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they are studying. They must take on the role of an insider, and collect data covertly, without alerting others to their presence. Gold (1958, 219) states that

“The true identity and purpose of the complete participant in field research are not known to those whom he observes. He interacts with them as naturally as possible in whatever areas of their living interest him and are accessible to him as situations in which he can play, or learn to play, requisite day-to-day roles successfully.”

CPO involves intense, personal involvement with the people, places, and activities being studied. It is important to acknowledge the caution with which one must proceed when taking on the role of complete participant. Gold (1958, 220) stresses that

“a complete participant must continually remind himself that, above all, he is there as an observer: this is his primary role.”

Such a role demands that the researcher refrains from developing an emotional attachment to, or significantly personal interest in, the culture being studied^v. While it is inevitable that some attachment and involvement will develop, the researcher must remember their primary role in order to act as safely and ethically as possible.

There is a fine line between insider and outsider that the researcher must walk during a CPO virtual ethnography. As a complete participant, the researcher needs to learn how to skillfully play the game in order to avoid detection as an outsider. They need to learn the argot and expected in-game behaviors while working toward the successful completion of quests alongside other players. They need to play the game with sufficient skill to avoid drawing unwanted attention to themselves. As an insider, the researcher is inevitably going to make social connections, aid and be aided by other players, and share in the emotional collective effervescence linked to the successful completion of a challenging boss battle or series of quests. Through their participation,

