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**PROTOCOL TITLE:**

A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Virtual Sociology in World of Warcraft

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

Rhyse Bendell

**VERSION NUMBER/DATE:**

1

**REVISION HISTORY**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Revision #** | **Version Date** | **Summary of Changes** | **Consent Change?** |
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# Study Summary

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| **Study Title** | A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Virtual Sociology in World of Warcraft |
| **Study Design** | Mixed-method qualitative and quantitative methods, 1 manipulation |
| **Primary Objective** | The current investigation aims to replicate the investigation of Bean and Groth-Marnat (2016) by relying on a Big Five Inventory informed model to predict WoW players’ biological sex, chosen character sex, chosen alignment, chosen class, and preferred play-style with additional consideration of the effect that player recurrence may have on the model’s predictive power. |
| **Secondary Objective(s)** | Further, this study will not only ask participants to indicate their preferences, but also request responses to a reduced set of options regarding each of the predicted variables (e.g., rather than choosing from all races, players may be asked to choose "human" or "orc"). |
| **Research Intervention(s)/ Investigational Agent(s)** | NA |
| **IND/IDE #** | NA |
| **Study Population** | Players of World of Warcraft: Classic |
| **Sample Size** | 2000 |
| **Study Duration for individual participants** | < 30 minutes |
| **Study Specific Abbreviations/ Definitions** | World of Warcraft (WoW) |

# Objectives\*

* 1. World of Warcraft (WoW) is a Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplay Game (MMORPG) released by video game developer and publisher Blizzard Entertainment, Inc. in 2004. The game had it's highest subscriber numbers in 2010 with over 12 Million people playing worldwide. Though Blizzard decided not to make the official player number public anymore in 2015 due to decreasing numbers, estimations still guess the current subscriber number of 2 - 3.5 Million, which still makes WoW the most popular MMORPG. To date, little research has addressed why individuals make the race, class, specialization, and playstyle choices that they do - a surprising revelation considering the prominence of World of Warcraft and the size of its player-base. Notably, only two scientific studies (Bean & Groth-Marnat, 2016; Harari, Graham, & Gosling, 2015) have questioned the impact of players’ personalities on their decision-making despite the apparent role of individual differences in determining player preferences. Bean and Groth-Marnat (2016) shared promising findings regarding the power of a Big Five Inventory based model to predict WoW players’ biological sex as well as their primary play-style; however, their model fell short of adequately predicting players’ character race, class, or specializations. It is possible that their investigation overlooked a major factor that would almost certainly confound the capacity of the model: player recurrence. Many veteran WoW players may choose to create a character and make choices in that character’s development that would not necessarily be driven by their personality, but rather by their previous experiences in the virtual world. We aim to more clearly investigate the influence of recurrence and perceived relation to one's avatar by administering two sets of WoW focused queries (random assignment): one which specifies "if you [the player] were to be creating a new character..." another which specifies "if you [the player] were making a character which best represented you...". The current investigation aims to replicate the investigation of Bean and Groth-Marnat (2016) by relying on a Big Five Inventory (BFI) informed model to predict WoW players’ biological sex, chosen character sex, chosen alignment, chosen class, and preferred play-style with additional consideration of the effect that player recurrence may have on the model’s predictive power. Further, this study will not only ask participants to indicate their preferences, but also request responses to a reduced set of options regarding each of the predicted variables (e.g., rather than choosing from all races, players may be asked to choose "human" or "orc"). The purpose of presenting reduced options is to examine whether individual differences may have predictive power that is insufficient for capturing response patterns across all possible options, but may be sufficient to predict more clearly stratified decisions.
  2. State the hypotheses or research questions to be tested.
     + H1: Responses to WoW probes regarding designing a character with which they identify will be predicted by BFI measures with larger effect sizes than responses based on players’ main characters.
     + H2: A combination of higher Extraversion scores, lower Agreeableness scores, lower Neuroticism scores, and lower Openness scores will predict players’ biological sex such that those scores will correspond with male respondents
     + H3: A combination of higher Extraversion and lower Neuroticism scores will positively predict player preferences towards PvP play-styles as opposed to RP or PvE.
     + H4a: Participants’ personality traits will predict their free-responses to queries regarding race and class.
     + H5: Participants’ personality traits will predict their responses to reduced-choice forced queries regarding race and class.
     + H6: A combination of increased Conscientiousness scores, increased agreeableness scores, and decreased Extraversion scores will predict players’ alignment such that those exhibiting those traits will be more likely to align with Alliance forces than the Horde.
     + H7a: Participants’ responses to the motivation to play online games scale will predict their choices of play style
     + H7b: Participants’ responses to the motivation to play online games scale will predict their choices of character role

# Background\*

* 1. Describe the relevant prior experience and gaps in current knowledge.
     + Currently, it remains unclear whether a directionality exists in the relationship between video gamers, the content they experience, and their subsequent behavior (particularly those involving violence).
  2. Describe any relevant preliminary data.
     + NA
  3. Provide the scientific or scholarly background for, rationale for, and significance of the research based on the existing literature and how will it add to existing knowledge.
     + One approach that has been presented to shed some light on the equation of gamer-game-behavior relies on measurement of the inherent personality of gamers. Personality has been presented as a potential solution to predicting behavior/preferences in many fields (to varying degrees of success), and lends itself here to addressing the ambiguity of whether game content on its own may significantly impact all gamers or whether content primarily influences those with an affinity or predisposition to its acceptance. This is a vital point in the argument for or against violent video games because assuming that violent video games are the driving force behind violent tendencies neglects the reality that gamers exist before and beyond the games they play.
     + Several previous studies have examined player motivations in World of Warcraft and their relationship with player retention. (Debeauvais et. al 2011, Siqueira et. al 2018). This data is critical to determining player resubscription rates that will affect the ability of the gaming company to maintain the game and develop new expansions. Other researchers have examined real-life player characteristics, such as finding that MMO players are less religious and more physically fit on average than the general population. (William et. al 2008). One study found that female MMO users are on average older than male players and that players under the age of 18 are almost entirely male (Yee, 2006). Apart from Bean, the Big Five Inventory model has been applied to World of Warcraft and other games by attempting to classify in-game player personalities by combining a survey of a subset of users with machine learning analysis of game usage data (Halim 2017).
       - Debeauvais, T., Nardi, B., Schiano, D., Ducheneaut, N., & Yee N. (2011). If you build it they might stay: retention mechanisms in World of Warcraft. Retrieved from <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.net.ucf.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbas&AN=edsbas.9E0AA86F&site=eds-live&scope=site>
       - Siqueira, E. S., Castanho, C. D., Rodrigues, G. N., & Jacobi, R. P. (2017, November). A data analysis of player in world of warcraft using game data mining. In 2017 16th Brazilian Symposium on Computer Games and Digital Entertainment (SBGames) (pp. 1-9). IEEE.
       - Williams, D., Yee, N., & Caplan, S. E. (2008). Who plays, how much, and why? Debunking the stereotypical gamer profile. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, (4), 993. Retrieved from https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.net.ucf.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.184411873&site=eds-live&scope=site
       - Yee, N. nyee@stanford. ed. (2006). The Demographics, Motivations, and Derived Experiences of Users of Massively Multi-User Online Graphical Environments. Presence: Teleoperators & Virtual Environments, 15(3), 309–329. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.net.ucf.edu/10.1162/pres.15.3.309>
       - Halim, Z., Atif, M., Rashid, A., & Edwin, C. A. (2017). Profiling players using real-world datasets: Clustering the data and correlating the results with the big-five personality traits. IEEE Transactions on Affective Computing.
     + We chose to address one particular, but important aspect of the game-gamer relationship by focusing on the ability of inherent personality traits to predict players' choices in virtual worlds. Determining whether gamers' preexisting tendencies reliably impact their in-game choices is a vital first step to examining the effect of video games on behavior, and can provide insight into the most persistent variable in the equation: the players themselves. To accomplish this investigation, we built on the approach presented by Bean and Groth-Marnat (2016) who focused on the role of player personality on decision-making in the virtual environment of World of Warcraft.
       - Bean, A., & Groth-Marnat, G. (2016). Video gamers and personality: A five-factor model to understand game playing style. Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 5(1), 27.

# Study Endpoints\*

* 1. Describe the primary and secondary study endpoints.NA
  2. Describe any primary or secondary safety endpoints. NA

# Study Intervention/Investigational Agent

* 1. Description: NA
  2. Drug/Device Handling: NA
  3. NA

# Procedures Involved\*

* 1. Describe and explain the study design.
     + The design of the present study follows from survey-based investigations with a single manipulated variable pertaining to the phrasing of avatar/WoW related questions:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Phrasing: | Primary avatar focused | Most self-relatable avatar focused |
|  | Group A | Group B |

* 1. Provide a description of all research procedures being performed and when they are performed, including procedures being performed to monitor subjects for safety or minimize risks.
     + Subjects that choose to participate in this study will first review and agree to an informed consent document which will familiarize them with all surveys and the general goal of the investigation. Following the informed consent, subjects will complete a set of surveys including: a demographics survey, Big Five Index questionnaire, Motivation to Play Online Games questionnaire, and a free-response World-of-Warcraft focused end survey.
  2. Describe:
     + Procedures performed to lessen the probability or magnitude of risks.
       - NA
     + All drugs and devices used in the research and the purpose of their use, and their regulatory approval status.
       - NA
     + The source records that will be used to collect data about subjects. (Attach all surveys, scripts, and data collection forms as separate study documents in the Local Site Documents section of the study application in the IRB system. Provide a list of the document title or filenames in section 6.3 of the protocol, ensuring that the document title or filenames match what is attached in the system. )
       - Demographics survey
       - Big Five Index questionnaire
       - Motivation to Play Online Games questionnaire
       - Free-response World-of-Warcraft focused end survey
  3. What data will be collected during the study and how that data will be obtained.
     + All data will be collected from and related to responses to the administered surveys.
  4. If there are plans for long-term follow-up (once all research related procedures are complete), what data will be collected during this period:
     + NA
  5. For Humanitarian Use Device (HUD) uses provide a description of the device, a summary of how you propose to use the device, including a description of any screening procedures, the HUD procedure, and any patient follow-up visits, tests or procedures:
     + NA

# Data and Specimen Banking\*

* 1. If data or specimens will be banked for future use, describe where the specimens will be stored, how long they will be stored, how the specimens will be accessed, and who will have access to the specimen:
     + NA
  2. List the data to be stored or associated with each specimen:
     + NA
  3. Describe the procedures to release data or specimens, including: the process to request a release, approvals required for release, who can obtain data or specimens, and the data to be provided with specimens:
     + Specimens: NA
     + Other Data:During data collection, data will be protected within a password secured hard drive. Only the PI’s and co-PI’s will have access to the hard drive. After data collection is complete, the data will be saved, stored, and maintained on a password protected hard drive and locked in a secure location in the PI’s laboratory. Only the PI’s and co-PI’s will have access to the password-protected hard drive. Data will be archived for the required minimum of five years.

# Sharing of Results with Subjects\*

* 1. Describe whether results (study results or individual subject results, such as results of investigational diagnostic tests, genetic tests, or incidental findings) will be shared with subjects or others (e.g., the subject’s primary care physicians) and if so, describe how the results will be shared.
     + NA

# Study Timelines\*

* 1. Describe:
     + The duration of an individual subject’s participation in the study. Include both the active participation time and overall duration. For example, for a pre/post survey, specify the amount of time to complete the survey along with the duration between the surveys.
       - 30 minutes.
         1. Demographics: 5 minutes
         2. World of Warcraft Survey: 5 minutes
         3. Big Five Index: 10 minutes
         4. Motivation to Play Online Games: 10 minutes
     + The duration anticipated to enroll all study subjects.
       - 2 months
     + The estimated date for the investigators to complete this study (complete primary analyses)
       - 6 months post-approval

# Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria\*

* 1. Describe how individuals will be screened for eligibility.
     + Participants will only be ineligible based on the following criteria:
       - Member of a vulnerable population (e.g., pregnant, less than 18 years of age, prisoner)
     + Participants will be screened by confirming that they do not belong to any vulnerable groups prior to beginning the study.
  2. Describe the criteria that define who will be included or excluded in your final study sample.
     + Participant data will only be removed from the final sample based on the following criteria:
       - Malingering (e.g., Christmas treeing survey responses as detected by embedded catch questions)
       - Incomplete data
  3. Indicate specifically whether you will include or exclude each of the following special populations: (You may not include members of the above populations as subjects in your research unless you indicate this in your inclusion criteria.)
     + Adults unable to consent
       - Exclude
     + Individuals who are not yet adults (infants, children, teenagers)
       - Exclude
     + Pregnant women
       - Exclude
     + Prisoners
       - Exclude

# Vulnerable Populations\*

* 1. If the research involves individuals who are vulnerable to coercion or undue influence, describe additional safeguards included to protect their rights and welfare.
     + If the research involves pregnant women, review “CHECKLIST: Pregnant Women (HRP-412)” to ensure that you have provided sufficient information.
       - Pregnant women are excluded from the study, such that they will not be actively recruited and will be filtered out through the SONA recruitment application.
     + If the research involves prisoners, review “CHECKLIST: Prisoners (HRP-415)” to ensure that you have provided sufficient information.
       - Prisoners are excluded from the study, such that they will not be actively recruited and will be filtered out through the SONA recruitment application.
     + If the research involves persons who have not attained the legal age for consent to treatments or procedures involved in the research (“children”), review the “CHECKLIST: Children (HRP-416)” to ensure that you have provided sufficient information.
       - Individuals under the age of 18 are excluded from the study, such that they will not be actively recruited and will be filtered out through the SONA recruitment application.
     + If the research involves cognitively impaired adults, review “CHECKLIST: Cognitively Impaired Adults (HRP-417)” to ensure that you have provided sufficient information.
       - Cognitively Impaired Adults are excluded from the study, such that they will not be actively recruited and will be filtered out through the SONA recruitment application.

# Local Number of Subjects

* 1. Indicate the total number of subjects to be accrued locally.
     + 2000.
  2. If applicable, distinguish between the number of subjects who are expected to be enrolled and screened, and the number of subjects needed to complete the research procedures (i.e., numbers of subjects excluding screen failures or other attrition).
     + 1600 participants are required to complete the statistical analyses involved in this study; the additional 400 are requested to account for exclusion, and the removal of data sets from the final sample.

# Recruitment Methods

* 1. Describe when, where, and how potential subjects will be recruited.
     + Participants will be recruited through online World of Warcraft forums and player networks via advertisements and requests; participants who choose to participate will do so at their leisure
  2. Describe the source of subjects.
     + Participants will be recruited from the player base of World of Warcraft: Classic
  3. Describe the methods that will be used to identify potential subjects.
     + Participants will be “self-selecting” in that they will choose to sign up for the study.
  4. Describe materials that will be used to recruit subjects. (Attach copies of these documents with the application. For advertisements, attach the final copy of printed advertisements. When advertisements are taped for broadcast, attach the final audio/video tape. You may submit the wording of the advertisement prior to taping to preclude re-taping because of inappropriate wording, provided the IRB reviews the final audio/video tape.)
     + - General Forum Advertisement
       - Targeted Advertisement
  5. Describe the amount and timing of any payments to subjects. Include the method of payment (e.g. cash, check, gift card specifying type; electronic payments or in-person; at the end of each research session or at the end of the study. Provide a plan for prorating compensation for early withdrawal if the study involves multiple sessions or a lengthy individual session. If compensation is in the form of course credit, the instructor must offer the same credit for an alternate assignment of comparable time and effort for students who choose not to participate in the research.
     + This study will be volunteer only.

# Withdrawal of Subjects\*

* 1. Describe anticipated circumstances under which subjects will be withdrawn from the research without their consent.
     + Participants may choose to withdraw at any time. No subjects will be actively withdrawn.
  2. Describe any procedures for orderly termination.
     + NA
  3. Describe procedures that will be followed when subjects withdraw from the research, including partial withdrawal from procedures with continued data collection.
     + NA

# Risks to Subjects\*

* 1. List the reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, hazards, or inconveniences to the subjects related the subjects’ participation in the research. Include as may be useful for the IRB’s consideration, a description of the probability, magnitude, duration, and reversibility of the risks. Consider physical, psychological, social, legal, and economic risks.
     + NA
  2. If applicable, indicate which procedures may have risks to the subjects that are currently unforeseeable.
     + NA
  3. If applicable, indicate which procedures may have risks to an embryo or fetus should the subject be or become pregnant.
     + NA
  4. If applicable, describe risks to others who are not subjects.
     + NA

# Potential Benefits to Subjects\*

* 1. Describe the potential benefits that individual subjects may experience from taking part in the research. Include as may be useful for the IRB’s consideration, the probability, magnitude, and duration of the potential benefits.
     + NA
  2. Indicate if there is no direct benefit. Do not include benefits to society or others.
     + There is no direct benefit to participants.

# Data Management\* and Confidentiality

* 1. Describe the data analysis plan, including any statistical procedures or power analysis.
     + The data gathered in this experiment will primarily be related to metric variables associated with factors of multiple level. The main method of analysis will be null-hypothesis testing via general linear modelling. Additionally, Bayesian modeling using R studio (JAGS) and JASP will be employed to provide a basis for future investigations.
  2. Describe the steps that will be taken to secure the data (e.g., training, authorization of access, password protection, encryption, physical controls, certificates of confidentiality, and separation of identifiers and data) during storage, use, and transmission.
     + Describe how any study/participant numbers, pseudonyms, etc. will be generated.
       - Participant IDs will have no relation to a participant’s personal information as they will be generated randomly.
     + Discuss how and how long identifiers will be stored prior to deleting identifiers/links.
       - Personal identifiers will never be stored.
     + Discuss how and how long recordings (audio or video) will be stored.
       - NA
     + Include data retention for de length for de-identified data. Per UCF policy, this needs to be a minimum of five years.
       - During data collection, data will be protected within a password secured hard drive. Only the PI’s and co-PI’s will have access to the hard drive. After data collection is complete, the data will be saved, stored, and maintained on a password protected hard drive and locked in a secure location in the PI’s laboratory. Only the PI’s and co-PI’s will have access to the password-protected hard drive. Data will be archived for the required minimum of five years.
  3. Describe any procedures that will be used for quality control of collected data.
     + NA
  4. Describe how data or specimens will be handled study-wide:
     + What information will be included in that data or associated with the specimens?
       - Data collection will be accomplished by logging of participants’ responses to the study surveys.
     + Where and how data or specimens will be stored?
       - During data collection, data will be protected within a password secured hard drive. Only the PI’s and co-PI’s will have access to the hard drive account. After data collection is complete, the data will be saved, stored, and maintained on a password protected hard drive and locked in a secure location in the PI’s laboratory. Only the PI’s and co-PI’s will have access to the password-protected hard drive.
     + How long the data or specimens will be stored?
       - 5 years.
     + Who will have access to the data or specimens?
       - Only the PI’s and co-PI’s will have access to the hard drive account. After data collection is complete, the data will be saved, stored, and maintained on a password protected hard drive and locked in a secure location in the PI’s laboratory. Only the PI’s and co-PI’s will have access to the password-protected hard drive.
     + Who is responsible for receipt or transmission of the data or specimens?
       - PIs and Co-PIs
     + How data or specimens will be transported?
       - NA

# Provisions to Monitor the Data to Ensure the Safety of Subjects\*

**This section is required only when research involves more than Minimal Risk to subjects**

* 1. NA

# Provisions to Protect the Privacy Interests of Subjects

* 1. Describe the steps that will be taken to protect subjects’ privacy interests. “Privacy interest” refers to a person’s desire to place limits on whom they interact or whom they provide personal information.
     + Participants in this study will only interact with the researchers conducting their data collection session, and will do so only by choice.
     + We will limit data access in this study to people who have a need to review this information. The principal investigator and co-investigators working on this project will have access to your de-identified data.
  2. Describe what steps you will take to make the subjects feel at ease with the research situation in terms of the questions being asked and the procedures being performed. “At ease” does not refer to physical discomfort, but the sense of intrusiveness a subject might experience in response to questions, examinations, and procedures.
     + Participants will have the option to withdraw at any time rather than answer any questions or complete any experimental tasks that cause them distress or discomfort.
  3. Indicate how the research team is permitted to access any sources of information about the subjects.
     + The only remotely identifiable information the research team can access is participants’ SONA IDs; all other study data will be deidentified.

# Compensation for Research-Related Injury

* 1. If the research involves more than Minimal Risk to subjects, describe the available compensation in the event of research related injury.
     + NA
  2. Provide a copy of contract language, if any, relevant to compensation for research-related injury.
     + NA

# Economic Burden to Subjects

* 1. Describe any costs that subjects may be responsible for because of participation in the research.
     + NA

# Consent Process

* 1. Indicate whether you will you be obtaining consent, and if so describe:
     + Where will the consent process take place
       - The informed consent process will take place online and be confirmed by response to a comprehension query.
     + Any waiting period available between informing the prospective subject and obtaining the consent.
       - NA
     + Any process to ensure ongoing consent.
       - NA
     + Whether you will be following “SOP: Informed Consent Process for Research (HRP-090).” If not, describe:
       - NA

# Process to Document Consent in Writing

* 1. Describe whether you will be following “SOP: Written Documentation of Consent (HRP-091).” If not, describe whether and how consent of the subject will be documented in writing.
     + NA
  2. If your research does not include children, presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written documentation of consent is normally required outside of the research context, the IRB will generally waive the requirement to obtain written documentation of consent. Use this bullet to request a Waiver of Written Documentation of Consent and remove the signature lines from the Informed Consent. Review “CHECKLIST: Waiver of Written Documentation of Consent (HRP-411)” to ensure that you have provided sufficient information.
     + We are requesting a waiver of written documentation of consent and the ability to remove the signature lines from the informed consent document.
       - This research incorporates protocols to ensure no more than minimal risk to participants, and involves only surveys of a non-harmful or controversial nature.

# Setting

* 1. Describe the sites or locations where your research team will conduct the research.
     + Identify where your research team will identify and recruit potential subjects.
       - Participants will be self-selected by choosing to access and complete the study at their leisure (online recruitment)
     + Identify where research procedures will be performed.
       - Online
     + Describe the composition and involvement of any community advisory board.
       - NA
     + For research conducted outside of the organization and its affiliates describe:
       - Site-specific regulations or customs affecting the research for research outside the organization.
         1. NA
       - Local scientific and ethical review structure outside the organization.
         1. NA

# Resources Available

* 1. Describe the resources available to conduct the research: For example, as appropriate:
     + Justify the feasibility of recruiting the required number of suitable subjects within the agreed recruitment period. For example, how many potential subjects do you have access to? What percentage of those potential subjects do you need to recruit?
       - World of Warcraft is the largest massive multi-player online role-playing game, and the recent re-release of the classic version drew many players back to the game. Hundreds of thousands of potential players may be available for recruitment, and several thousands may be reach easily through forums and player networks.
     + Describe the time that you will devote to conducting and completing the research.
       - We anticipate 2 months of intermittent data collection.
     + Describe your facilities.
       - Online
     + Describe the availability of medical or psychological resources that subjects might need as a result of an anticipated consequences of the human research.
       - No such services are expected to be needed or are available as subjects’ locations will not be known.
     + Describe your process to ensure that all persons assisting with the research are adequately informed about the protocol, the research procedures, and their duties and functions.
       - Regular meetings will be held with research assistants prior to and during data collection.
  2. Describe ancillary reviews and approvals associated with the research
     + NA.

# Multi-Site Research\*

* 1. Study-Wide Number of Subjects\*

If this is a multicenter study, indicate the total number of subjects to be accrued across all sites.

NA

* 1. Study-Wide Recruitment Methods\*
     + If this is a multicenter study and subjects will be recruited by methods not under the control of the local site (e.g., call centers, national advertisements) describe those methods. Local recruitment methods are described later in the protocol.
       - NA
  2. Describe the method for communicating to engaged participating sites (see “WORKSHEET: Communication and Responsibilities (HRP-830)”):
     + NA
  3. If this is a multicenter study where you are a participating site/investigator, describe the local procedures for maintenance of confidentiality. (See “WORKSHEET: Communication and Responsibilities (HRP-830).”)
     + NA