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Self-Reflective Essay

The Evolution of an "Outsider"

In the beginning I got out to a rough start for this project. After nearly two weeks of class I discovered I was signed up for the wrong Rhetoric class, so I entered this class with a disadvantage of having to work from behind. My very first day of class we did a mapping and by looking at that I can recall just how clueless and confused I was on the first day. On this mapping I start addressing my insecurities about the project. I was not sure what the assignment even was, and expressed how I had no idea what type of group I would be focusing on. Therefore, I started out struggling to get started on my project and deciding exactly what subculture would be my focus for the semester. After a student-teacher conference and much brainstorming I was hit with what I thought was a brilliant idea. The gamers! The couple of guys on my dorm's floor that I was friends with could be found gaming at any given time of any given day. I thought to myself how I have been subjected to gaming before, but never really paid any real close attention to it. Therefore I would be allowed to surround myself with something I was familiar with, but in retrospect knew nothing about.

Once the decision of where my focus would be directed was made I was overcome with relief only to remember I needed to get started as soon as possible so that I did not fall any further behind. I remember feeling puzzled and insecure about how to go about taking these notes and just what exactly I should be thinking and observing when I did make my visits. I knew the assignment was to help me better understand a subculture and on a side note consider how technology influences their activity, but how exactly was I supposed to do this? How would I ever write a twelve page paper about these guys playing a video game? I

figured I would explain the technology in about a page or so, and then what would I fill the other eleven pages with? Little did I know I would be in for a shock about just how much I would have to say by the end of this assignment.

I did the mapping activities that we did in class, but not many more outside of class. To think about exactly how much I "got into" my project is a difficult task. I honestly did not create as many self-reflective notes as I should have, and this paper would have probably come easier if I would. I also do not have as many mapping activities as I was expecting, but when looking through them I can definitely see a progression in how my work was coming together from beginning to end. The second mapping focused more on my project, but was not nearly as filled as any of the others. On this paper I expressed much of the distress I often felt throughout the first part of the semester and my project. I wrote about how I feel like I tend to take the same notes every time, but I also feel much more comfortable with this project and the progression than I did initially, considering in the beginning I had no idea of what was even going on. I noted how watching them play this video game was entertaining for me. It is funny that previously if I would come to hang out in their room only to discover they were playing their video games I would give a quick hello and move along, but after a few weeks of the project if I came to their room to find the same thing I would take a seat and watch and await for the next funny thing to be said or acted out. While initially I worried about how bored I would become having to spend an hour or two their a week, by the time I "got into" the project I found myself spending extra time in the room, and I believe this was beneficial to my project in the long run also.

Although I did not address this in my paper or any of my iLabs writings I attempt to play Halo 2 once or twice. Sometimes when you observe something long enough you begin to feel compelled to try it for yourself, so I did. I got excited when they were willing to let me play, which was anytime between gaming sessions when they could log me into a mode that

would not effect their own personal rating. In the couple of times I played I found out I had not picked up any skill from observing and I really actually sucked, but because they were coaching me in their usual manner and lingo, it was still fun. After the few times I played I decided that was enough for me, and I would just get my kicks from watching them, but one of their traits I did pick up basically to perfection was their lingo. One of my favorite pieces of work from this project was my Insider Language essay that I titled "No Longer a N00bz". I was pretty excited about this paper simply because I felt like I came up with a very catchy title, but this work also resembles a large stepping stone in my work through the semester. I expressed how in the beginning although I was somewhat familiar with the gaming society I still considered myself an outsider, but after spending many hours with them I felt I no longer was and that I had a grasp on the activity they loved oh so much. Now, of course my research about Halo and Halo 2 assisted in my obtaining of knowledge about the game, but most of my gain of information came simply from observation and casual conversation. To refer back to this essay that I feel was one of my better pieces of work; I talked about how I began to notice how their speech adapts when they play this video game, but it does evolve into their everyday, casual conversations as well. The title uses some of the lingo that while may be used in similar context by someone who is not familiar with Halo, it has a different spelling in their video game realm. In this paper I quote, "I have not only learned, but experienced, that spending time with and around them will start to have an effect on a person. It might be a coincidence, but all of the gamers I observe playing Halo talk about a million miles a minute." I also note, "I have begun to speak more quickly, and especially when I am around them." To me this reflects how much time I spend around them and what kind of effect they were having on me and my everyday life. Later in the paper I note about how after spending this extra time, more time than previous to the project, with them I find myself repeating short statements just like they do. "I find myself beginning to respond to

someone saying 'okay okay,' rather than just a simply okay." I speak of how I do not even notice I am doing this until my friends not familiar with my subculture point out I am continually and hysterically repeating myself without recognition. While much of my knowledge was earned through observation, and some through research, the interview also proved to be a very resourceful piece of work also, and while I noticed this definitely was a subculture to me considering how much information I was discovering that I did not even know was there, my preconceptions about gaming were proving to be not so stereotypical, but more politically correct.

While I do not, and not too many people still, categorize a group of guys who plays video games as nerds, in the past years television and movies and the general society have labeled video gamers as exactly that. This generalization, however, has evolved over the past few years, because this activity is becoming more and more popular among more and more ages, genders, and demographic groups. One of the most useful quotes from this entire project was when Subject Two told me in the interview that "It (Halo/Halo 2) is becoming more of a mainstream thing." He and Subject One informed me of girls they know that are picking the game, and how two of college basketball's biggest stars playing Halo 2 online together. My preconceptions did not put any certain label on video gamers rather than I believed it to be typically young adult males. While I still believe young adult males make up the vast majority of video gamers, Halo 2's popularity has extended the gaming network, which is something I was not expecting. In making most of my assumptions previous to the beginning of the work, I gave my best attempt not to be stereotypical, and because of this I was not in for too much of a shock. Guys (in general) play video games, like girls (in general) shop. These are generalizations that date back many, many years, and while they are still common generalizations today, we know that this world has evolved greatly and there are plenty of girls who play video games and Halo while males spend their time shopping for enjoyment.

My point is that my specific subculture spends time playing Halo 2 like I would spend time shopping, or working out, or hanging out with friends. It is a past time, an opportunity to have a social gathering with some friends, nothing more, nothing less. And while it is an extremely difficult assignment to interpret, depict, and successfully portray their lives and opinions I took the task on to the best of my ability, and feel as if I did at least a decent job of doing so.

I actually was pretty excited about my final paper, and took it to the guys I had been observing to let them run through it. Even though it was awfully long for them to want to read, because it was about them and something they knew they found interesting they took advantage of this opportunity. I, of course, waited in suspense for what their response would be. Would they hate what I had said and think I was totally wrong? Would they think I depicted them effectively and be completely satisfied and even impressed? Or would they even be embarrassed and/or upset that I used something I should not have? I really felt like I had come along way since the beginning of the semester and sufficiently pulled all my resources together to make an effective and intriguing argument while incorporating some enjoying anecdotes to spice if up a bit. To my relief while each read the paper they let out little chuckles here and there and made small comments about what they liked. This sealed the deal for me. Although the teacher has the final say on how well I did on this paper, with my initial feeling of satisfaction and the approval and even appreciation of what I said and how I represented them through my work was the icing on the cake.

They both liked how I looked at addiction and while I admitted, and so did they, they play this game a lot, we all recognized how they are not much different than many other of their peers. They enjoyed the stories and quotes I incorporated seemed to genuinely feel that the essay was factual, true, and interesting. When I look back at everything from my mappings, to my notes, to my papers I realize that my work only evolved over the semester. Every step

of the way things got a little bit better, but of course that is expected simply through gaining experience. However, I did a complete 180 from the beginning of this project. Initially I was worried and confused about what I would ever find to fill all of these expectations and how this would ever be interesting in the end. I soon found that there was much more to discover that I ever would have imagined and I would become involved in this subculture myself in ways I never would have imagined.