) Appropriated, As Per Player Comments</td>
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<td>The Orcs of Durotan</td>
<td>Blend of, first, ‘Medieval Mongolian’ (25.9%) and ‘Hunnic’ (8.3%); second, ‘Tribal African’ (18.3%) and ‘Zulu’ (2.3%); third, ‘Norse’ (8.3%), ‘Germanic’ (3.2%), and ‘Gothic’ (2.1%); and fourth, ‘Medieval Japanese’ (4.6%) and ‘Nomadic Central Asian’ (4.4%). Some ‘African American’ (7.6%) and ‘Native North American’ (1.6%) aspects as well. Orcs are without a doubt a fantasy allusion to the pre Islamic Turkic and Mongol peoples. Fierce warriors from the steppes/desert (Nagrand and Hellfire) who are shamanistic, revering Storms and Wolves above other spirits. Their cultural systems of honor duels, Warchiefs, “clan” mentality, and of course their buildings are all heavily suggestive of Central Asian Peoples. (Blackwood, 2014, Forum Comment #1) Orcs – They are often compared to Africans because of Nagrand and the architecture of Garadar, but most of their buildings look Mongolian or Central Asian to me. As far as cultural values and traditions, they are very Germanic. Axe as weapon of choice, rever[en]ce for wolves and the elements, as well as being very warlike. (Lorigar, 2011, Forum Comment #13)</td>
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<td>The Forsaken</td>
<td>Blend of, first, ‘Nazi German’ (24.5%) and ‘German’ (20.4%); second, ‘Medieval English/British’ (10.9%), ‘Victorian-Era European’ (8.2%), and ‘Medieval French’ (2.7%); and third, ‘Medieval Eastern European’ (10.9%) and ‘Transylvanian’ (4.8%). [Forsaken are similar to] National Socialist Germany. A twisted perversion of what is normally a powerful yet good state, which believes in a particular “master race” who should all answer to one person, who believe that they’re rebuilding a fallen empire, who shuffle undesirables into death camps, who favor blitzkrieg tactics and unethical medical experimentation to perfect more powerful weapons, whose rampage across a continent recently got stopped by a bunch of British people and their allies from across the sea. (Vyrin, 2012, Forum Comment #7)</td>
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<td>The United Tauren Tribes</td>
<td>Blend of ‘Native North American’ (86%), ‘Plains Native American’ (8.1%), ‘Pacific Northwest Native American’ (1.7%), and ‘Sioux’ (1.1%). I’m pretty positive that Tauren’s culture is heavily influenced [or] based off of Native Americans. Totems, feathers, they even say “Hao.” (Opshieldslam, 2013, Forum Comment #4) The Tauren are almost a mirror of Native American, I see the nomad kinda point. But this ‘Cow Mirror’ is in all the words (MojaCHE and all the other ones that end in things like that), all the totem poles, the ceremonial dress… (Enraged_Balloon, 2010, Forum Comment #25)</td>
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<td>The Darkspear Trolls</td>
<td>Blend of, first, ‘Jamaican’ (34.5%), ‘Caribbean’ (14.4%), ‘Haitian’ (4.1%), and ‘Cuban’ (1%) second, ‘Aztec’ (11.6%), ‘Mesoamerican’ (6.3%), ‘Mayan’ (4.8%), and ‘Incan’ (1.9%); and third, ‘Tribal African’ (12.6%). Their language actually contains several [Real Life] African words when heard by non-Trolls, and the Patois they use in game is a Western African/[Caribbean] mash-up. Loa and voudoun again are of Afro-[Caribbean] nature... (Brigante, 2015, Forum Comment #54)</td>
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<td>In Game ‘Race’</td>
<td>Ethnocultural Group(s) Appropriated, As Per Player Comments</td>
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<td>The Blood Elves of Quel’Thalas</td>
<td>Blend of, first, ‘Ancient Persian’ (18.7%), ‘Medieval Arabic’ (14.3%), ‘Medieval Middle Eastern’ (8.3%), and ‘Turkic’ (1.6%); second, ‘Early Modern French’ (18.7%), ‘Renaissance Italian’ (7.9%), and ‘Renaissance European’ (1.2%); and third, ‘Classical Roman’ (8.7%) and ‘Classical Greek’ (3.2%).</td>
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<td>Absolutely and utterly Persian/Arabic – Look at the luxurious curtained interiors, pipes, cushions. There is also a heavy classical Roman/Greek theme to a lot of the buildings. The Blood Elves laid back and arrogant outlook reminds me of the opulent Roman elite and Greek oligarchs, the affinity for magic and knowledge reminds me of the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers/historians. (Ravensescene, 2014, Forum Comment #35)</td>
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<td>The Bilgewater Cartel Goblins</td>
<td>Blend of, first, ‘New Yorker’ (21.9%), ‘New Jerseyan’ (17.5%), and ‘American’ (13.9%); second, ‘Jewish’ (25.9%); and third, ‘Italian American’ (10.4%) and ‘Italian’ (9.3%).</td>
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<td>I think they’re a bit of a mix. They act like stereotypical Italian mobsters, have a background that’s very much like a caricature of corporate America, [and] talk like they belong on Jersey Shore. Now there might be a bit of the traditional anti-Semitic stereotype of the “greedy Jew,” but that could also be applied to corporate America and the romanticized mafiosi; really apart from the fact that Goblins have large noses (also a caricature of Jewish people) there’s nothing to call them out as that; they’re probably a mix of all those things: Jersey Shore, Mafia, corporate America, Jewish stereotype, with a decidedly Italian/New Jersey demeanor. (Nobleshield, 2012, Forum Comment #75)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Tushui and Huojin Pandaren</td>
<td>Blend of ‘Chinese’ (67.5%), ‘Asian’ (14.8%), ‘Japanese’ (10.7%), ‘Korean’ (5.3%), and ‘Tibetan’ (1.8%).</td>
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<td>Pandaren: All the good things of Chinese and Korean culture. However, a lot of things Pandaren [are] really Taoism and most of their buildings and attire comes from the rural areas of East Asia. (Althamacnar, 2014, Forum Comment #37)</td>
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<td>Pandaren are Chinese. Listen to the way they speak, they don’t speak with a Japanese accent. Their philosophies are much more in line with Confucianism than they are with the Japanese Taoism or Bushido cultures and their manner of speaking is much more Chinese in their manner and accent. (Another_Gamer, 2015, Forum Comment #7)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Ethnocultural Group(s) Appropriated, As Per Player Comments**

As the findings presented within chapter five demonstrate, and the table above depicts, Blizzard Entertainment seems to have appropriated the properties and attributes of certain ethnocultural groups to construct the ‘races’ found within *World of Warcraft*, at least according
to those individuals who play or have played *World of Warcraft*. The comments players themselves authored best capture this assertion:

I know and we’ve been through this before, the races (and cultures, languages, etc.) do not directly equate to out-of-game/lore races and cultures, but let’s not be ignorant and play dumb here when it’s so obvious that some are extremely heavily influenced by real life, past and present day, peoples. (Namananitaw, 2014, Forum Comment #1)

It’s fact and pretty clear that they are all modelled off of something from [real world] cultures… Are we supposed to ignore the racial flav[our] that they have been given, even though it’s so blatantly obvious with some of them? (Trollsmack, 2014, Forum Comment #10)

There is no other ‘race’ within *World of Warcraft* in which appropriations of North American Indigeneity seem to be more apparent than in the Tauren. The Tauren are large humanoids that are bovine in appearance with hooves, horns, and fine fur that ranges in colour from brown to black to white to tan (“Tauren,” 2016). The official game guide for *World of Warcraft* describes them as peaceful entities that strive “To preserve the balance of nature at the behest of their goddess, the Earth Mother” and had, until recent events, “Lived as nomads scattered throughout the Barrens, hunting the great kodo beasts native to the arid region” (“Tauren – Game Guide,” 2016, Para. 1).

As illustrated within the preceding chapter, players assert that the Tauren are, in part, embodiments of certain elements of North American Indigeneity. There were a total of 356 players who identified a total of five ethnocultural groups from which the Tauren were conceptualized. Just one of these five ethnocultural groups was not related to North American Indigeneity – the ‘Greek,’ to which only 11 players (3.1%) equated the Tauren. Those players who equated the Tauren to the ‘Greek’ explicitly stated it was only because of the Tauren’s physical likeness to the Minotaur of Greek mythology. The other 345 players (96.1%) asserted that the Tauren appropriated North American Indigeneity in some variant or another, whether
that form was ‘Native North American’ (86%), ‘Plains Native North American’ (8.1%), ‘Pacific Northwest Native American’ (1.7%), or, as more specific players asserted, ‘Sioux’ (1.1%).

The Tauren are also perceived among players as the ‘race’ that most seems to appropriate North American Indigeneity. As described in the previous chapter, there were a total of 371 players who drew parallels between certain aspects of certain ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft* and those of North American Indigeneity. Of these, 335 (90.3%) drew parallels between North American Indigeneity and the Tauren, while 25 (6.7%), 7 (1.9%), and 4 (1.1%) drew parallels between North American Indigeneity and the Night Elves, Orcs, and Trolls, respectively.

**Figure 17: Ethnocultural Groups From Which The Tauren Seem To Appropriate**

**Figure 18: ‘Race’ That Most Seems To Appropriate North American Indigeneity**
The Tauren, it would therefore seem, were conceived and developed by Blizzard Entertainment through appropriations of North American Indigeneity. These appropriations are most evident, at least in terms of the material properties players identified, within the grasslands of ‘Mulgore,’ the peaceful plains of Azeroth in which most Tauren live and players begin when first playing as a Tauren. Situated within Mulgore lies the Tauren capital of ‘Thunder Bluff,’ as well as the Tauren settlements of ‘Camp Narache’ and ‘Bloodhoof Village’ (“Tauren – Game Guide,” 2016).

In each of these settlements, and others similar to them, the Tauren inhabit longhouses and teepees that are decorated with geometric designs and colour schemes similar to those found among the Indigenous Nations of the Northeastern Woodlands (e.g. Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga); Pacific Northwest Coast (e.g. Haida, Tsimshian, Tlingit); and Great Plains (e.g. Siksika, Cheyenne, Comanche) (Conrad & Finkel, 2009, PP. 8-26; Langer, 2008, P. 96). These
settlements are also replete with totem poles, dream catchers, stretched animal skins, and ceremonial drums, each of which again bear striking similarities to those of the various and distinct Indigenous Nations found within North America. These are just some of the appropriated properties, illustrated in the figures below, which players seem to be most aware of when discussing the Tauren:

Basic inquisition and in game play has shown that the teepees constructed in Thunder Bluff resemble Native American teepees made of buffalo hide, as well as the various totem poles and dream catchers that can be found in Thunder Bluff. (Raklen, 2013, Forum Comment #1)

Picking up the game for the first time, I instantly realized [that] Taurens were greatly based on Native American and Alaskan culture. Their nomadic tendencies, the totem poles, shoot they even have teepees. (Hefnut, 2013, Forum Comment #6)

Figure 20: Camp Narache, Mulgore
Figure 21: Bloodhoof Village, Mulgore

Figure 22: Thunder Bluff, Mulgore
Figure 23: Longhouse In Thunder Bluff, Mulgore

Figure 24: Another Longhouse In Thunder Bluff, Mulgore
Figure 25: Dream Catchers In Thunder Bluff, Mulgore

Figure 26: Totem Pole In Bloodhoof Village, Mulgore
Besides the material properties mentioned above, Blizzard Entertainment also seems to have appropriated certain cultural characteristics that are commonly associated with North American Indigeneity. For instance, the Tauren are said to “Have a long and complex oral tradition that has been handed down for generations,” only the most important of which have recently been written down (“Tauren,” 2016, Para. 4). Similarly, Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel (2009, P. 8) explain that many of the Indigenous Peoples of North America have orally handed down their histories, lessons, and/or religious and spiritual practices and customs from generation to generation for centuries.

The Tauren also use names that describe an important event or notable characteristic that is unique to each individual Tauren, a custom not dissimilar from those that some Indigenous Nations historically used (“Tauren,” 2016). ‘Leaping Deer’ and ‘Plainstalker’ serve as two illustrative examples in this respect. Similarly, the guards scattered throughout Thunder Bluff,
Camp Narache, and Bloodhoof Village are titled ‘Braves,’ after the archaic term used to refer to Indigenous Warriors (“Tauren,” 2016; Langer, 2008, P. 97). The Tauren also seem to govern themselves through tribalism, which is similar in practice to the governance structures some Indigenous Nations used to organize themselves. Each tribe consists of a number of families that are led by a common hereditary Chieftain who is referred to as a ‘Chief,’ some of which include the ‘Bloodhoof,’ ‘Cloudsong,’ ‘Eagletalon,’ and ‘Runetotem’ tribes (“Tauren,” 2016).

Finally, the Tauren, which is itself an anagram for ‘nature,’ are also said to possess a potent attunement to nature, striving, as mentioned above, “To preserve the balance of nature at the behest of their goddess, the Earth Mother” (“Tauren – Game Guide,” 2016, Para. 1). In World of Warcraft: The Roleplaying Game, authors Rob Baxter, Bob Fitch, Luke Johnson, Seth Johnson, Mur Lafferty, and Andrew Rowe (2005) further explain that,

For the Tauren, nature is the mother of the world, and their faith holds a deep and resonant tone within their hearts. Tauren are connected to the ebb and flow of the world. They revere the spirits of the land and of their ancestors, and they turn to these spirits for wisdom and guidance. This connection manifests in their deeply animistic culture, where druids and shamans stand side by side with warriors and hunters. Tauren do not see a separation between the veneration of nature and the hunt; to hunt is to honor the spirits of nature. (P. 48)

This close affinity with nature is, as Andrea Zittlau (2014, P. 100) explains in other contexts, often perceived amongst Settlers as a characteristic that is distinct and essential to Indigeneity, a notion players themselves seemed to support in asserting that “There is a cultural resemblance between [the Tauren and North American Indigeneity], primarily with the connection to the Earth and how it provides for the people” (Raklen, 2013, Forum Comment #1). One player, in particular, offered an illuminating survey response that seems to encapsulate a lot of the points above, explaining that the Tauren,

Live atop mesas in simple dwellings, created from the land and its bounties. They carry a deep respect for balance in nature. They have totems all over the place and
value their hon[our]. To go back to Warcraft III, they lived peacefully (other than skirmishes with those bristle-boar types) and had their world turned upside-down when the Orcs and Humans showed up with their war, not unlike what Native Americans went through when European Settlers crossed the Atlantic.

THE TAUREN AS A POTENTIAL FETISH ‘OBJECT’

In seemingly appropriating the properties and attributes of North American Indigeneity to construct the Tauren in World of Warcraft, as described above, it seems as though Blizzard Entertainment might have unconsciously engaged in the postcolonial fetishism of North American Indigeneity. Recall that, as Hall (1997, P. 266) and Kaplan (2006, P. 6) argue, postcolonial fetishism is a defensive mechanism in which a fetish ‘object’ substitutes for some sort of powerful, immaterial, and perhaps dangerous force or essence. Its purpose, according to these authors, is to transform an unknown and intangible ‘something’ or ‘someone’ into something that is known and tangible. In doing so, the powerful, immaterial, and dangerous force or essence of the ‘something’ or ‘someone’ in question is supposed to be extinguished (Hall, 1997, PP. 267-268; Kaplan, 2006, P. 6; See Also McClintock, 1995, P. 184).

As Hall (1997, P. 266) seems to explain, a fetish ‘object’ might be conceived through two main processes. In the first process, the ‘something’ or ‘someone’ is disassembled into its most defining components through the logic of reductionism. Reductionism, as previously described, is a means through which one comes to understand the nature of intricate phenomena via reducing them to their simpler and more fundamental parts. In the second process, these simpler and more fundamental components are amalgamated into a single composite trope that is imbued with all the energies and meanings of these simplistic component parts.

I contend that Blizzard Entertainment, in appropriating the properties and attributes of North American Indigeneity to construct the Tauren, might have unknowingly created a fetish ‘object.’ In accordance, for instance, with the first process involved in the creation of a fetish
‘object,’ it seems as though Blizzard Entertainment reduced Indigenous Peoples into a select set of relevant parts that were perceived as their most essential, defining characteristics. Among these relevant parts are the aforementioned material objects and subjective attributes that Blizzard Entertainment appropriated. The former include teepees, longhouses, totem poles, dream catchers, stretched animal skins, and ceremonial drums. The latter include living nomadically, being close with nature, titles such as ‘Brave’ or ‘Chief,’ and names such as ‘Leaping Deer’ or ‘Mistrunner.’

Likewise, in accordance with the second process involved in the formation of a fetish ‘object,’ Blizzard Entertainment seems to have rearranged and amalgamated these simpler components – which were appropriated from a diverse range of unique North American Indigenous Nations – into one single, homogenized image that was then tied to the Tauren. Consider, for instance, just three of the ‘most essential, defining’ elements of North American Indigeneity that Blizzard Entertainment appropriated: longhouses, totem poles, and teepees.

Longhouses are long, narrow, single-room buildings that were the preferred homes of the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk Peoples of the Haudenosaunee, the ‘People of the Longhouses,’ as well as the Wyandot and Erie, all of which inhabited the Northeastern Woodlands of North America. Totem poles are wooden poles that have been carved and painted with a series of figures and emblems so as to symbolize or memorialize clan lineages, historical events, or legends. Totem poles are an integral part of the cultural identities of some of the Indigenous Nations of the Pacific Northwest Coast, such as the Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian Peoples. Lastly, teepees are cone-shaped tents that can be assembled and disassembled in little time, which made them particularly useful for nomadic Indigenous Nations that had to relocate in accordance with the seasonal migrations of various animals. The Siksika, Cheyenne,
Comanche, and Arapaho Peoples of the Great Plains were some of the principal users of these teepees (See Conrad & Finkel, 2009, PP. 8-26; McMillan & Yellowhorn, 2004, PP. 67-101, 189-232, 129-165).

Despite the various and distinct Nations from which these cultural elements were appropriated, as well as those properties and attributes besides longhouses, totem poles, and teepees that Blizzard Entertainment also appropriated, it seems as though Blizzard condensed these into a single, amalgamated image. There were some players who, in commenting on the appropriation of North American Indigeneity evident within the Tauren, acknowledged and described procedures that seem consistent with these two processes. One player, for instance, argued that:

The brass tacks is that the Tauren are being shown as a rehash of the monolithic cultural stereotypes that we’ve imposed on all Native Americans. It went in steps:

A) Observe a few notable trappings of assorted Native Tribes
B) Blend them all together into one popular conception of “Native American culture”…
C) Cook on high for 300 years or until thoroughly ingrained. Oppress ingredients periodically.
D) Attach horns, glaze liberally with fur.

…The problem with the Tauren, among others, is that they are that monolithic culture. The same one we’ve been imposing forever [Emphasis Added]. (Belial, 2011, Forum Comment #131)

**Displacing and Condensing the Indigenous ‘Other’**

As a potential fetish ‘object,’ then, the Tauren might fixate the identities associated with North American Indigeneity into a more palatable form that potentially masks some of the more foreboding revelations that the Indigenous ‘Other’ poses to Settlers. The Tauren may accomplish such an endeavour through the dual processes of displacement and condensation. The former
enables Settlers to ‘learn’ all there is to know about the Indigenous ‘Other,’ while the latter enables Settlers to experiment and ‘engage’ with the identities of the Indigenous ‘Other.’

With respect to displacement, the Tauren seems to enshrine specific properties and attributes of the Indigenous ‘Other’ as the most imperative of North American Indigeneity, such that these properties and attributes become emphasized over and above all the other distinct qualities that North American Indigenous Peoples possess. These properties and attributes include those already mentioned above that Blizzard Entertainment appropriated, which, for some Settlers, seem to point to the whole of North American Indigeneity. The following three players, for example, authored comments that are suggestive of this theoretical proposition:

If you think about the Native Americans… They moved a lot too. They followed the buffalo, deer, and edible plants wherever they went. The Tauren do (did) the same thing. (Hunterhorn, 2014, Forum Comment #4)

Wait, you[’re] Native American? If so, [the] Tauren[,] show off you[r] great peace and love for the Earth… I would be proud to be a Tauren. (Urók, 2013, Forum Comment #101)

They really use actual elements of the culture… For example, Tauren respect the Earth, commune with nature, and feel connected to their ancestors. (Hippeaux, 2011, Forum Comment #157)

In each of these comments, players equate the Tauren to Indigenous Peoples in singular, monolithic terms. In doing so, these players fail to acknowledge the fact that not all Indigenous Peoples were nomadic, as Hunterhorn (2014) seems to suggest, and that there are a vast number of other attributes besides living nomadically and/or having a close connection with nature that are found within the hundreds of diverse Indigenous Nations within North America.

Two other players seemed to echo the theoretical proposition put forward above. In seeking to explain this potential function of the Tauren to other players denying the importance of this topic, one player explained that the Tauren “Were simply copied over from [Settlers’]
broadly inaccurate perception[s] of Native American Tribes as a single, monolithic whole – i.e., all Native Americans lived in tee-pees, all Native Americans carved totem poles”

(TheGreatHippo, 2011, Forum Comment #96). The other player went into comparatively more depth, explaining that,

There are specific icons which are “Native,” that are different than other stereotypes of nomadic cultures. The image of an “Indian Brave,” the image of totem poles, the image of leather wearing shamans, communing with the Earth. There are very specific images which evoke the western perception of the “American Indian”… As the westerners took over the Americas, we created a specific image that people think of when thinking of an “Indian.” (Jessica, 2011A, Forum Comment #136)

With respect to condensation, the Tauren seems to enshrine a compacted conceptualization of the Indigenous ‘Other’ as bona fide North American Indigeneity, such that the actions performed through or with the Tauren might subconsciously replace actual interactions with real, living and breathing, North American Indigenous Peoples. This compacted conceptualization, as mentioned above, is that of a homogenized, monolithic Indigenous ‘Other’ that appends the diverse cultural properties and attributes of the various Indigenous Nations within North America to those of the Great Plains during the mid-nineteenth century. It is a compacted conceptualization of North American Indigeneity that might be, in the minds of some players, real, avowed, and objective; and as such, might manifest itself as a rendition of the authentic Indigenous ‘Other.’

Some of the comments players authored were suggestive of this potentiality. Consider, for instance, the following player who, in arguing in favour of these cultural appropriations, explicitly suggested that the ‘races’ in World of Warcraft amounted to real world ethnocultural groups:

Perhaps if a person played World of Warcraft and created a Tauren or Troll and saw quite clearly the noble intentions of their character, then the player could only
take away a positive impression of the culture that the race represents… So, I would propose that it is in fact a good thing to borrow a culture for a fictional race as long as they are represented in a positive light, in context with the story. It may leave the player with a better understanding of the real life culture and provide more positive connotations [Emphasis Added]. (Minifie, 2015, Forum Comment #1)

Similarly, another player explained that the Tauren were his preferred ‘race’ within World of Warcraft specifically because of the fact that the Tauren seem to epitomize elements of North American Indigeneity:

For me, the Tauren hold a more personal note – their cultural aesthetic draws heavily from Native American aspects, and my father’s great-grandmother was a pureblooded Cherokee (and Dad himself got so lucky genetically that even as far-removed from her as he is[s], he’s still got the dark ruddy skintone that he could even pass for one – I on the other hand strongly follow Mom’s bloodline, so I’m pale as an Irish peasant-girl, ironically), so they have a strong appeal to me that way as well. (Wykea, 2012, Forum Comment #11)

Finally, another player seemed to explicitly reiterate this theoretical assertion in stating:

If you wanna engage cultures that aren’t your own, no need to hide it behind the mask of another race. Step into Thunder Bluff and you know that’s exactly what’s going on – “We wanted to make something Native American, but we couldn’t do it straight up because we’d get in trouble, so let’s slap it on a new race we created.” (Yiffinhell, 2008, Forum Comment #6)

The Tauren, as a potential embodiment of the authentic Indigenous ‘Other’ in the minds of some players, might therefore enable Settlers to engage and experiment with the identities associated with North American Indigeneity. Theoretically, players who, first, interact with the Tauren might be in essence engaging with the Indigenous ‘Other’ and, second, opt to play as the Tauren might be in effect assuming the identities of the Indigenous ‘Other,’ at least for the duration players spend within the game. As but one example, in discussions surrounding potential role-playing names for the Tauren, players suggested the use of names based on Indigenous Peoples and/or their languages:
My name would be the name that it is now (Gahege) which means Ch[ie]f in Native American, or Antiman which means Condor of the Son, or Eluwilussit which means Holy One. (Gahege, 2011, Forum Comment #11)

Seeing as how Taurens are stylized from Native American culture, I’d start hitting the Internets to find some sun related phrases in various Native American tongues. (Alghester, 2011, Forum Comment #13)

[I suppose] American Indian names would be all the rage for RP [Role-Playing] Tauren Paladins[:] Minihaha, Laughingbull, Sittingbull. (Ostentatious, 2011, Forum Comment #15)

Consequently, it could be the case that the Tauren affords to Settlers a vessel through which to engage in a kind of ‘identity tourism.’ According to Lisa Nakamura (2002, P. 39), identity tourism refers to the practice of adopting and interacting with identities that are different from one’s own via a secure, non-threatening, and in this case, virtual, environment. She explains that massively multi-player online role-playing games, like World of Warcraft, provide players with a host of different options when it comes to customizing the avatars through which these virtual worlds are entered and experienced, including preferences in regards to race, gender, skin colour, height, weight, physique, and species.

As such, it could be the case that the Tauren allows for what Veracini (2010, P. 47) calls a transfer by performance, which, as previously mentioned, occurs when Settlers dress up as Indigenous Peoples and/or pretend to be Indigenous. In doing so, Settlers seem to assume and occupy the identities associated with North American Indigenousity, which might virtually allow them to inherit all that is Indigenous in enabling Settlers to experience what it is like to be an embodiment of the seemingly authentic Indigenous ‘Other.’

Yet, as Nakamura (2002, P. 39) points out, in partaking in identity tourism via means of ethnic sampling, players experiment and engage with alternate identities that are often devoid of their real life socio-historical contexts. Thus, while Settlers can theoretically assume the
identities of Indigenous Peoples through the Tauren, Settlers seem to do so without experiencing any of the negative conditions Indigenous Peoples endure. One player, protesting another player’s suggestion that in game cultural representations should be more accurate, articulated this sentiment in asserting that,

In the case of games, which let you be the characters in question, it can be more about wish fulfilment than facts… I like[] the image. I don’t want the reality. It’s a game. A fantasy… Some people want to play the role of a Native American style character. They don’t want or need a history class in the exact rituals of any particular group… Totem poles and leather te[e]pees weren’t both in use in any one tribe? Tough luck, the player wants to be a character who sleeps in a te[e]pee and carves totems… If one game company listens to you and starts caring more about historical accuracy than what wishes/fantasies the customers want to live out then they’ll be pushed out of the market by a developer who gives the customer what they want. In games any image of a lifestyle or culture which people like or want to put themselves into will eventually get implemented. (HungryHobo, 2011, Forum Comment #191)

In potentially enabling Settlers to assume the identities associated with North American Indigeneity that are devoid of their real life socio-historical contexts, as Huhfndorf (2001, P. 8) articulates in alternative cases, the Tauren might thereby mask the more disconcerting aspects of the Indigenous ‘Other.’ Predominant among such aspects, for instance, are the violent origins upon which the United States was founded, and/or the negative repercussions contemporary Indigenous Peoples experience as a consequence from such violence and oppression. As such, in a similar fashion to postcolonial fetishism, identity tourism vis-à-vis the Tauren might serve to both safeguard the identities attached to, and validate the contemporary existence of, Settlers in the United States. Better stated then, the Tauren might serve as a potential means through which Settlers can superficially ‘understand’ the Indigenous ‘Other,’ without experiencing the negative socio-historical and political aspects attached to that.
THE REGULARLY KNOWABLE, DOMESTICATED INDIGENOUS ‘OTHER’ VS. THE UNKNOWABLE, THREATENING INDIGENOUS ‘OTHER’

In sum, the Tauren could be perceived as a fetish ‘object’ that, through the dual functions of displacement and condensation, potentially manipulates the ambiguity of North American Indigeneity into a fixated and more palatable form for Settlers. Theoretically, this more palatable form allows for the mutual coexistence of two antithetical assertions in an effort to sustain the precarious logic of elimination upon which settler colonialism relies. On the one hand, there is a ‘regularly knowable, domesticated’ Indigenous ‘Other’ that, as a fictitious being, supports the settler colonial logic of elimination in fostering a wilful ignorance amongst Settlers. On the other, there is an ‘unknowable, threatening’ Indigenous ‘Other’ that undermines the settler colonial logic of elimination in delegitimizing claims to Indigenization (Hook, 2005, P. 722).

The regularly knowable, domesticated Indigenous ‘Other’ is that which seems to be embodied within the Tauren. It is an Indigenous ‘Other’ that exhibits and emphasizes select component-parts of North American Indigeneity – inhabiting longhouses or teepees, carving totem poles, living nomadically, and being close with nature. It is an Indigenous ‘Other’ that conveys and enshrines a compact conceptualization of North American Indigeneity – an amalgamated and monolithic conceptualization in which diverse cultural elements have been appended to the Indigenous Nations of the Great Plains.

In other words, it is an Indigenous ‘Other’ that seems to be regularly knowable in the sense that, first, the select component-parts emphasized within the Tauren might be considered all that Settlers need to be aware of to ‘know’ Indigenous Peoples; and second, the compact conceptualization enshrined within the Tauren might be considered all that Settlers need to
engage with to ‘understand’ Indigenous Peoples. The following two players, for example, explain how such images can mediate what one knows of North American Indigenieity:

It’s not just the Tauren, or Blizzard, but all sorts of entertainment media. Hell, I grew up believing that all ‘Red Injuns’ were tomahawk-wielding scalp-merchants with feathers in their hair and names like Running Bear and Sitting Down who greet people with a raised palm and a ‘how’ sign and often, if not constantly, ran around making ululations with their hand patting their mouths. Where did I learn these traits? Comic books, TV, Cowboys ‘n’ Injuns [films]… All sorts of media. I know now how damaging that [the] perpetuation of these stereotypes are, and Blizzard continue[s] to, as Belial mentioned, reinforce this notion with the teepees and the wigwams and the totem poles and the heyheyhey and the like. Growing up, my perception of Native American life and culture was completely wrong, and the weapons used to shape this perception were old TV shows and lazy kids’ comics. The imagery used to cause this imprint on my impressionable child mind was set until I actually decided to learn about it… Which I understand not everybody in the world would choose to do. The cycle of stereotype perpetuation is continued, not with low-budget TV imports, but with multi-milli-
ulti-million-selling games like Warcraft, which takes the lazy stereotype and slathers it onto bipedal cows [Emphasis Added]. (Felstaff, 2011, Forum Comment #189)

As a culture, we have dehumanized the First Nations People, and made them into caricatures of themselves… Is this a bad thing? In my opinion, it is. It perpetuates the ignorant stereotypes about Native People… It also continues to overwrite the actual culture of these people, making our incorrect views seem correct through repetition. Finally, if they can be seen as an icon, or a caricature, they’re easier to ignore [Emphasis Added]. (Jessica, 2011A, Forum Comment #136)

And therein lies the more prominent purpose of postcolonial fetishism. In seemingly augmenting select component-parts and a compact conceptualization of the Indigenous ‘Other,’ the Tauren might mask other more foreboding aspects that could undermine the settler colonial logic of elimination if exposed. Recall that, as Wolfe (2006, P. 387), Veracini (2010, PP. 21-22, 33), and Smith (2010, Para. 4) explain, the logic of elimination stipulates that if Settlers are to supplant Indigenous Peoples as the rightful inhabitants of the land, and thus complete the settler colonial project, Indigenous Peoples must disappear so that Settlers can inherit all that was and is Indigenous.
In this respect, it seems as though the Tauren may have been conceived by Blizzard Entertainment, and might still be perceived amongst its players, on the basis of a tenacious and wilful ignorance that inadvertently supports the settler colonial logic of elimination. It is a tenacious and wilful ignorance of what Gerald Vizenor (2008, P. VII) calls the ‘survivance’ of North American Indigenous Peoples, in spite of the plethora of genocidal and ethnocidal acts perpetuated against them. It is a tenacious and wilful ignorance of the relationship of domination and displacement inherent within settler colonial societies, through which Settlers have carried out unlawful territorial possessions to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples, as Veracini (PP. 81, 105) explains. And it is a tenacious and wilful ignorance of the contemporaneous existence of North American Indigenous Peoples that belong to a range of unique Indigenous Nations, each of which possess their own histories, cultures, and societies, as Chaat Smith (2009, P. 20) describes.

These are just some of the unflattering facts that seem to have been stripped from North American Indigeneity vis-à-vis the Indigenous ‘Other’ that is embodied within the Tauren. These disconcerting facts, in part, seem to constitute the unknowable, threatening Indigenous ‘Other.’ As Pearson (2013, P. 177) explains, in raising questions about the genocidal and/or ethnocidal acts perpetrated in the settler colonization of the United States, and reminding Settlers that the settler colonial project remains unfinished, this unknowable, threatening Indigenous ‘Other’ seems to imperil the unabated continuation of settler colonialism in delegitimizing Settlers’ claims to Indigenization (See Also Simpson, 2011, PP. 210-211; Tuck and Young, 2012, P. 9; Veracini, 2010, PP. 33-34, 81).

The Tauren, as a potential fetish ‘object,’ seems to cast aside settler colonialism’s component-parts of dispossession and partial genocide to concoct a more palatable rendition of
North American Indigeneity that serves to shelter the settler colonial logic of elimination. Indeed, players themselves authored comments that seem to suggest that this logic of elimination still serves as a basis upon which Settlers legitimize their status as the rightful inhabitants of the United States. In the discussions examined surrounding the appropriation of North American Indigeneity evident within the Tauren, there were a handful of players who asserted that these appropriations were offensive on the grounds that such appropriative acts misrepresented and commodified Indigenous Peoples. One player, lamenting this distortion and exploitation of North American Indigeneity, explained:

There was never a treaty that was signed in European expansions where the Natives gave [Settlers] the right to remove them… I want more people to understand that the land they live on is filled with rich history with several First Nations that still exist today. I want Native People from all over the Americas to have a face in the future, and not to be ignored and considered irrelevant to common society. (Acomapueblo, 2013A, Forum Comment #38; 2013B, Forum Comment #54)

A heated discussion thereafter emerged in response to this comment, and others similar to it, in which statements that seem to be reflective of a belief in the settler colonial logic of elimination arose. Some players, for instance, argued that the disappearance of Indigenous Peoples was an inevitable and natural historic fate, as evinced in the following comments:

Nomadic cultures either die, assimilate, or settle, then their culture completely changes after that. (Talrenya, 2011, Forum Comment #4)

The world’s history is full of cultures that have clashed over the ages. Some win and some lose. Sometimes neither does, and they continue to fight. Sometimes, they just get tired of fighting and assimilate. Often, cultures are lost to the pages of history – It’s sad, but true [Emphasis Added]. (Claro, 2013, Forum Comment #40)

Such comments are reflective of one of Veracini’s (2010) four kinds of ‘narrative transfers’ that he asserts facilitate the logic of elimination, in which contemporary Indigenous Peoples are cast
as illegitimate because “Their defeat is irretrievably located in the past” as an inevitable occurrence (P. 41).

Similarly, other players referenced the right of conquest and/or trade to legitimize the settler colonization of the United States. In doing so, much like the players discussed above, these players branded the physical destruction of North America’s Indigenous Peoples as an unfortunate, yet logical development in the evolution of the continent. Consider, for example, the two comments the following player posted:

It is no longer -your- land. You have no right to claim it as yours. You -lost- that land. By right of conquest, trade, so on and so forth… Get over yourself [Emphasis Added]. (Dyoh, 2013A, Forum Comment #39)

The rules of warfare are constantly changing. As stated by another poster, the right of conquest is a concept that has largely died out… In [the] modern age. The Native Americans largely traded away, or lost the land to conquest. And, for the record, my blood lineage largely consists of Cherokee heritage [Emphasis Added]. (Dyoh, 2013B, Forum Comment #49)

Still others asserted that Indigenous Peoples willingly yielded to Settlers, again a rationale that is similar to those put forward above. This belief seems to be exemplified in the following comment where a self-identified black player compared his community to that of Indigenous Peoples:

You know what the difference is between mine and your community? We don’t stop fighting til [something] happens.

You guys said “F it, let me build some casinos” and called it a day. I’m not racist, I’m a realist. I don't have time blaming other groups for my problems…

But you stay on the reservation crying about the white man stealing your land from you. Land that YOU as a[n] individual, didn’t fight for… [Emphasis Added.] (Dàmàge, 2013, Forum Comment #69)

As the above comments seem to vindicate, then, the Tauren might have been founded upon, and might be perceived through, a tenacious and wilful ignorance through which some
Settlers selectively elicit ‘knowledge’ about what is believed to be North American Indigeneity. These Settlers likely do so because it is not in their interests to allow for the full breadth of the experiences of Indigeneity to be exposed, which might undermine the logic of elimination upon which settler colonialism relies. A few players seemed to acknowledge and reverberate this theoretical proposition in the comments they authored, as the following two comments illustrate:

It’s wrong when you’re perpetrating the same incorrect stuff that our great great grandparents did, and was used to shove people across the country, into shit holes, over and over again. It’s wrong when that group has had it’s own culture time and time again fucked with by ours, to any end they want, from sympathy (the crying chief, the noble savage) to dehumanization (primitives, against progress). It’s just following the cultural standard of ignoring actual people and instead just using them for our own devices [Emphasis Added]. (Jessica, 2011B, Forum Comment #150)

Personally, I do think that continuing the Native American myth/caricature as it stands is a problem. If all people have to go on to relate to a group of people is this myth and the current stereotypes of Natives, it makes it harder for people to empathize. What I mean is, if you think about Natives, if all you can think of is “primitive hunter gatherers” or “drunk casino owners,” that’s not a good start to understand [where] any individual person is coming from. Especially when both of those stereotypes wash over the actual problems that Native Americans (or First Nations in Canada) [actually] face, and have faced in the past. Really, there needs to be more education about the First Peoples of America, so people can learn more about what happened to them, and what is happening now [Emphasis Added]. (Jessica, 2011C, Forum Comment #185)

It could therefore be the case that the Tauren might be, in essence, a duplication of what some Settlers already ‘know’ and have ‘known’ about North American Indigeneity since the imposition of settler colonialism first came to be. In other words, the Tauren might be a duplication of a North American Indigeneity that supports the settler colonial logic of elimination, and thus maintains the negative status quo in relations between Settlers and Indigenous Peoples.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity; that is, the use of those cultural properties and/or attributes that belong to, or are characteristic of, the Indigenous Peoples and Nations of North America, by those who do not belong to such cultures. While there is a significant amount of literature available on the subject appropriation of Indigeneity that explores both the moral dimensions of, and the theoretical harms stemming from, appropriative acts, there have been few investigations conducted as of this writing that examine this phenomenon in video games. This thesis therefore sought to determine, first, whether or not the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity occurs in video games according to players and, second, how such appropriations might affect Settler relations with Indigenous Peoples.

In seeking to answer these overriding research questions, this thesis used as its case study Blizzard Entertainment’s *World of Warcraft*, such that the research questions were further refined to explore first, whether or not *World of Warcraft* appropriates North American Indigeneity, according to those individuals who play or have played *World of Warcraft*; and second, how such appropriations might affect Settler relations with Indigenous Peoples. Using discourse analysis and open-ended surveying, I collected and analyzed the comments that 711 players wrote in which the cultural elements of the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft* and those of real world ethnocultural groups were compared. The findings obtained through these methods helped situate the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft*, illustrating from which real world ethnocultural groups, both past and present, players believe Blizzard Entertainment appropriated to construct each ‘race.’
These findings revealed that, of the 13 ‘races’ in *World of Warcraft*, players believe that the Tauren most appropriate North American Indigeneity. From a total of 356 players comparing the Tauren to real world ethnocultural groups, 345 (96.1%) asserted that the Tauren appropriated North American Indigeneity in some variant or another. Additionally, from a total of 371 players who made parallels between certain elements of certain ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft* and those associated with North American Indigeneity, 335 (90.3%) asserted that the Tauren most embodied elements of North American Indigeneity. These findings seem to suggest that, with respect to the first research question posed, players believe that North American Indigeneity has been heavily appropriated in *World of Warcraft*, one of the most popular video games ever created.

Having offered a potential answer to the first research question posed, as well as situating the ‘races’ within *World of Warcraft*, I then used the settler colonial logic of elimination and the theory of postcolonial fetishism to develop a theoretical answer to the second research question posed. I theorize that the Tauren might serve as a fetish ‘object’ for those Settlers who play *World of Warcraft*, potentially substituting itself for the Indigenous ‘Other.’ Through displacement, the Tauren might augment select component-parts of North American Indigeneity, theoretically becoming all that Settlers might need to be aware of to ‘know’ the Indigenous ‘Other.’ Through condensation, the Tauren might likewise augment a compact conceptualization of North American Indigeneity, theoretically becoming all that Settlers might need to engage with to ‘understand’ the Indigenous ‘Other.’ The Tauren might therefore transform the Indigenous ‘Other’ into a regularly knowable, domesticated, and fixated form that might mask some of its more foreboding revelations.
It could therefore be the case that the Tauren might produce an Indigenous ‘Other’ that first, relieves the cognitive dissonance some Settlers have been theorized to experience; and second, supports the ongoing logic of elimination upon which settler colonialism relies, principally in allowing for a tenacious and wilful ignorance amongst Settlers with respect to the full breadth of experiences associated with North American Indigeneity. As such, I theorize that, with respect to the second research question posed, the appropriation of North American Indigeneity evident within World of Warcraft might maintain the negative relations Settlers have with Indigenous Peoples, failing to transform them in any meaningful way.

**Significance**

In charting the arguments posited above, this thesis seems to make at least one modest academic contribution. This potential contribution resides in its attempt to provide a preliminary contribution to an area within the literature on cultural appropriation that has thus far been under-explored and under-theorized; that is, the fact that there are relatively few in-depth investigations exploring the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity in video games. As mentioned within the literature review, video games are an important medium worth exploring because of the widespread appeal these games have garnered within settler colonial societies, as well as the powerful effects this entertainment medium has on players through their interactive and realist design elements. The arguments presented herein might, it is hoped, encourage other academics to investigate the cultural appropriation of Indigeneity in video games and, perhaps, assist in the initial efforts among scholars to fill this gap in the literature.

**Limitations and Recommendations**

Although extensive care was taken in the preparation of this thesis, there are at least three limitations and shortcomings that readers should be made aware of. The first of these
shortcomings is the use of open-ended surveying as a research instrument in online contexts. The survey that was developed and employed in this research was composed of seven open-ended questions that players could respond to in as much or as little depth as desired. While I opted to use open-ended surveying on the basis that such an instrument would be least restrictive to players, the players themselves might have avoided completing the open-ended survey because of the estimated length of time it required. This factor might account for the relatively small number of responses received (29) and the high dropout rate encountered (54%). The discourse analysis of 85 forum discussions might have helped to mitigate the potential negative effects this low response rate and high dropout rate could have posed to the research I conducted. Future research examining the appropriation of North American Indigeneity in video games and/or other online contexts might therefore benefit from the use of closed-ended surveying as a research instrument, rather than open-ended surveying.

The second and related of these shortcomings is the lack of representativeness of participants. As previously mentioned, the last financial update Blizzard Entertainment provided in which the total number of subscribers was divulged pegged that total at 5.5-million, not all of which were based in North America (“WoW Subscription Numbers,” 2015). Given the comparatively small sample of 711, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the findings presented within this thesis might not be reflective of broader trends. These findings might help begin an initial academic discussion surrounding the cultural appropriation evident within World of Warcraft, but future research that examines a larger, more representative pool of participants is needed to help rectify this limitation.

The third of these shortcomings is the use of a single in-depth case study approach. While such an approach allowed for a focused and thick description of the appropriations evident
within *World of Warcraft*, the arguments developed within this thesis might not be applicable to other instances of appropriation in alternate video games. The arguments put forward *might* be suggestive of what *might* be occurring in other video games that appropriate North American Indigeneity; however, alternate explanations *might also* be just as applicable if not more so in those other instances. Further research examining the cultural appropriation of North American Indigeneity in other video games besides *World of Warcraft* is therefore needed to, first, assess the extent to which the arguments developed herein can be generalized elsewhere and, second, assess the extent to which postcolonial fetishism can be used as a lens through which to understand cultural appropriations.
REFERENCES


