

New Media and New Citizenship

The right to be gay :)

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The Right to be Gay: In- and Exclusion of citizens within World of Warcraft.

Nowadays, more than 5.5 million people are immersed in World of Warcraft (WoW). These virtual citizens with an average age of 28 years spend 22,7 hours a week (Yee 2005) fighting their way through dungeons and socializing with other players online. Interested in the possibility of a formed online-citizenship, we started our research, about in- and exclusion of female and homosexual players, asking ourselves: what is meant by being a WoW citizen?

T.H. Marshall (1950) claims that citizenship can be divided in three elements; civil, political and social. Civil rights assure the individual freedom of the citizen, like the freedom of speech, the right to own property and the right to justice. Political rights gives the citizen the power to participate in the exercise of political powers. This includes free elections and the right to vote anonymously. Social citizenship means the right to have a decent life. That includes for example at least a bit of social welfare and security.

One of the criticisms of Marshall's theory is that he does not analyze how the expansion of citizenship has developed. Turner (2001) claims that citizenship is developed through the conflict between the working-class, their employers and the government in the 19th and 20th century. That explains how white males got their rights. Sylvia Walby (1994) says that citizenship for women was not realised in the USA until the late 1960's. Those rights were gained through conflicts between the excluded women and white men. Turner argues that instead of looking at the static principles of civil, political and social right and duties to define citizenship, we should look at processes of citizenship in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Turner says: "Citizenship is both an inclusionary process involving some re-allocation of resources and an exclusionary process of building identities on the basis of a common or imagined solidarity." (1950, p.192)

After analyzing these processes Turner concludes that Marshall's framework no longer is valid, because the nature of work, war and the social relations of reproduction have changed. If we look for citizenship in WoW it is not enough to use Marshall's definitions, because citizenship has different forms depending on the economic, military and social factors that shaped the country or world we are trying to analyse. With this in mind we can now have a start in analyzing citizenship in WoW. In our analyses we will stick to game schematics and online conversations. The representation of characters and their surroundings will be left out of our discussion.

World of Warcraft, what are u talking about?

Let us first explain what kind of game WoW is. WoW is a game in which players can immerse themselves in a fantasy world ruled by Orcs, Human, Elves and other Tolkien Like Creatures. This 3D environment is shared online with other players around the world, segmented in different continents like a European, a Chinese and a US server or realm. In contrary of simulation games, WoW focuses about realtime turnbased fighting systems where strategy plays a major role in completing a quest. Growing or levelling is one of the most important aspects of the game.



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Rights in Warcraft

At first sight there seems to be more civil rights in WoW than in real life. When you start playing WoW it looks like you have a lot of individual freedom. Unlike real life, you can choose who you are. Not only by appearances, but by choosing what your abilities within the game will be. You can choose between eight races, nine classes and you can tinker with your characters facial characteristics and skin colour. These choices are however being presented by the creators of the game. You can choose between a limited amount of pre-made parts that the creators of the game have made. You are not able to make a character from scratch. If you want to have a black character your choices slink dramatically. The only race that can have a black skin colour is the Tauren race, a cow like creature. The blackest you can be when you play a race of the Alliance, the so called "good site" of the inhabitants of WoW, is a medium brown. If you want to play as a woman, who looks stronger than the average man, you are not able to be feminine and have a body as muscular as a male. If you play a female character, you are always thinner and have more round curves on your body than your male counterpart.

Another part of civil rights according to Marshall is the right to own property. That right does not exist in WoW. The Terms of Use (2005) says: "Note that Blizzard Entertainment either owns, or has exclusively licensed, all of the content which appears in World of Warcraft." (World of Warcraft Community Site, 2005)

Blizzard excludes people who sell "their" property for real money offline. In 2005 Blizzard revoked more than 18.000 members the right to play WoW (Jenkins, 2005). What about other social rights? In Januari 2004 there were rumours that gamemasters in WoW were using their power to extort players. Gamemasters are hired by Blizzard to help players if they are in trouble. If a player for example gets stuck in the water and can't get out, a gamemaster has the tools to move the player to another place. These employees have their own character and can therefore also play the game. Some gamemasters allegedly threatened players to give valuable items. If the players did not comply they would be banned from the game.

It is interesting to see how Blizzard reacted on this rumour. Some people complained and expressed their anger on the official WoW boards. Blizzard deleted these messages as soon as possible. That didn't work though. More and more people posted messages on the forums, so Blizzard could no longer ignore them all. As soon as the commotion was over, all the posts were deleted. The only evidence of abused by Blizzard employees can be found on the Penny Arcade website (Penny Arcade, 2005), a satirical site about videogames. The rumour suggested that there isn't something like justice in WoW and that there is also no such thing as a freedom of speech. Peoples' reactions were deleted. But let us first examine the other rights described by Marshall, before jumping to conclusions.

The second of rights someone should have as a citizen is political right. In other words; the right to influence the world of the game. The only influence players have in changing the game is by discussing the game world in the forums of WoW on the official website. In the forums people can complain or suggest new rules or new ways of interaction. There are a lot of suggestions being made on the forums and some of the suggestions have been implemented into a patch. A nice example was the suggestion that the two different



houses¹ should be linked to one another. In patch 1.9 this feature was added to the game.

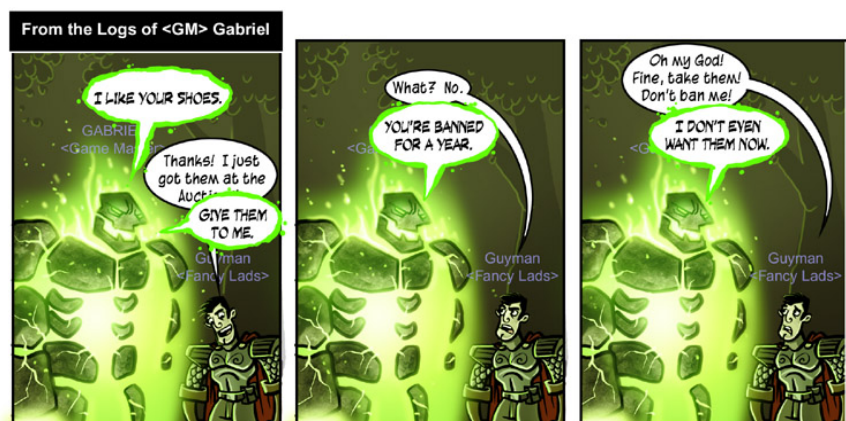
The third category of rights that Marshall mentions belongs to the social aspect of citizenship. In real life this means that humans should have a certain standard of living. That means that social rights compensate for circumstances that could influence your quality of life in a negative manner. Having the right to attend school and to be able to go to a hospital compensates a little for example for being born in a poor family. The basic premise in WoW is that you fight enemies and the more enemies you fight the stronger you get. To have a decent life in WoW means that you are able to defeat enemies.

But not any enemy will do. The enemies you fight have to be around the same level you are. A level in WoW is a measurement of one's power. You start out on a location where enemies have a low level, just like you and gradually as you explore the world enemies get tougher, just as your character gets stronger. You should therefore always have a good change in defeating your enemies. This is however not always the case, if you encounter a high level player he or she will kill you instantly. This can be done over and over again, which will cause a lot of frustration.

If a player has this problem it can contact a gamemaster who will transport the body to a safer place, so that the player can continue slaying enemies. This guardian angel will also help if there are other problems that will reduce your fun in playing the game. Although at first sight you can say that player rights in WoW are very limited if you compare them to the rights, suggested by Marshall. But as Turner pointed out, every world has its own form of citizenship. In WoW the most important thing is that players enjoy the game. This enjoyment is being paid for. The payments players make every week has the same function as taxing. The world of Azaroth² is being maintained by that money, but that money is also used to grant the players certain rights. Gamemasters are hired to help players if they are not able to play the game. Taxes are also used in the funding of forums, so players can give suggestions or complain about the game.

The rights players have suggest that there is a form of citizenship in WoW. That means that the players in WoW are its citizens. One aspect of WoW has not been addressed fully, that is WoW being a Massive Multiplayer game. It means: to completely enjoy the game, one have to play with other online players. So playing the game with other players and at the same time enjoy the experience, should be a right in WoW. We would like to add a new right to this kind of virtual citizenship: the right to have fun!

But before elaborating about citizenship in a virtual world, we should first look at inclusion and exclusion in real-life.



¹ An auction house is a place where players can trade their items with other players.

² Azaroth is the name of the location, WoW takes place.



The right to have fun, the right to be included.

Although civil, political and social rights and concepts are referred to guarantees of freedom, justice, equality and fun a state makes to its citizens, distinctions may be made. Being a citizen means that one is given a legal status which entitles one to these rights (Lister, 2003). In addition to being about a status, which gives one rights and obligations, citizenship is also about participation. But equal opportunity to exercise the privileges of citizenship and to participate fully in real-life is not always applied to certain groups in society. These groups could be considered social groups which historically have been discriminated against and in certain situations they nowadays still are.

These discriminations could be experienced by these groups on different types of levels. One of the largest groups in society which still experience discrimination in different kind of ways on a daily basis is women. As Lister quotes in her article on citizenship and gender, 'women have been denied the full and effective title of citizen for much of history, ancient and modern. The twentieth century mainstream theorisation of citizenship has tended to ignore the ways in which women's gradual achievement of civil, political and social rights often followed a different pattern from men's.' (2001, p1).

As already is discussed in the previous chapter, Lister (2001) also states three elements of citizenship which could be defined: civil, political and social. In relation to social citizenship, Walby (1994, p386) mentions social citizenship as something which usually depends upon being a worker for full access to such rights. For example, as women often are considered taking up the role as a carer, they do not have direct access to pensions, provided typically as part of a scheme with an employer. So attributing a specific role to someone could mean limitation on certain levels of access. By playing WoW, one is forced to choose one of the races and classes given by the game. For a player, this is an opportunity to play the kind of hero you always imagined to be. So after decided which race (within our case study, human) you want to play, several classes are given as options to choose from. By choosing a character's class, it is already clear which spells and skills you can master. As Nakamura (2000) refers to an article of Rheingold on cybernetic identity, 'By creating your identity, you help creating a world', players realise the importance of determining what kind of race and class to play with, especially in a virtual world like WoW.

In relation to political citizenship, financial dependency is an obstacle to women's citizenship (Lister, 1990). Poverty and lack of time and money curtail women's access to the political rights of citizenship. The expectation about the political rights of women in WoW is that it does not really matter whether a player plays male or female. Lack of time and money could curtail access to level up, but leveling up could be attributed more to the experience of the player.



Being Homosexual

Another group of people, which experience exclusion of certain social accesses in society nowadays, are lesbians and gay men. For a long time citizenship has been considered as something heterosexuals and that the 'normal' citizen has largely been constituted as heterosexual. In her article, Richardson questions how citizenship is constituted through these heterosexual norms and practices.

Often lesbians and gay men are represented as oppressed minorities seeking access to core institutions such as marriage, family and the military, and just want the same rights and responsibilities. The reason for seeing them as a minority is because the common stereotype of 'the homosexual' as the 'enemy within', threatening the stability of traditional social structures and norms, and that homosexuality is perceived as 'troubling to' mainstream society.

The first feminist and earlier lesbian and gay movements were seeking for social acceptance, which nowadays still takes place, and demonstrate for equal rights on both individual and collective level. For example, registration of same-sex partnerships grant access to civil rights, such as inheritance and pension rights and already has been diffused over European countries. Although equal rights of citizenship on the ground of being the 'same' as most heterosexuals is increasing, inequality still exists, whether it is conscious or unconscious.

According to Motivaction, concluding from a research done in 2005, intolerance to homosexuals is declining in cities, while the overall acceptance in the Netherlands towards gays is growing. Though, 85% of the people bother offensive behaviour of gaymen. Whether it be straight women, lesbians or gay men, the fact that people get excluded from certain forms of activities/facilities results in a gathering of people with the same beliefs etc. For this reason, groups or movements arise whom demonstrate for their access to rights and in the search of social security.

In both groups, discussed above, women and homosexuals perceive a kind of common stereotype within society. In spite of social movements demonstrating for equal rights, one still experience inequality on different level of access.

In relation to a homosexual character in WoW, identity revealing could become an issue in grouping or socialising with other players and whether there is social acceptance among other players. Referring to gay guilds existing in WoW, it is clear that not only within the real world gay movements will arise in order to demonstrate for the same rights, but also in the virtual world.

Who and how are people included and excluded within World of Warcraft?

Before researching inclusion and exclusion of women and homosexuals in WoW, we will first look at the overall gameplay of WoW and its relation to exclusion of citizenship.

Entering the world of Warcraft is restricted to everyone who does not have the game, internet access, at least a Pentium 3, Athlon 800 or G4 computer with 512 megabytes of rapid access memory and 32 megabytes 3d video card (World of Warcraft Community Site – Technical Support 2004) and a user code to create an account for playing. In order to answer the question; who and how people are included or excluded within WoW, we assume that the players posses the requirements, mentioned above, to play the game.

There are several ways in which people can be included in WoW. But before elaborating about, some key features of the game should be explained first. According to the official strategy guide of WoW (van der Lip, 2004) “there’s always money and experience to be made.”(p75) Experience is expressed in points and levels. Your character starts with level 1 and after finishing a couple of wolfs, kobolds or other foes, one gains experience points enough to heighten his level by 1. The higher ones level, the stronger a character and the more experience points are required to level up. But there are other ways to gain more points: Exploring the world and doing quests enforced by computer generated characters, also known as non player characters (npc). These assignments vary from bringing a packed to another city, killing some foes, exploring a mine, retrieving some artefacts or finding out what other npc’s are doing.



Grouping

Some quests or assignments, given by npc's, are too hard to finish alone. Grouping then, is the solution. This means that players search for other players doing the same quest. Mostly they are found within range of the assigned objective. One can invite a player to join his or her group to bundle power. There are some recommended roles and functions to play grouped. It is important to balance your party with different types of players, so one can help each other out. There are "three types of primary components of a battle in this game. A tank reduces incoming damage, a DPS [Damage Dealer] class reduces battle time, and a healer reduces downtime and extends survivability. It's for this reason that you may form a core group out of a Warrior/Mage/Priest combination." (van der Lip)

Grouping seems to be a mayor feature of WoW and will be in our analysis of in- and exclusion. But there are other things that are to be analysed. While constructing one's starting character, the player can choose to play some different races: approximately "Dwarves, Gnomes, Humans, Night Elves, Orcs, Tauren, Trolls, and Undead. Each of these races has unique racial traits and certain playable classes available to them."(WoW community site 2004) The player can choose between Druid, Hunter, Mage, Paladin, Priest, Rogue, Shaman, Warlock and a Warrior. "A character's class will help determine which spells and skills he or she can master"(WoW community site 2004)

So choosing a character already means exclusion from some abilities and skills one could never learn as a certain character. This exclusion leads to inclusion, because of the dependencies players have to each other, causing them to group. At the same time it excludes people who are not benefiting the group.

Within a party there is another form of exclusion due to the class you are playing. It is about looting. Looting is receiving items from killed foes, which can be done by right clicking on a corpse while standing close to it. While grouped, there are a couple of different loot options. The party leader can choose for the so called "grouploot"; everyone may loot a corps in turn. For rare items players are asked to roll need, when the item can strengthen their abilities, and greed, for using an item as "vendor trash", so one can make a lot of money from the item by selling it to a vendor. The alternative "Master Loot" leaves the group to assign one party member to divide the loot. The looting-form in which inclusion and exclusion by gameplay is most manifested is the "free for all" looting type, where the first one is king. A Warrior needs to be close to the target to kill, contrary to Mages who are at their best by staying as far from the foe as possible. One can conclude that the Warrior can loot every corpse that both players kill. Finally, he is the first one in range to loot the corpse. In this way the Mage is excluded from collecting items.

The gameplay concerning grouping does offer or is in itself a form of in- and exclusion which shall be accounted for.

Exploring

Other than with grouping, the game excludes players which could be categorized as explorers. Exploring Azaroth does give these players some experiences but it is hardly enough to level. And while every region is ruled by the animals and foes wandering the landscape, being a low level character, one has to take a quick run to escape from high level creatures. Keeping on the roads may be the only option an explorer has, to see how different regions look like, but it probably will not give the explorer a satisfactory pleasure. A player is advised to level to the standards of the region's level, before entering. This is a form of excluding low level players and including higher level players to a bigger part of the world.

Speaking of high and lower level characters, the story goes that two groups are fighting each other: the Horde and the Alliance. As a member for the Alliance it is practically impossible to enter a capital city of the Horde, due to some high level (elite) guards. This excludes players from entering the whole world of WoW as mentioned above. Despite that, a high level character (level 60–70) has a greater freedom to wander around in Azaroth. There are exceptions like the level 1 horde raidgroup whom entered Stromwind by night, despite the high level security protecting the gates of the Alliance capital city. A level 60 Horde can literally exclude level 20 players to play the game.

While questing in Westfall a level 60 Tauron appeared, the walking cow was accompanied by a level 15 Undead. Both of the players were part of the Horde and started to kill characters of the Alliance. Killing a player results in his ghost appearing at a graveyard, from which the player has to run back to one's corpse to resurrect. The Horde killed all players around a graveyard. It did not matter where you resurrected, either at your body or at the graveyard (which causes your character to have 25% of his power for a couple of minutes). The moment one resurrected, one got killed again. This form of excluding lower level characters is really frustrating and a lot of players were cursing the Tauron for unfair and childish play. Calling him a "big Homo" and making rude gestures to the Horde player.

Exploring-only players are excluded due to the level ruled game system. Also the differences between horde and alliance do make it almost impossible for a player to fully explore the world of Azaroth.



Newbies and Veterans

As the strategy guide indicates: "It takes considerable time to teach someone about World of Warcraft. This game has enough complexity to keep players reeling for many days, even while learning the basics."(p75) Playing WoW for the first time, being a Newbie, is tough. Especially regarding the first pages of the guide called: "An introduction to online gaming." It is an enumeration of 222 abbreviations, like SM; meaning Scarlet Monastery and PBAoE which should be translated as: "Point Blank Area of Effect – An AoE that is centred on the caster. Often used by casters standing in the middle of a group of defending tanks to damage the enemy while remaining relatively safe."(p8)

One should "learn the local "lingo"– the huge amount of abbreviations, acronyms and commands, the use of which will distinguish the more experienced player from the newbie" (Klastrup 2003). Meaning, there is a lot to learn!

In addition to the WoW lingo, commands will make your character make nonverbal moves. Typing "/kiss"; will bend your character headfirst while blowing a kiss in the direction of the last selected character. Within the chat area the sentence "you blow a kiss to <character name>." will appear. More experienced players will know all the "emotes" and how to use them according to the WoW lingo.

To make it even harder, there is the possibility to create macros "Macros allow users to create hotkeys that can perform custom commands based on the player's individual needs. They can utilize the many slash (/) commands [emotes] in the game and have over 300 different icons from which to choose and assign to the individual macros." (van der Lip p30)

Other ways of verbal exclusion can be found in the 4 different chat forms: Normalchat (displayed above the players head and coloured white in the chat screen) will allow players to communicate with other players within range. Groupchat (displayed in purple) only communicates to other group members and whispering (pink coloured) allows the player to send a private message to one player only. Worldchat gives a player an opportunity to talk to everyone within the district formalised by 4 categories: general chat, local defence, looking for group, and a buy and trade channel. A lot of confusion can come from this by Newbie's. Players could watch with indifference when one tries to communicate by Normalchat interrupting a whispered conversation or a chat taken place by Groupchat.

Both the Horde and Alliance speak their own language, so they cannot understand each other. In this way, the Alliance can communicate mutual tactics without being afraid the horde is listening and visa versa. Though when two Horde and Alliance meet, the emote "/rude" communicates a lot!

This difference of experienced–chat versus newbie–chat is a form of in– and exclusion which will be taken in account. But there are more differences between veterans and newbies than chatproblematics. As Lisbeth Klastrup (2003) argues; an MMORPG has the major function

"of providing a stage for an experience of shared lived world. This is the aspect of being in the world, which is related to the experience of time history and community development within the world. Having lived in the world for so long that you have had

significant experiences [being a veteran] or experienced significant changes you have shared – or want to share – with other players also familiar with the world, your story of “the world as lived” can retrospectively, become a compelling story to be told. Furthermore, it also seems closely related to the experience of the emergence of a social space [...] so it could easily also be a story of inclusion into or exclusion from smaller or larger social networks.”(Klastrup, 2003, 103)



Reputation and Social Networks

Not only does sharing significant experiences to players, unfamiliar with the online world, happens in an MMORPG. The so called “twinking” expands and reduces the difference between newbies and veterans. Twinking is handing over some items that greatly improve[s] a player’s abilities to kill creatures, as well as a sum of money that will be very substantial compared to what one is able to make at that level.(Jakobsson, 2003, p81) Jakobsson explains the newbie support from veterans as a way to gain a higher reputation within the world. According to him “reputation plays a significant role in a gamer’s success”(p85). A high reputation will help a player in EverQuest³ to enter a guild and get grouped. Reputation is not only conceived by sponsoring starters, there are several other ways to gain an honourable place in the virtual world. “People are known as raid leaders, accomplished class players, and group organizers.” (Jakobsson, 2003, p86) But there is more to it than high skills and sponsoring, being the first one who kills a new epic monster or receive an epic item, when a new patch is released, does contribute to the reputation of a character. In an interview with a hardcore player, my housemate Sander, tells me that people play on test servers to understand the tactics behind the new patches that will be launched. So they can progress faster than other players, whom have to find out these tactics by themselves.

Beside reputation, “the reputation of social networks and the circulation of social capital proves to be one of the most important aspects [of in- and exclusion] in EverQuest” (Jakobsson, 2003, p88) and WoW.

Social networks come in different ways. We can distinguish three types of social relation in WoW. One based on earlier gameplay relations; people have fought together to defeat a monster or to finish a quest. The Second relation can be found in “Real Life Friendships” which handles the players who know each other from offline experiences.

A third relation is that of nationality; there are national guilds⁴, The Holland Knights is a good example. People find it interesting to know where others are from according to the chat sessions I encountered. I should make a remark here considering the difference between Player Versus Player Servers (PVPS) and Role Playing Servers(RPS). At RPS it is officially “not done” to speak about one’s offline life. As van der Lip explains: “There are many players that immerse themselves into their character so much that they never speak out of character unless absolutely necessary. [I even encountered a Dwarf speaking dwarfish, which wasn’t part of the official game, but supposedly a self-made-language] These are the types of players that use speech as a medium to convey the essence of their character to others [or they just think it is funny]. There’s a sense of full immersion that comes into play by shutting out the real world and becoming a very real citizen of Azeroth.”(van der Lip, 2004) But on PVPS most people are not really interested in immersing oneself into a character, they want to fight and explore. This research will be limited to PVPS servers only, and to my surprise I have not encountered the chat abbreviation “asl”⁵ yet. Also, there is no mention about it in the “Glossary of Terms” (van de Lip, 2004, p6–9). It seems that Blizzard

³ Everquest can be seen as WoW’s forerunner.

⁴ “Guilds, also sometimes referred to as clans, are often comprised of a group of people with simal like, personalities and gaming style that join together for mutual benefit”(van der Lip 2004, p208)

⁵ ASL is the abbreviation of age sex location. A question often asked in chatrooms.

does not want players to talk about real life happenings, as we shall see, examining WoW-forums. Strange though, I talked with a character called Holysmoke about his music taste and school problems. I even sat down at a campfire, discussing if Turkey might join Europe. And some Romanian players started talking Romanian in Groupchat, which excluded me from the discussion.

On US servers “there is a common belief among English speaking players that most non-English speakers are gold farmers and are only playing for commercial gain. As a result, players are asking anyone who wants to join a group to type one or two sentences in English. If the sentences contain spelling or grammar mistakes, the player is rejected.”(Gibson 2006) This major⁶ form of exclusion/discrimination draws a distinct line between offline nationality and online gaming.

Not only are social networks important to investigate in World of Warcraft, nationality plays a big role in the debate about inclusion and exclusion. Which is not so surprising: “people do not build their meaning in local societies, not because they do not have spatial roots, but because they select their relationships on the basis of their affinities.” According to Castells this is certainly true for social relations arising on the Internet. Even though *World of Warcraft* is a game with frames/borders which “communicates that those contained within it are “playing” and that the space of play is separate in some way from the rest of the world.” (Salen and Zimmerman 2004) But as Marinka Copier(2006) suggests, “fantasy role-playing consists of collections of performances or *ritual acts*, in which players construct the game/play space, identities and meaning.”

Gamers themselves construct play while using “real world” characteristics and experiences, which are prohibited by Blizzard saying: “we prohibit mention of topics related to sensitive real-world subjects in open chat within the game.”(Cole 2006). By declining people to use real-world subjects within the game, Blizzard decreases the fun gamers have playing the game. A right, as argued before, which is of most importance for functioning as a full citizen in WoW.

There are many forms of in- and exclusion found in WoW. We will examine exclusion of woman and homosexuals focussing on groups, exploring, newbie and veterans and reputations and social networks in the next chapters.

⁶ According to Gibson; more then 7.000 Chinese forum posters claim to have fallen victim to the problem.

Playing World of Warcraft as a woman.

By entering WoW with a female priest character, one could wonder if the choice of being a woman or being a priest will lead to more or less acceptance of other players. Are they asking me for help because I am a priest or does choosing a particular character will not play a role in connecting to other people.

The fact that my character is a female, does give me a lot of attention (from male characters) in the WoW. In that way it is like the real world where in general heterosexual men are predators and see women as an easy object they could conquer. As Miller (1995) states women are often considered in media as victims and as a class of people who require special protection from the element of society, men are expected to confront alone. According to a Newsweek article on women online, research have shown that women do often feel intimidated and sexual harassed online. Miller herself does not recognize such intimidations or treatment in her own experiences, because she believes in the disembodiment on the Net, just like the others on the Net do. During gameplay I shared the same thought. As I already stated, men do become effective when women are involved, considering that most of the time I was just standing near them not doing anything.

In the first city, Goldshire, I walked through and tried some things my character could do, like laughing, dancing, bowing etc. on/towards other people. One would think that in a virtual world like WoW, such things have less effect than practicing this in the real world. But it is like the real world, where a woman blows a kiss to a man and where the man becomes sensitive for female actions. When I blew a kiss to a man he gave me full attention, we danced with each other and where having fun (as a newbie, I already considered this as fun). But suddenly he asked me to take my clothes off. Although I thought it was kind of weird to pop up a question like that, I just laughed, asked him 'why' but did not pay further attention to it. He just answered with 'because it's fun' and asked me again. Although it still was in a way funny (imagine two virtual characters stripping), I did not feel like dancing anymore and just walked away. In real life things could end up differently. So referring back to Miller, in real life I would consider this as harassment and as she says '..see my body as the site of my heightened vulnerability as a woman.'(p101).

Because grouping is one of the major features in WoW, I tried to find out what that means for a female character in WoW. One thing that did struck me was the quantity of invitations a woman gets for joining a group. It seems like being a woman makes it easier to get included into a group, than playing a male character. Of course this needs some further



research due to my short stay in WoW.

Interesting is that people are very helpful. As a newbie I asked a lot, for example where to find things. Not only people in front of me are answering polite and directly, I also communicated with other Dutch players in the general chat. He gladly wanted to help me, but was busy with his quest in another city. Another time I got in touch with another Dutch player and apparently he and his little sister were both playing with that character. He invited me to play on another server, so I would not confuse him with his sister. I would meet him over there, which never happened. Another example of someone who I just met and wanted to come over to another part of Stormwind, was a girl who talked to me in general chat.

So already in the first six levels I came in contact with a lot of people, Dutch and non-Dutch, male and female, whom only intention was to socialise and have fun in WoW.

A lot of things I noticed, during gameplay, weren't quite remarkable. For a newbie, you enter a new world where you explore things that come on your way and you love getting (lot of) attention. But getting other characters to talk to you and to help you, also partly depends on the fact how you act as a player. But within this casestudy, there was not much effort I did for people being nice to me. Remarkable thing is in spite of playing at a low level, the amount of invitations I get from other players. On the other hand, I often got challenged for a duel by other players, which probably has something to do with playing on a PVP server according to my groupmates, but usually ignored those. But none of them questioned why I did not want to fight them or judged by declining.

Because I did not level up that much (got stuck at level 6), I did not get any further insights in grouping, looting and social networking. So as a newbie and low level player, I felt I get excluded from certain kind of activities within WoW. Not knowing how to handle things, causes a limitation in living your life as a citizen of the World of Warcraft. In spite of all that, my character mostly experienced positive things and got a positive view on the 'citizens' living in World of Warcraft.

In relation to the issue of being included or excluded within this citizenship, I can conclude that I have not felt excluded in any kind of way by other players. Although women often are represented in games as 'a peculiarly vulnerable class of people who require special protection from the elements of society men are expected to confront alone'(Miller, p100), as my character I felt very invited by the WoW citizens in every area of the city. According to results from Nick Yee's survey data, research among WoW players show that 84% of players are male and 16% are female (Yee 2005). The main reason for this choice by men is that females in World of Warcraft are treated very nice and also receive gifts from other male characters, which is also in line with my experiences. So if that is the case of being a woman in World of Warcraft citizenship, no wonder most men take up the opposite sex as their virtual identity.

Due to my findings on being a women in WoW, I felt very included on all kinds of levels. The right of fun was certainly experienced in the World of Warcraft. In a citizenship where heterosexual lifestyles and values rule, one could question if a homosexual player experiences WoW in the same way as I did.

Playing World of Warcraft as a homosexual.

Thinking of homosexuality as something gendered. "Gender is a social and cultural identity – conventionally associated with biological sex – that influences the way individuals present themselves to the world and the ways in which others act toward them. It also determines the norms, expectations, and roles regarded as acceptable, and the nature of interactions between and within the sexes" (Byce, 2002, p302). You could say that being gay is an inferior position compared to being heterosexual male in a masculine world such as WoW. But how do you expose yourself being gay in WoW? A question asked, every time when I was talking about this project. A justified question looking to the interface of WoW in which one can choose a sex, not a gender. Of course, displaying your avatar with a name like: "cutegayguy" or "homo1982" could be used to expose one's sexuality. But there are more sophisticated ways to show your sexual preferences.

Because of WoW being a highly social game in which communication by keyboard plays a major role in the progression of your character, one can hint the other player about one's preference in either men or women. Typing things like: "sorry I have to go in 30 minutes, my boyfriend is waiting" passes a lot of information about your "real life" (RL) identity to the other. While communicating my social state, other players asked me if I was a girl most of the time. When declining this, questions of being gay automatically followed. Most people did not really care about my homosexual feelings. "As long as you heal me, I don't care!" stated Avor a warrior dwarf with whom I was fighting my way through a dungeon called "The Deadmines". All the exclusion, formalised in the former chapter, about grouping does not hold, looking for differences between gay and straight play.

Mostly, acceptance of homosexuality occurs when already played with another character for a while. But what happens when one's sexuality is showed by acting gay, without first getting to know the other. To answer this question I first figured out in which way feminism was exposed in the game. I found out that, while playing a female character, blowing a kiss to a male counter player was really accepted. I imagined that people would translate a kiss from a man to another male character as "miss clicked" when doing it in random. But when I was travelling in the Deeprun Tram, leading from Stormwind to Ironforge, I had to wait a minute standing in a wagon with another fellow called Vanzan. I buffed⁷ him with a power of stamina and he buffed me in return with a power of strength. Then we busted out in a dance interrupted by some "silly" remarks and a couple of laughs. Arriving at the station Ironforge it was time to split and say goodbye. He waved goodbye enthusiastic, saying it was fun and I blew him a kiss. He did not give me the same attention Nadine received, but he smacked me in the face. The next dialog started:

⁷ By buffing a character, one gives the other some kind of magical spell which heightens his/her abilities.

Ddonaldd

[Ddonaldd] whispers: thanks
You bow down graciously.
Boris has defeated Naala in a duel
You roar with bestial vigor. So fierce!
You roar with bestial vigor. So fierce!
[Ddonaldd] whispers: mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
You roar with bestial vigor. So fierce!
You roar with bestial vigor. So fierce!



Me /kiss
 --- you blow Vanzan a kiss
 --- Vanzan slaps you across the face. Ouch!
 Me What did you do that for?
 He You kissed me
 Me So
 Me Do you hate gays?
 He Noooooooooooooo!

Then he took off. While wandering through Ironforge we bumped into each other again. He shouted “Kiss my assss!” and took a run again.

What happened here? Vanzan clearly felt offended and harassed by me, blowing him a kiss. So saying you are gay is received less or not offending, but searching for sexual oriented contact does. At least, if one sees blowing a kiss as a sexual expression. This needed some further research. I planned to play the “rich old man trick” by giving presents to get sex in return. I went to the starting point of every human player, called Northshire Abbey. Here players don’t have a lot of money, equipment and experiences. Some players will be new to the game while others start a new character. I talked to two guys: Ddonald and Boris, asking them if they would like to have a cat. While having a cat in World of Warcraft is not of any practical use, it sure is cute to have a little animal walking along with you everywhere you go. They yield into the temptation and I bought them a cat, which is quiet expensive for a starter.

One cat richer, we went for a drink in the Goldshire Inn. This tavern is built to rest your character, receive quests and for social activities like enjoying some alcoholic beverage. Your character can get drunk, which is represented by blurring the screen and with your avatar drifting about, trying to make a long turn to the right while walking. Twinking the fellows and getting them drunk, I asked the guys to go upstairs and have sex. Boris declines but Ddonald went along and we had some cybersex in one of the bedrooms of the Inn. After cybering the next conversation started.

Me Are u male?
 He yes
 Me Also in RL?
 He Yes
 He U?
 Me Yes
 He Male?
 Me Yes

Pause

Me Are u gay?
 He No of course, u are?
 Me Yes I am



Ddonald



[Party] [Gillesvbaden]: ok

Innkeeper Farley says: Welcome to the Lion's Pride Inn. Make yourself at home!

[Party] [Gillesvbaden]: you don't mind what just happened?

You receive item: [Skin of Dwarven Stout].

You receive item: [Skin of Dwarven Stout].

You receive item: [Jug of Bourbon].

You receive item: [Jug of Bourbon].



He proposed to go downstairs “like we are now”, which meant being naked. Seated down in the Common room, Ddonald asked for more money. I asked him, if he cared; having sex with a guy. He answered; asking for more money. Finally I put a stop to our relation and left.

Ddonald did not feel harassed by first giving my avatar a blowjob and later finding out the person behind that avatar was male, instead of being feminine. But he kept asking for money and wandered about some controls of the game, which I could explain to him. For him the game mechanics and profits seemed more important than virtually having sex with a guy while being straight. Being a veteran, in comparison with Ddonald being a newbie, I could use my knowledge and money to seduce other players and did not get excluded the moment my true nature aroused.

During the Christmas holidays the world of Warcraft was decorated as such. A Santa Claus could be found in Ironforge, the dwarf capital city, and people could pick up snowballs to fight each other. Mistletoes were found in every Inn, with two characters, a man and a woman standing beneath it. When a player blew a kiss to one of the non player characters (NPC) hearts twinkled above both the gamer and the NPC. It did not matter if you kissed the male or the female character. As a player you received a buff which increased the spirit of other players by 20, which could be very useful in group-combat. While standing there kissing the npc male, I was not sure anyone noticed. When I planned to leave the Inn, a little gnome entered the common room. Pandalf the gnome busted out in a dance which I joined. Suddenly the male gnome started flirting with me. I reacted in a shy way and he answered my shyness by blowing a kiss. Before I could ask a thing, he went offline. I think he was just joking with me, or has some serious intentions.

Levelling up a mage till level 40 (which took more than 120 hours) and a level 20 priest (approximately 50 hours of playing) a level 15 Druid and a level 15 Warlock gave me a satisfied view of homo-acceptance within World of Warcraft. I talked to a lot of people, exposed myself being gay in conversations and even indulged in virtual gay sex. Only twice I witnessed excluding behaviour from other players by slapping me in the face and once someone yelled to everyone that the level 60 horde, whom was killing defenceless level 20 players in Westfall, was a “big homo”. I could not feel offended by these two guys, who are compared to the friendly and welcome “as long as you heal me I don’t care who or what you are” are less than a minority within World of Warcraft on a European server.

I explicitly say European server, because arguing from forums as allgames.com and the blog ImmutablyMe this isn’t the same on US servers. According to Paolo Pace “it’s not uncommon in the online video game community to see people refer to others in a derogatory way. Most of the time the word “gay” is used excessively. [.. that is why a] discussion [is] going on in a few places about the formulation of gay guild in the World of Warcraft.” (Pace 2006) We will cover this item in the forum-chapter. Apparently homophobia is more present on US servers than at European servers. But this is another discussion. I will like to stick to the European servers, because the research was done there ingame. It raised the question if there are any GayGuilds on European servers.

Googling on “Gay Guilds WoW” I found out the existence of some gayguilds. The Rough Trade gaming community hosts two guilds in WoW where they are “welcoming fun gay, lesbian, queer, and friendly straight players 18 and over” (Benjamin and Greg 2006). “The phenomenon of the gay guild is an answer to [...] potential harassment [...]. Players not having to worry about their sexual orientation making others uncomfortable or opening

themselves up to harassment leaves one free to truly enjoy the game and all it has to offer without worries” (Sliwinski 2005). Surprisingly I did not encounter a lot of harassments, even while playing a character named “Gayguy”. People were willingly to help and did not make funny remarks associated with my name. Brent Malley, an officer of the Stonewall Champions, argues with me on this point “He explained the creation of Vice and Valour [which merged with the Stonewall Champions] was more about keeping an existing group of friends together than about avoiding harassment. Brent says, “I’ve never experienced any homophobia, but I have experienced harassment based on the gender of my toon” (Sliwinski 2005). Unfortunately I could not join the Stonewall Champions, due to a too crowded server, which refused any newcomers.

So I started a gayguild on my own. I went to Stormwind, bought a petition for creating a guild, called it “the gaymers” and went recruiting by general chat. Then a lengthy discussion full of homophobic remarks and harassments started. People thought it wasn’t necessary to start a gayguild: “U C that’s the problem with gays. Not that they are gays, but that they have to make such a fuss about it!” (Darkmessias) or that gays should not be playing the game: “We should form a guild called kill the fu***in gays!” (Xän). Even more unfriendly were these comments: “please die!” (Asgar) and “Gays are gross, Men and Men relations IW!” (Emilzor). During the discussion I was protected however by more open-minded players.

Gladly people were standing up for my right to have fun. But some did not, which made my place as a citizen questionable.



Virtual discussions

After this discussion ingame we started wondering how homosexuality in WoW is discussed at online forums and what that suggests about the in- and exclusion about gay players. This is done by focusing on how a specific news item was discussed in forums. Christine Hine (2000) makes the point that the 'location' of research should not be a specific webaddress, but a topic. The topic we are analyzing is the case of Sara Andrews.

Sara Andrews is the owner of a guild on the Shadow Moon server on WoW. To get members for your guild you have to advertise. Guild masters, like Andrews, walk around Azeroth, generally asking people if they want to join their guild. Andrews was promoting the guild as GLBT⁸-friendly. For this she was reported by a gamemaster and Andrews got an e-mail that she was cited for "Harassment - Sexual Orientation"(Andrews 2006). Andrews did not think that was fair and emailed Blizzard. The response was; she was not allowed to talk about sexual preferences.

Andrews made a new topic on Gamers Experimentations at the 16th of January, a gaymer community forum. In the posting she told what happened, showed all email correspondence with Blizzard and said that she corresponded with a lot of news papers and websites about what happened to her. A week later the first story was published in In Newsweekly, a GLBT news site. Slashdot, Eurogamer and Tweakers are some of the news sites that brought this news a few days later. Meanwhile, a lot of discussion was going on at different websites about this subject.

On the official American WoW forums there were numeral topics on the subject. The first ones were deleted. I have not witnessed that, but several visitors of the forum mention this. Keellath, a level 56 Dwarf Warrior in the game says in the "GLBT Thread deletion....." thread:

"What gives Blue? We talk about this thing all day and then you just delete the thread so its like it never existed. ... That thread was out there for over 4 hours and you just now do anything with it." (Keellath 2006)

With Blue he means a moderator of the boards, easy recognizable, because the words of a moderator have a blue colour. On Tuesday the 31 of January 19:00 hours (GMT +01:00) there were five topics about this subject on the general forum. They were however all locked, so no one was able to post on the topics.

There were two different opinions on the forums of WoW. The first one was that, because gay people were constantly being mocked in the game, they should at least be able to have their own guild, so they can enjoy the game just like any other gamer. A typical response on the topic from this side was made by Berke, a level 60 Tauren Druid:

⁸ Gay, Lesbian, Bidesxual and Transexual

“Some people play for the social aspect as much as the accomplishing aspect of the game. Besides, after sitting through a barrage of “he/she/its/that/they/thingy/everything is so gay” in Barrens chat, gay players might like to know there is at least one chat channel they can pay attention to without feeling attacked.” (Berke 2006)

Other people did not understand why gay players had to explicitly show that they were gay. They thought that Blizzard made the right choice, because the game should only be about the game and not about sexuality. Belayle, a Level 17 Human Warrior said:

“Honestly.. it's a computer game. Why bring sexual orientation into it.. Just doesn't make any sense to me. There is absolutely no reason for anybody to know your sexual orientation in this game.”(Belayle 2006)

It looks like the discussion, between the parties, was focusing on the question; who should be given the right to enjoy the game? Gay players argue that they should be allowed to play in an environment where they feel comfortably without being confronted with remarks like: “that loot is gay”, a regular comment when a treasure turns out to be not valuable. Other players argue that sexuality is not an issue in a game and should therefore not be mentioned. The flaw in that argument is of course that straight sexuality can be found everywhere in the game.

For example let us look at one of the pets the warlock can summon. A warlock is a magical class that can summon creatures from the demon world to fight. One of the creatures that can be summoned is the succubus. The succubus is a female devil look-a-like with horns, hoofs, a tail and wings like a bat. She is dressed in a tiny bikini and has a whip. Her main weapon is the ability to seduce the enemy so that they are defenceless for a while. This stereotype reeks of heterosexuality.

Both cases have presented themselves, but we have not discussed the official statement by Blizzard, yet. On the topic “Re: Invisible Harassment Policy Issue [PART 3]”, Caydiem, a spokesman for Blizzard officially responded on the commotion as follows:

“Apologies for the length of time it took to get this information out to you.

We encourage community building among our players with others of similar interests, and we understand that guilds are one of the primary ways to forge these communities. However, topics related to sensitive real-world subjects -- such as religious, sexual, or political preference, for example -- have had a tendency to result in communication between players that often breaks down into harassment.

To promote a positive game environment for everyone and help prevent such harassment from taking place as best we can, we prohibit mention of topics related to sensitive real-world subjects in open chat within the game, and we do our best to take action whenever we see such topics being broadcast. This includes openly advertising a guild friendly to players based on a particular political, sexual, or religious preference, to list a few examples. For guilds that wish to use such topics as

part of their recruiting efforts, our Guild Recruitment forum, located at our community Web site, serves as one open avenue for doing so.

We will be clarifying some of the language in our game policies in order to help avoid such confusion in the future.” (Caydiem 2006)

Blizzard has the following problem to consider: how do you make sure that people are not offended in WoW? It would be political correct to have a rule that says that Andrews can talk about her sexuality anywhere she want in WoW. But just like in real life, Motivaction argues that lots of people feel offended by the behaviour of homosexuals. That does not mean Andrews is not allowed to talk about her sexuality, it just means that she has to set up a guild, open an offline–topic⁹ addressing the guild on the recruiting forum of the WoW community site. Then she has to return to the game, wait till she gets members, than find those members and will be able to talk with other players on a secure line about her sexuality. This is an excellent example of excluding. She can only refer to her girlfriend in that manner, which leaves her with no other choice than to follow that path.

This is not only Andrews’ problem. It is also a problem for players who use phrases as: “that is so gay”, which is not allowed too. If in real life someone makes such a remark, a homosexual can not do anything about it. In WoW it is very easy to report a remark, so that a gamemaster can give a warning to the person who was offensive. At least that is the theory, according to prd, poster of the Asshats topic on the forums of gaymer.org, Blizzard says “just ignore it”(prd 2006), Blizzard will not act on anti–gay comments.

“Any self respecting homo with 2 balls between his legs would say something right? So, I did.I emailed Blizzard and asked them to do something, Blizzard's response was “just ignore em, they'll go away”, riiiiiiiiight, like that's ever worked with a gay basher.” (prd 2006)

On the same forum, however, FuriUlsa wrote this:

“Im going to post something I wrote for my LJ about the subject, but I also wanted to say that I have reported people for homophobic comments in general chat and EVERY time I have it's always resulted in someone getting suspended or even in one case banned. Emailing Blizzard about it after you've logged out is a total joke and dumb as you can possibly get. THAT isnt how you deal with it if you are soooo offended.” (FuriUlsa 2006)

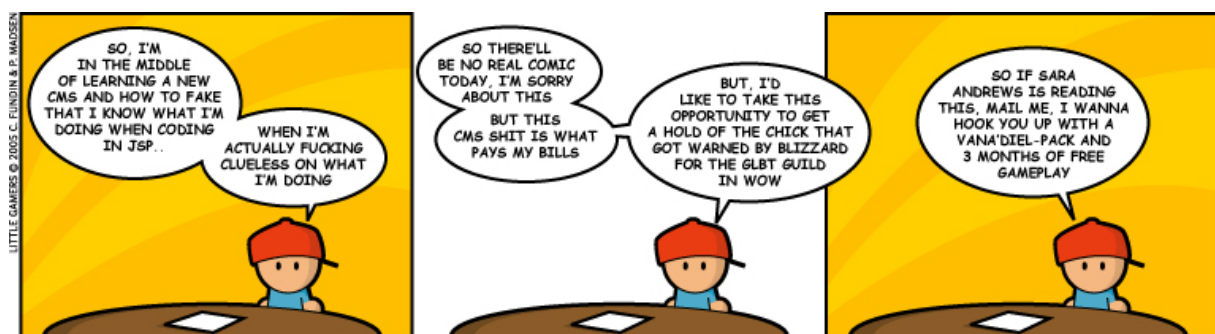
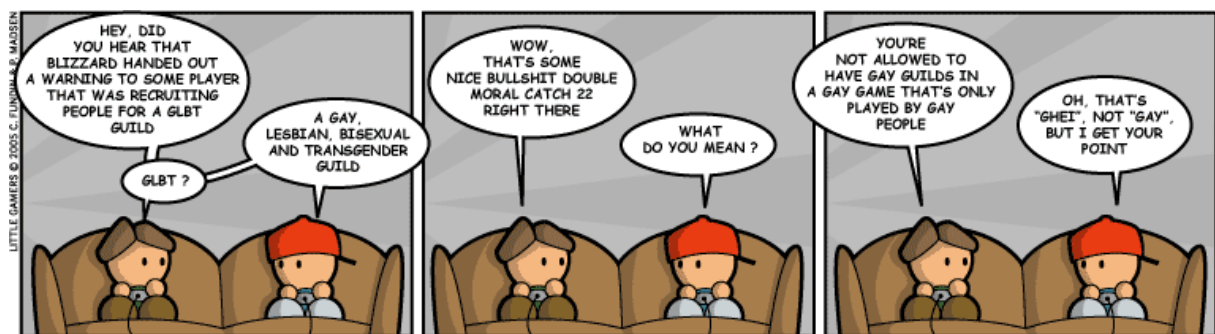
It seems that different people have different experiences with rights in WoW. Different gamemasters rule differently about the same situations. This suggests that citizenship is based on random rulings by game masters. It is however made clear that not everyone has the same rights. Straight people can talk about their sexuality every time they will, so when talking about their girl- or boyfriend or about their children, they will not receive any

⁹ In this case meaning to log out of the game. Not to stop having a connection with the Internet.

harassment. Gay players have to talk secretly about their lives and if they are faced with bigotry, they have to be lucky to find a gamemaster willingly to help.

Blizzard has perhaps an even larger problem than the one stated above. The user agreement, Blizzard has set up for the game are open for interpretation by gamemasters. That means that Blizzard has little control on citizenship in WoW, from which we can conclude that each server has a different form of citizenship. Different citizenships lead to different levels of enjoyment and more diverse reactions on the game. For every positive reaction there will be a negative one. And that could lead to a drop of new citizens.

According to the research done, homosexuals in World of Warcraft mostly are not excluded one way or another as long as you do not make a “fuss” about it. Blizzard’s policy about real life interference in World of Warcraft raises some questions about equality of citizenship for homosexual players, which are excluded in a very crude way. Not only do they have to put up with harassments and homophobic remarks, but even Blizzard is resolutely excluding gays by violating their right of free speech and the right of having fun.



Conclusion

In the introduction about what form of citizenship exists in WoW it was concluded that the most important right a player should have, is the right to have fun. To have fun means that you should always be able to play. To play not only means that you have access to the game world, but that, in an online game, other players can help you in your quests.

For female players this is not a problem. When they ask for help it seems to be given without any hesitation. They might have no problem in finding a guild or party that will accept them too.

Male players however are not as enthusiastically welcomed by existing players. When playing WoW as a priest, we found that lesser people were helpful. Even if we helped others regularly by, for example, healing them. They still did not give us the amount of attention Nadine was talking of even without us mentioning being gay.

Homosexuals are only accepted by all other players if they do not mention that they are gay. The Sara Andrews case shows that the gamemasters all have a different interpretation of the rules in WoW. Some gays are, and some gays are not able to talk about their romantic or sexual lives on the general chat. This is possible because, Blizzard allows the rules to be vague and open for interpretation. Blizzard therefore encourages the discrimination of homosexuals.

Emancipation in real life is created by protests by those who are excluded. Because not all homosexuals are excluded in WoW, not all gays are likely to protest. Every server has a different citizenship, because of the subjective interpretation of the rules by Blizzard employees. A general protest against Blizzard could be the beginning of a solution. A general protest by all gays is however not likely, because not all gays are excluded by their gamemaster.

WoW is partially a social forum. Part of the fun of playing the game is the social interaction with other players. It is part of the game mechanics, without conversation you can not experience WoW to the fullest. Blizzard is destroying the gaming experience for the homosexual players. The right to have fun is taken away from this group. Homosexuals are not citizens in World of Warcraft.

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