Resistance and Sexuality in Virtual Worlds: An LGBT Perspective

Abstract

Virtual worlds can provide a safe place for social movements of marginal and oppressed groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). When the virtual safe places are under threat, the inhabitants of a virtual world register protests, which have critical implications for the real-world issues. The nature of emancipatory practices such as virtual protests in the digital realm research remains somewhat under-explored. Specifically, it remains to be seen how the oppressed communities such as LGBT take radical actions in virtual worlds in order to restore the imbalance of power. We conducted a 35-month netnographic study of an LGBT social movement in World of Warcraft. The lead researcher joined the LGBT social movement and data was captured through participant observations, discussion forums, and chat logs. Drawing on the critical theory of Michel Foucault, we present empirical evidence that illuminates emancipatory social movement practices in an online virtual world. The findings suggest that there are complex power relations in a virtual world and, when power balance is disrupted, LGBT players form complex ways to register protests, which invoke strategies to restore order in the virtual fields.

Keywords: LGBT, Social Movements, Oppressed Communities, Virtual Protest, Foucault, Critical Theory

1 Introduction

According to Cabiria (2008), virtual worlds act as safe havens for oppressed people such as lesbian, gays, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and other marginalised communities[1,2]. A safe place plays an important role in one's emancipation and emancipatory practices. In a safe place, the oppressed can develop positive coping skills, explore their identities, and engage with their social movement practices. The Internet can provide safe places and a "platform for the establishment of contacts between individuals of similar creeds and sexual orientations" (Döring, 2009, p. 1097). For example, virtual worlds are often seen as safe places where members of a social group engage with emancipatory practices related to the movement in meaningful ways (Collister, 2014, p. 337; Nardi, 2010, p. 164). These virtual safe places are also volatile insofar as they are under a constant but invisible threat of unwanted digitally-enabled spatial changes, including permanent closure (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, 2007). This is problematic because when power is exercised over a community's safe place, its members often resist with counter strategies to restore the power balance. While the literature on societal resistance using digital technologies is slowly growing (e.g., Doolin, 2004; Markham & Baym, 2009), the topic of resistance of oppressed groups in the digital context, in particular, discrimination against sexuality and gender-based cultures, in the virtual worlds remains under-examined. To that end, this paper presents an empirical account of the struggle of LGBT social movement in a virtual world and made a case for studying the issues of the oppressed in every day as well as virtual situations.

A social movement is a loosely connected group of people with a collective identity that aims to bring about social, cultural, political, or other common goals through collective engaged practices (Oh, Eom, & Rao, 2015; Staggenborg, 2011). Social movements are powerful ways to raise awareness or to lobby for social change (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003) such as the occupy movement, #Ferguson, black lives matter, and the LGBT movement. Scholars of (digital) social movements have explored issues

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[1] In this paper, we use the term LGBT as an umbrella concept to stress and include a diversity of gender-, sexual- and identity-based cultures. In this way we address a broad range of identities (often referred as LGBT+) to include but not limited to queer or questioning identities as well as intersex identities.
[2] Another example is a safe haven for the disabled: https://www.latimes.com/socal/daily-pilot/entertainment/tn-wknd-et-second-life-20181003-story.html

concerning the mobilization and recruitment of individuals (Edwards & McCarthy, 2003; Jenkins, 1981; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978), social movement organization (Pichardo, 1997; Scott, 1990; Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016; Tarrow, 1994) and strategies and campaigns (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003; Staggenborg, 2011; Tilly & Wood, 2009). Davis and Zald (2005) note that the early use of websites and mobile phones in the 1999 WTO protests, sometimes refers to as the Battle for Seattle, a social movement that paved the way for the innovative use of digital technologies in the effective mobility in social movements. Subsequently, information and communication technologies (ICTs) became "essential infrastructure" of social movements (Davis & Zald, 2005, p. 344) as well as digital activism (Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016). Nonetheless, some studies take the position that there are "protests that are completely Internet-based, with very limited or no offline presence" (Silva & Panahi, 2017, p. 104). In contrast, complex offline engagements are often intricately entwined with online protests (for example, the use of digital technologies by alt-right groups reveal a disturbing picture, see Peters & Besley, 2017).

Indeed, online harassment of LGBT people also goes "beyond the online sphere" (Soboleva & Bakhmetjev, 2014, pp. 280ff). A digital protest often reflects the ground reality. In order to understand the nature of resistance of LGBT peoples, one needs to pay attention to the role of digital technologies in their everyday practices. While it has been recognized that the Internet is shaping and being shaped by the sexuality-related practices such as sexual sub-cultures and sexual orientation (e.g., Döring, 2009; Festl, Reer, & Quandt, 2019; Gámez-Guadix & Mateos-Pérez, 2019; Jonsson, Priebe, Bladh, & Svedin, 2014; Sarabia & Estévez, 2016), the interest in the study of LGBT and their engagement with the ICTs is gradually increasing (e.g., Faulkner & Lannutti, 2016; Fox & Ralston, 2016; Han, Han, Qu, Li, & Zhu, 2019; McConnell, Clifford, Korpak, Phillips, & Birkett, 2017). We also find that LGBT peoples are increasingly experimenting with virtual worlds as a platform to register protests. For instance, in 2006, Sara Andrews, an LGBT activist, started a protest in World of Warcraft (*WoW*) to make the virtual world friendly to all genders (Giles, 2007). Although *WoW* management did not initially agree, the protest paved the way for LGBT places in the virtual world. Other examples include class protest and

million gnome march in the *WoW* (Andrews, 2014), and a joint strike by a European labour union and organisational staff against IBM in Second Life (Blodgett & Tapia, 2010).

Hence the purpose of this paper, following Nardi (2010, 2015), is to examine the question of virtual protests as a form of resistance of LGBT communities in a virtual world. On the one hand, this is particularly relevant to the real world engagement with LGBT social movement, which functions in situations where sexual minorities confront high levels of social discrimination and harassment. On the other hand, it is also important for critical and interpretive researchers to understand how the oppressed voice their concerns as they engage with contemporary digital technologies such as virtual worlds. This study contributes to three interrelated discourses: power and resistance studies (e.g., Avgerou & McGrath, 2007; Córdoba, 2007; Doolin, 2004; Vieira da Cunha, Carugati, & Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2015), gender and LGBT studies in the context of digital technologies (e.g., Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016; Trauth, 2013), and understanding of social dynamics in virtual worlds (e.g., Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012; Nardi, 2010, 2015). In what follows, we shall provide a critical account of the LGBT social movement. By drawing on the critical theory of Foucault (1978, 1982), we shall explain how power is exercised in virtual worlds and how people perform counter-strategies to restore power balance.

2 Related Work

2.1 Virtual Worlds

A virtual world contains visual representations (Martončik & Lokša, 2016) of places, people, and things that may look like the physical world (Castronova, 2007), or a fantastical world (Schultze & Rennecker, 2007). In these worlds, people interact with others visually, verbally and textually just as they do in ordinary situations (Stanney, Hale, & Zyda, 2015). In particular, virtual worlds are more immersive than traditional social media (such as Facebook) where users are limited to only reading what others are doing (Wasko, Teigland, Leidner, & Jarvenpaa, 2011). This explains the rise of complex engagement in virtual worlds that hinges on one's identity, orientation and social and political views. Early research into the radical nature of virtual worlds, including massive multiplayer online games (MMOG), highlighted the significance of gender, race, and class in the exercise of power in virtual

worlds (e.g., Cherny, 1994; Escobar, 1995; Gray & Driscoll, 1992; Wilson & Peterson, 2002).

Virtual protests in the virtual worlds are becoming a complex and important form of engagement (Robinson, 2008; Van De Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004). By controlling the inhabitants of a virtual world, digital technology can grant power and privilege to the dominant class and continue to the marginalised the oppressed groups. As more and more people use a virtual environment for their everyday social relations, virtual worlds have intensified and further complexified the power dynamics related to identity and gender relations. Gray (2014) says that, for the oppressed and marginal social groups, the virtual places and situations are as unjust as the physical places. He highlights that accounts of the oppressed are "disturbingly absent" in the contemporary debate surrounding ICTs, such as devices, virtual worlds and gameplay (Gray, 2014, p. xxi).

2.2   Resistance and Sexuality in Virtual Worlds

In order to make sense of resistance and sexuality in virtual worlds, we draw on Michel Foucault's critical theory of power in the context of his discussion of the history of sexuality (Foucault, 1978, 1982). Although Foucault's concept of power has been widely used as panoptic power (e.g., Doolin, 2004; Jasperson, et al., 2002; Silva, 2007) as well as pastoral power (e.g., Beckett & Myers, 2018), in this study we are particularly interested in power from the *resistance* perspective, and how it relates to sexuality *in* the lived worlds of vulnerable people. Traditionally, resistance is either seen as an identification mechanism to establish the source of power (Silva & Backhouse, 2003) or seen as something to "circumvent" (Avgerou & McGrath, 2007, p. 312) such as resistance to change. However, for Foucault, resistance is first and foremost an important everyday strategy of restoring power balance (Fleming, 2006; Kelly, 2013; Pickett, 1996), which also forms the theoretical background our study.

Resistance is not opposed to power; instead, it is a form of power (Foucault, 1978, pp. 95-96). As Kelly (2013, p. 69; cf. p. 73) says "one man's resistance is just another man's power." Similarly, although there exist different individual cases of resistances, the very idea of power is grounded in everyday practices (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). To paraphrase Avgerou and McGrath (2007, p. 298), every practice is a power practice. To critically engage with resistance, one needs to understand what matters to oneself in everyday practices and how a practice is influenced by the circulation of power. Although we

acknowledge that there are many different ways to understand power in the everyday practices in a virtual environment (Hekkala & Urquhart, 2013; Wilson & Howcroft, 2005), here we focus on only everyday sexuality and its power dynamics, which is slowly getting attention in the literature (Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016).

The power mechanism underlying everyday sexuality and its relation to one's gender identification and sexual orientation has been critically discussed in the studies of social phenomena (e.g., Collins, 2006; Ruffolo, 2016; Sandoval, 2000). A common argument in this debate is that there are always hierarchies of power in everyday practices, which entails submissions and domination, and that there is a constant struggle between opposing poles to maintain power balance. In this perspective, more than an escape, resistance is conceptualised as a way to reinstate order (Ruffolo, 2016, p. 10). For instance, the heterosexual position is often found to be the dominant everyday sexuality. This suggests that a person or a social group, which do not identify with the dominant position, risk being subordinated in the everyday practices (Sandoval, 2000, p. 55). One ordinary example is the debate surrounding the gender-neutral toilets (West & Zimmerman, 1987); more complex examples are found in technology-mediated violence against women as well as people with unorthodox gender identities (Henry & Powell, 2015; Jauk, 2013).

2.3 Gendered Landscape of Virtual Worlds

To examine resistance and sexuality in a virtual context, we take a gender-critical position (Foucault, 1978; Gray, 2014, pp. 79-80). We suggest that the virtual places are gendered just like everyday places and that virtual places are not separate from everyday practices but an important part of it. In what follows we explain the gendered landscape of virtual places and how the oppressed, with special attention to the LGBT, engage with complex virtual worlds to identify and understand virtual places as safe places and how LGBT people resist and rework the imbalance of power.

Virtual worlds are complex social phenomena permeated with power relations (Boellstorff, 2008, 2011; Boellstorff, et al., 2012; Geraci, 2014; Kafai & Fields, 2013). Foucault (1982) says that wherever there is power, there is resistance. Therefore, it seems a fundamental question remains unanswered: how the oppressed communities take radical actions in virtual worlds in order to restore the imbalance of power?

As social movements move into virtual worlds, the virtual place becomes critical for social good as people try to create awareness for their causes and use technologies and places in a way that matters to them in their everyday lives (Blodgett, 2009; Blodgett & Tapia, 2011; Young, 2018). In this perspective, Nardi (2010) says that *WoW* is an important virtual world as it goes beyond traditional gaming and facilitate meaningful engagement with members, and forming complex communities. As Curtis (1996, pp. 347-8) has observed, a virtual world is "not really a game at all." For the vulnerable populations, being in a virtual world is a particular way of being in the world. Recent studies in *WoW* explains how people make sense of their lives using everyday digital practices such as gripe, bereavement, and ennui (e.g., Bainbridge, 2010; Corneliussen & Rettberg, 2008; Cuddy & Nordlinger, 2010; Klastrup, 2008; Roy, 2015; Silva & Mousavidin, 2015). Although the previous studies advanced the social study of *WoW*, recent literature has under-explored the significance of sexuality in the virtual protests.

According to Trauth (2013, p. 288), the question of gender in the studies of digital technologies is predominantly explored from a heterosexual perspective and often about the issues surrounding "middle class, heterosexual, white women." She performs an exhaustive 20 years review and concludes that gender minorities (as well as ethnic and other marginalised groups) are virtually absent in the literature. We agree with Trauth (2013). We go a step further and suggest that a binary categorisation of gender is still pervasive in the contemporary studies of the virtual world. For instance, in her groundbreaking ethnographic study of *WoW*, Nardi (2010, p. 158) attempts to reconcile the intricate gendered nature of virtual places and suggests that there are two planes in a virtual world, a primary and a secondary plane. The primary dominant plane is "produced and reproduced" through heterosexual male practices related to sex and romance. The secondary plane is also heterosexual, but it is considered flexible insofar as it offers "possibilities for pleasurable intimacies for both genders." Although a social tension is acknowledged because two planes are stated as the dominant and the secondary, we observe an uncomfortable omission of the non-binary sexual orientations. It is also disturbing to find that both planes belong to the dominant heterosexuality where one is about calm sexuality, and the other is deemed volatile. Hence, the planes are argued to work on a binary view of gender.

At present, the orthodox assumption that the inhabitants of a virtual world are either male or female is

problematic. This also suggests that the orthodox view of a virtual world goes against the everyday reality of the everyday world where different genders and sexual orientations and identities exist. It is best reflected by the simple fact that marginal and gender minorities also use virtual worlds and, compared to heteronormativity, often have a radically different conceptualisation of virtual places.

3 Methods

This study presents a reanalysis of the study conducted by <author name blinded> which explored how the LGBT social movement can use a creative combination of the affordances available in WoW for their cause and help to shape the game through community involvement. While the previous study explored how the technical environment can influence social movement activities, the present study highlights how power was exercised on the LGBT community, and they attempted to resist the power.

We draw on a 35 months netnographic field study. Netnography is sometimes called online ethnography or virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000), and is a style of ethnography appropriate to conduct studies in virtual online fields (Kozinets, 2009, 2015) involving participant observation and interaction with community members (McKenna, Myers, & Newman, 2017). Netnography adapts ethnographic procedures to use digital communications as a source of data and is used to gain an ethnographic understanding of the online phenomenon (Kozinets, 2015). There are examples of ethnographic studies in virtual worlds such as Star Wars Galaxies (Ducheneaut & Moore, 2004), Everquest (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Taylor, 2006) and Second Life (Boellstorff, 2008).

The first author, from here on the *researcher*, conducted field research to study and engage with a social movement in a virtual world, as part of his doctoral research (references suppressed). The second author is versed in ethnographic field research methods and provided theoretical guidance. The fieldwork was conducted between January 2010 and November 2012 in the WoW. We also included the historical perspective to understand the critical nature of the issue fully. To that end, we carefully studied relevant digital sources (e.g., software updates) from 2006 to 2013.

3.1 Ethnographic Context – World of Warcraft

The fieldwork was conducted in the WoW, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game made by

Blizzard Entertainment. Although WoW is essentially a quest game to kill monsters and fight against your enemies, we note that it is being used in other ways. For example, we observed that a scientific conference was held in a virtual WoW city[3], and a cooking club where players created a virtual restaurant and invited other players to come and dine there. We also discovered that social movements were using WoW. For example, we found many religious movements, including make-believe religions, which only exist in WoW. WoW has been of interest to scholars from a wide variety of disciplines including anthropology (Nardi, 2010), psychology (Martončik & Lokša, 2016), sociology (Bainbridge, 2010), education (Zhang & Kaufman, 2015), and information systems (Blinded 2010; Blinded 2012; Silva & Mousavidin, 2015). WoW has two in-game factions (Horde and Alliance) which are at war with each other[4]. A player must decide which faction they would like to join. Communication between factions is not possible in-game.

At the time of our research, WoW had more than 12 million players globally in 2010 (Blizzard, 2010). Blizzard stopped reporting their player numbers in 2015. The social movement used in this study is an LGBT movement (hereafter referred to as LGBT), in WoW. Any long-term group in WoW must form a guild. Guilds enable persistent player associations (Williams, et al., 2006), and provide opportunities for assistance with quests, social interactions (Brignall & Van Valey, 2007). The LGBT movement was established in October 2006 to "*better service the LGBT community and offer a safe, inclusive place to game for members of any sexual orientation or gender identity*". LGBT is a global social movement which aims to create awareness for LGBT issues. LGBT also holds many regular activities inside WoW. These activities include the annual pride parade with floats, model competitions, dance parties, and guild photographs. The LGBT movement also has a website with discussion forums. When the study began in early 2010, LGBT had approximately 5,000 members (players). After the study, in late 2012 the membership had grown to 7,800. There were approximately 15,000 characters in the guild, as it is possible for one player to have multiple characters.

Ducheneaut, et al. (2007, p. 848) say that "the guild itself serves as a broader social environment." We

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[3] Details of the conference can be found at: http://science.sciencemag.org/content/320/5883/1592.3.full
[4] A faction is similar to a team which the player chooses to join when they start the game.

observed that many complex social activities were taking place in LGBT, one of these being social movements. The LGBT movement has a strong presence in WoW and holds many regular activities. Some of the significant LGBT activities include the annual pride parade with floats, model competitions, group photographs, and dance parties[5]. They have their own websites, discussion forums, and dedicate guilds. LGBT has a much smaller sister guild on the Alliance faction. However, our participant observations and data were obtained primarily from the significantly larger LGBT guild on the Horde faction. The Alliance and Horde LGBT guilds do not normally interact in-game, except during the pride parade and dance party when the two perform these activities together.

3.2 Role of the Researcher

Initially, the researcher entered the virtual world with a blank slate, i.e. with no preconceived ideas or hypotheses. The researcher created multiple characters in WoW, which then need to be levelled up. He noticed that each time he started playing the game with a new character, his gameplay experience was quite different.

We note that despite the rules of WoW, and the limitations of its programming, the introduction of human players into the game extends the limits of the game and introduces a range of play experiences. Social behaviour is often hard to predict, and hence, virtual worlds such as WoW may be inherently chaotic. This further motivated him to explore what other aspects of the game may be extended beyond what the designers intended. For example, based on the participant observations made of the LGBT movement, it becomes clear that there is an interplay between the virtual world (technological artefact controlled by designers), and the social (groups of people within and reacting to the virtual world). As more social activities take place in virtual worlds, it is important to understand exactly how they might be impacted by the technology in which they are acting within.

In terms of the physical world, to confront the prejudices held by the researcher, the researcher spent some time speaking with members of the gay community in New Zealand (personal friends of the lead researcher). He constantly sought clarification from these members, to become aware of the important

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[5] For an example of virtual pride parade and dance party within WoW (author's information suppressed), see the YouTube link: https://youtu.be/Vfko_sN5z40

social conventions of the gay community and becoming familiar with the terminology used by the gay community. This included understanding what gay rights movement events happen in New Zealand, such as the annual Big Gay Out (a fair day held in Auckland), and the Hero parade (a physical world pride parade), which returned in 2013 after being cancelled in 2001.

Therefore, the role of the researcher was that of an engaged researcher (Chughtai & Myers, 2017). After obtaining permission to conduct the research from LGBT leaders within WoW, the first author immersed himself in WoW. He joined the LGBT movement and participated in several movement activities such as virtual pride parades, dance parties, and group photographs. The leaders and many of the members of LGBT were aware of the presence of the researcher playing the involved researcher role.

3.3 Data Collection

Data was primarily collected through participant observations as well as digital sources such as discussion forums or chat logs (see Table 1). In total, the lead researcher spent over 1,600 hours engaging with LGBT. Most of the time, members of the movement are just simply playing the game, and nothing interesting was happening from a research perspective. Hence, the fieldwork involved the researcher spending many hours just playing the game. This provided the researcher with invaluable and in-depth knowledge of WoW. On occasion, however, members of LGBT would meet together and perform social movement activities, such as a parade. Outside of WoW, the researcher also engaged in LGBT's discussion forum based on an external website. Members would post here on a range of topics from their personal lives, to gameplay, to their thoughts on LGBT issues. The researcher also was an active participant in the discussion forums. Discussion forum posts were collected back to 2006, which is before the researcher joined LGBT in 2010.

Source	Type	Details
Participant Observation	Gameplay	1,600 hours playing the game with LGBT members, and engaging in LGBT events.
Screenshots	Screen cams from movement activities.	At least 50 screenshots.
Discussion Forum Posts	Discussion posts from movement website.	128,773 posts dating back to 2006.

Chat Logs	Chat logs from movement in-game chat channels.	Approximately 1.5 years of continuous chat logs from whenever the researcher was logged into the game.
Social movement's website	Textual information relating to background information about the movement and rules of membership.	Approximately 20 single-sided pages of information.
WoW Patch Notes	Documents the changing configurations of WoW.	Patches between 2006 and 2013, totalling 114 patches.

Table 1 Details of Data Collection

The in-depth understanding in this study was formed by becoming engaged with the LGBT movement in a virtual setting. The qualitative data was obtained during the longitudinal immersion and participant-observation with LGBT movement (see Collister, 2014 as an example of LGBT in WoW). Our data collection strategy is similar to the recommendations of McKenna, et al. (2017). The lead researcher first had to immerse himself in WoW. Some LGBT events require certain levels of game expertise, which can only be achieved by playing the game. To do this, he spent over 1,600 hours playing the game and interacting with LGBT. This enabled the researcher to become familiar with the game mechanics, and intimate knowledge of LGBT's activities and in-game behaviour. This allowed for an in-depth understanding of the social movement. Textual data was triangulated by aligning discussion forum posts with events in the history of WoW and LGBT, such as chat logs. For example, when the researcher attended an LGBT event, such as the pride parade, he took screenshots during the event, and also read and analysed the discussion forum posts, and chat logs before, during, and after the event.

Although the study began as online participant observation, it gradually became clear how the subtle spatial dynamics of the virtual fields relate to the power dynamic in the field. One such example of power-sensitive data is the release of patches or expansion packs, enforced by the developers (Blizzard Entertainment), to ostensibly make updates to the technical aspects of the game (which sometimes have impacts on the social elements within it). A patch is a piece of code which is implemented into the game in order to change some technical element. A patch is accompanied by a patch note which lists the changes to the system implemented by that patch. As we shall explain, such technical strategies are part of a power framework. The patches are seen as an exercise of power to modify a virtual place and disregarding the implications for the actual users (or inhabitants) of that place. Several patches were

examined (see Appendix A for an example of a patch), and their implementation dates were matched with discussion forum data from LGBT, as well as participant observations, to explore the impact that the technical changes had on the social elements of LGBT's organisation.

3.4 Data Analysis

We followed the lead of Foucault (1982, p. 780 emphasized) to understand resistance, begin our analysis and set a starting point: "I would like to suggest [a] way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of *taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point*." In this way, we take a critical position that there is no single source of rebellion, whether in the virtual worlds or the physical world. Accordingly, we examined engagement within the guild as well as the sub-guilds, players, recruitment processes, guild chat, add-ons, parades, and other social events. This enabled our interpretations of the research problem to be analysed at a fine level of detail. We also accept the position that, in order to understand protests in the virtual worlds, we need to take a multi-perspective critical interpretive approach to analyse resistance. To that end, we adhered to the principles of critical research, as suggested by Myers and Klein (2011). The details of the principles are provided in Table 2.

Principle	Application
The principle of using core concepts from critical social theorists	This study employs key concepts from the critical theory of Michel Foucault (e.g., power and resistance) to understand how marginal communities (e.g., LGBT) engage with emancipatory practices in virtual worlds.
The principle of taking a value position	This study takes the position that it is crucial for the emancipation of oppressed groups to have access to places (whether virtual or physical) where they can meaningfully engage with each other.
The principle of revealing and challenging prevailing beliefs and social practices	This study documents ethnographic evidence from a social movement of LGBT people in a

	virtual world to challenge the heteronormativity of virtual places.
The principle of individual emancipation	This study acknowledges the emancipation of the gender minorities from the binary categorisation of gender necessarily requires gender-friendly places. This study also develops critical spatial knowledge that may help one to reflect on everyday places and encourage to transform the places in a way that facilitate the emancipation of the oppressed.
The principle of improvements in society	This study explains that the distinction between the virtual and physical world is collapsing. The study identifies that, unlike physical places, virtual places are owned by others and that the latter can exercise power using seemingly mundane technological strategies. Although this suggests that the oppressed can be easily dominated by the powerful, it also explains how resistance can be used as a strategy to restore power imbalance.
The principle of improvements in social theories	This study used Michel Foucault's idea of power to make sense of the oppressed gender minorities in virtual world situations. The resulting narrative provides a revised view of the gendered landscape, which includes the oppressed and paves the way toward emancipatory practices.

Table 2 Principles for Critical Research from Myers and Klein (2011, p. 25)

With ongoing technological changes (software updates, patches), it was necessary to consider the individual parts of LGBT which were forced to change, for example, the re-organisation of the guild structure. The power sensitive impact of patches became clear after the researcher's engagement with LGBT members. In particular, we found that there was a constant power struggle between social and technical hierarchies. For instance, the updates to software or *patches* were found to be complex technical strategies of control. The patches are seen as an exercise of power to modify a virtual place and to disregard the implications for the actual users (or inhabitants) of that place. Boellstorff (2008, p.

206) also says that a key difference between the physical world and the virtual world is that the latter can be "*owned*" (original emphasis). We found that, as the virtual arena was owned by the organisation, it was purposefully altered by its designers, and new configurations were implemented, this sometimes forced LGBT to alter their organising practices. As we shall explain, LGBT members were forced to change their way of being in the virtual environment multiple times throughout this study.

4 Tales of Resistance from a Virtual World

4.1 When Safe Places are Under Threat

LGBT in WoW is part of a larger gaming community called Gaming Community (GC) which began in the game City of Heroes in 2004. LGBT began as a small guild that has now grown to be one of the largest guilds in WoW. Their mission has always remained the same: to provide a consistent, dependable, friendly, and fun social experience for our members. The founding member wrote in an online article: "Most of our members say they were tired of getting online every day, hearing 'fag this' and 'gay that'." Additionally, he wrote that many of LGBT members come from rural areas that may not celebrate gay pride, and the virtual pride parade and other LGBT activities held in WoW might be the only LGBT celebration they could attend.

It is useful to look at how GC represent themselves across the games where they have a presence. The following is extracted from the GC website:

> "The GC franchise is much more than guilds with a bunch of gay people. In any of our guilds, you will find players from every walk of life, every sexual orientation and gender identity, every hue, and from many places, all of over the world. We welcome every style of game play and provide a great place for casual gamers, PvPers, and hard-core gamers. You'll find that anything goes in our guild chat and forums (as long as we respect each other of course) and that you can find a fast friend in any of our guilds. You'll also be able to meet your GC friends in your local area, and nationally, with our player-run local meetups and semi-annual national meetups. In game, we're not invisible, and we support diverse LGBT-inclusive environments in all the games where GC is present. So join the twink from Detroit, the gay lawyer in New

York, the MtF in The South, the straight family in Seattle, the Master and his Pupp in Gnome, the Viking lesbian in Boston, the housewife in Dallas (she's a top), and that freaky dude in SF. You won't be disappointed." (18 Aug 2018).

However, this self-reported LGBT safe space came under threat from multiple sources, including threats from Blizzard, and from the broader player community. Blizzard initially did not allow LGBT guilds as they saw it as a form of discrimination. The threat was present at both the group and the individual level. For example, one player was threatened with expulsion from the game if she used the acronym "LGBT" in WoW's general chat area. Blizzard's reasoning was "to promote a positive gaming environment for everyone and help prevent harassment from taking place." The player's lawyer claimed that this was Blizzard attempting to stop harassment by insisting that harassment victims go back in the closet." During the legal case, Blizzard backed down and softened its stance on LGBT issues in-game (Giles, 2007).

To understand the sensitive nature of LGBT's relationship with Blizzard, we have to look back in history. LGBT people had previously expressed concerns between 2006 and 2007 when Blizzard repeatedly took issue with the guild name, which was initially "The Spreading LGBT." The following post was made by an LGBT member on the discussion forum in response to the censorship from Blizzard:

"The "Spreading" could also easily refer to the spread of diversity and acceptance, but we also mean it as a joking response to the homophobic idea that specifically (ONLY) same-sex desire is contagious in the reading of "Spreading LGBT" we have embraced our oppression, turned it into a joke - a joke that we have tolerated no matter our relationship to it, because it has also been empowering for most. That others see some of us as a threat to promoting an 'alternative' lifestyle is a main attribute of heterosexism. Since however, that Blizzard decided to interfere with our own humorous way of addressing our empowerment […] so Blizzard people, in their benevolent top-down approach to this have decided the name "Spreading LGBT" suggests that LBGT-queerness is contagious, and thus offensive. What gives Blizzard the right to make this determination? Nothing. […] Using humour to address our oppression is a great survival skill,

and how dare Blizzard censor us on this particular point! Furthermore, Blizzard's decision to censor the name "Spreading LGBT" further entrenches the imaginary public/private divide and reconstructs the myth that we can, or should insulate people from sexual knowledge, or even awareness of sexual diversity groups." (04/10/2007)

Other members also accused Blizzard of double standards for banning the name "Spreading LGBT" but allowing another guild with the name "Two Dollar Horde," a play on the term "two dollar whore":

"Blizzard (and most of the world) has repeatedly demonstrated the attitude that homosexuality (or any deviance from patriarchal aligned heteronormative gender divisions) is in and of itself offensive. Blizzard doesn't have to go out of its way persecuting queer people in order for it to demonstrate homophobic attitudes. Call it a "minority card" if you want, but the fact remains that "Spreading LGBT" suffered a forced name change whereas "Two Dollar Horde" is still A-OK because it doesn't challenge the common attitude among Blizzard customers that alluding to women as sexual objects of little value is less offensive than much less blatant (and much less certain to the outside viewer) allusion to a part of male anatomy." (30/12/2006)

Ultimately, LGBT's solution was to use the name "Spreading LGBT" outside the WoW environment, on its external website, and to use the name "LGBT" within the game. Some LGBT members also made some complaints against the design of the game storyline. One member posted on the discussion forum that he had complained to Blizzard that they are trying to make the game too heteronormative by assigning only male to female relationships between characters in the storyline.

"Blizzard is taking a role-playing leap that I think it should not have. I am talking about the NPCs Candy Cane and Chip Endale. Apparently, the path characters take designates Candy Cane as a girlfriend of male Goblins and Chip Endale as the boyfriend of female Goblins. […] Blizzard, you are free to send me on any quests you wish, but please stay out of the personal romantic life of my characters." (21/10/2010)

Another member agreed:

"I completely agree with this discomfort. A lot of us have fought really hard to get out of the closet, or are still in the closet. The assumption of heterosexuality as the norm is something that needs to be combated everywhere, because it so permeates our culture. […] I personally want

WoW to be more inclusive and not feel like just another place where I'm assumed to be heterosexual because that's the norm. I go there to have fun, not be reminded of some sort of inferior status." (27/10/2010)

However, some LGBT members held different positions.

"This is a GAME. Say it with me. It's just a GAME. This is not real life. And being hyper-sensitive about your status and coming out is only going to strengthen homophobes' perceptions that we are unstable people." (27/10/2010)

"I do not consider my status in a video game to be a big issues as far as game mechanics and quests are concerned as long as they do not significantly affect the atmosphere of the game" (27/10/2010)

"By not accommodating people in this, I seriously doubt they're trying to remind you that you're "some sort of inferior status." I sincerely believe that it never even occurred to them that anyone might take it that way." (28/10/2010).

While there was a minor disagreement of perspectives in the LGBT community, others took much a stronger position to deny the rights. For example, threats can also come from other players in terms of fear and hatred toward LGBT people. In 2009, Blizzard was implementing a new feature into the game called "group kick" which would allow members of a group to kick out another member. Groups can consist of players from any guild, not necessarily LGBT members. One LGBT member posted that they had a fear of this new feature being used for homophobic purposes:

"[…] I was wondering if anyone knows if blizzard is going to prevent people from kicking members for prejudice reasons. I mean, in all honesty, that's always been one of my biggest fears about a vote kick system. While I couldn't care less what people say to or about me, I'd really rather not be put in a pug just to have someone go "isn't LGBT that gay guild??? Ew, faggots, vote kick him" (28/10/2009)

Another member responded:

"I can completely understand that fear, but what's to stop a group leader from kicking you, or refusing to invite you in the first place, for that reason (being in LGBT) right now? […] And

honestly? If three of the four members of a group were homophobic enough not to want to group with me, I probably wouldn't want to group with them either." (28/10/2009)

While another member thought it would not be an issue:

"I don't think there will be a problem with voting people out because they are gay." (29/10/2009)

LGBT also suffered from spammers from within WoW. In August 2010, a message was sent to all members informing them of a change in invite procedures, due to 'trolls'. A troll is a player who spams discussion forums or chat channels. Many trolls had discovered the chat channel for inviting new members into the movement and were continually spamming the channel, causing problems for the officers. It was not possible for LGBT officers to distinguish between legitimate members and spammers. As a solution, the invite channel was then moved from in-game to LGBT's website.

4.2   The Virtual Field of Power Relations

There are many distinct aspects of WoW, e.g. questing, raiding, factions, cities, zones (friendly/unfriendly), player vs environment, and player vs player. A brief description of these aspects is provided in Appendix B. Without these individual parts, the researcher would not have a full understanding of the pride parade and dance party. It would have been impossible to know what it means (in a virtual world) to have two opposing factions marching side by side in the parade. In a virtual world perspective, due to the gaming nature, these people (players) should be fighting each other, however for the parade, and to promote the greater cause (gay rights), they refrained from usual gaming activities. Similar activities happened for the dance party. During these events, LGBT often opened up temporary guest guilds for non-members to participate. This can also be seen as a way to open up toward the other and restore the power relations (cf. Fleming, 2006).

Although LGBT in WoW is seen as a single guild it is important to remember that it is an LGBT guild because of individual actors who make up LGBT. LGBT is also a family of several guilds. The power relations affect people in the guild as well as relationships between the guilds. An important aspect influencing the organisation of these guilds is the technological requirements of the virtual world. This was evident in October 2010 when Blizzard announced that it would cap the size of guilds to 1020

members before the release of the next expansion pack, Cataclysm. As a result of these actions, by late January 2011, the main LGBT guild had 3,500 players (down from 5,000).

Another power issue relating to this movement having multiple related guilds was that each guild had its own guild chat channel that allows members of each guild to have discussions in-game. This means the power within the guild was distributed but not across the guilds. This situation was further problematised by the technical requirements of the game element of WoW. One of the requirements was that members of another guild (even an affiliated guild) could not share a guild chat channel. Although it can be interpreted as technical design issues, for people involved in a social movement, this suggests a loss of communication that was enforced by the owners of their world (Boellstorff, 2008). These are critical examples of "calculative practices" that are "facilitated by information systems rendering social phenomena visible in a particular way, with two potential effects" (Doolin, 2004, p. 345). The purpose of such practices is to enforce the dominant discourse through technological power structures. To counter this power imbalance, the LGBT movement created an add-on for the game that joins the chat channels for multiple guilds, thus allowing all ten guilds to combine their chat channels as though it were one channel. This is a radical step; more than a technical solution, the social movement attempted to take control of their worldly affairs in their own hands.

4.3   Resistance in the Virtual Field

We observed that some members of LGBT came from countries (or states) where governments ban homosexual acts, while others may come from countries that allow same-sex marriage. This brings a wide range of physical world issues into the movement as well as flavours of resistance to the virtual world. LGBT had a special section of their discussion forum dedicated to physical world LGBT matters. Some of the issues discussed in their virtual social movement included: gay marriage, cures for HIV, support for shelters for LGBT youth, gays in the military; and local politics/elections.

In addition, to resist against the physical world power inside a safe virtual world, coping mechanisms in games are also instances of resisting the power. We observed how members of LGBT engaged in collective sensemaking as ways of resistance to address the change in guild size caps. They petitioned to Blizzard to remove the cap, although they were only partially successful. Blizzard increased the cap

from 600 members to 1,200 members (previously there was no cap). WoW also provides the functionality of allowing players to join group events to kill powerful monsters. Often this brings many different players together. We also observed that some members of the LGBT social movement engaged with issues relating to homophobic language in these events.

> "[…] we have expanded outside of our little community in our day-to-day game time and not everyone is as familiar with [LGBT] customs of politeness. How do you respond when someone uses "gay" or "fag" offensively?" (26 Dec 2010).

From the surface, it might appear as an ordinary social query. However, when we see it from the perspective of oppressed marginal communities, it is a critical example of engaging with communities and finding ways to resist power structures. The above question resulted in a meaningful discussion, vis-a-vis a critical dialogue with the community where one presents their vulnerable self and seek help from the community. To engage in a strategic dialogue is to engage in resistance (Thompson, 2003). A sense of frustration was also visible. One member said he now says nothing because once when he did speak up against the homophobic language, he was kicked out of the group. Another member said that he openly complains about the homophobic language in the group and then leaves, stating that it is just a game and should be a fun event so does not want to deal with this kind of language. This shows the subtle discrimination as LGBT people witnessed microaggression against themselves as being humorously dismissed (for a critical discussion on aggression and humor in LGBT context, see Nadal, Whitman, Davis, Erazo, & Davidoff, 2016).

While humorous language can be used as a disarming mechanism in a critical situation, it is essential to acknowledge that even the light-hearted jokes toward marginal communities can do more harm than good. Nardi (2010, p. 153-157) has discussed some of the critical implications of the everyday gendered language in WoW guilds at length. However, we want to highlight the humorous dismissal in the context of resistance. Another example was observed in an in-game issue related to the design of the actual game. The game consists of predefined conversations with non-player characters (NPC). A player can click on an NPC and then a dialogue box will appear displaying some text said by the NPC. One member protested against how one of the males NPCs makes a homophobic joke: "Homogonized? No thank

you, I like the ladies". Another member jokingly responds that this is discrimination but did not stand up for the LGBT. Although this post was meant to be light-hearted, it demonstrates that the virtual world itself contains the potentiality of discrimination via offensive comments predefined by the designers of the game (e.g., heterosexual design of the guilds).

The resistance had some positive impact on LGBT with unintended negative consequences. Over time, the pride parades became more widely known, and the server that LGBT is based on became known as the gay-friendly server. The founder of LGBT stated that:

> "I think the LGBT has had a huge impact on the personality of the server. Like attracts like, and we've been pleasantly surprised, more than once, at the random and unsolicited support we've gotten from <server name> folks."

The larger presence of LGBT players on the server did, however, create some issues, as other players would create characters on the server and give grief to the LGBT members. For example, creating fake requests to join their movement, spamming LGBT chat groups, and attending the pride parades and making homophobic statements. LGBT members often raised these issues:

> "The server is gayer than a clutch purse on Tony night. I think it's only natural for the huge gay presence to receive both positive and negative attention".

Nonetheless, it was taken positively by some members who felt this was a sign of endearment, and that their presence in WoW was making a greater impact:

> "Griefers and "protesters" have shown up in increasing (but still small) numbers in recent years. This is how you know this event is the shiznit, when people protest it. Screw 'em, ignore 'em"

The resistance perspective also affected the fieldworker. For example, during the mid-stages of this study, the researcher began to question his assumptions about Blizzard. Initially, when he discovered that Blizzard was imposing changes on the virtual world which affected LGBT, he interpreted this in a negative way. He thought that Blizzard was unfair to LGBT and even discriminatory towards them. However, as he engaged more with the text, and particularly with the responses from Blizzard and their

public announcements, he began to see their point of view. Blizzard desires to make a profit and not to lose its player base. The changes it made to WoW were done not to discriminate against LGBT, but to keep the general player population excited so they do not switch to a new game. The implications that these changes had on LGBT were side-effects of the changes, rather than acts of discrimination.

5   Discussion and Conclusions

In this work, using an ethnographic narrative of resistance, we highlighted how the power was exercised on the LGBT community in a virtual world, and their social movement attempted to resist the power. We used the concept of resistance from the critical theory of Foucault to make sense of struggles of LGBT people in a virtual world. This is the first time, as far as we know, an account of the resistance of a marginalised group (LGBT) in a virtual world is discussed using a critical approach. The contributions of this work to the research are in four distinct areas: highlighting the gendered nature of information systems, problematizing gendered landscape of virtual worlds, illustrating social movements in virtual worlds, and virtual technologies as means of resistance in society.

First, our study has extended the prior research on gender and technology by illuminating the gendered nature of virtual environments. In particular, in virtual worlds, gender remains binary, and his hardcoded into the software (Blodgett, Xu, & Trauth, 2007). More than stereotypes and the role of gender in the use of technology (Lin & Wang, 2020), we have shown how power exercised through ICTs can enable or inhibit gendered engagements. The moral and ethical principles underlying everyday technologies also apply to more complex information systems. History shows that technologies were repurposed and reconstructed through gendered engagements (Wajcman, 1991, p. 103). Virtual worlds were long seen as gaming systems that are free of gender and power relations. As we have shown, this is not the case. Virtual worlds are gendered political social environments that can provide safe places of engagement for marginalised groups but also used as a means of oppression.

Second, our critical approach has problematized the binary gender landscape of virtual worlds. Previous studies have taken the position that there is a primary and secondary plane of sexuality in virtual worlds (Nardi, 2010); however, both are treated as heterosexual. We have shown that there is a third plane

comprising the oppressed communities (in our case, LGBT). Hence, we expand the gendered landscape of the virtual world (Brehm, 2013). The focus on non-binary gender rather than a binary view of sexuality (Blodgett, et al., 2007) allows us to understand the full spectrum of sexuality and the associated practices (Baams, Jonas, Utz, Bos, & van der Vuurst, 2011). This also establishes a more inclusive position and dispel stereotypes. We believe that integration of the oppressed plane may also compel us (including researchers, designers, and users) to make sense of resistance in a meaningful way rather than merely countering it with the further exercise of power, which might create further divisions in society.

Third, our work has pointed out that social movements, no matter what their cause, are finding new methods to express themselves or to raise their concerns on a local or global scale mediated by technology. Humans have always found ways to express their concerns, and we have reached an era where virtual worlds and social media are being used as tools for social movements (Blinded, 2019). Going forward, we expect to see a higher number of social movements using a broader range of technologies for demonstration or raising public awareness for their causes. We might also see virtual social movements beginning to have an influence on policymakers (e.g. Braccini, Sæbø, & Federici, 2019; Sam, 2019), or have stronger influences on the physical world equivalents of these movements. As Snow, Soule, and Kriesi (2004) say, we live in a "movement world", which as we have seen now includes virtual worlds and technologies such as social media. For example, we can keenly observe the similarities and differences between our study and that of the #MeToo movement. The #MeToo movement was similar in that it was able to use social media to empower individuals, in this case, to recognise the importance of addressing sexual abuse and to share personal stories (Manikonda, Beigi, Kambhampati, & Liu, 2018). The differences arise from the mobilisation of the communities. We observed that the members of LGBT came together over a long period of time and for various reasons but were primarily motivated by wanting to have a sense of belonging within a heteronormative game. Compared to the #MeToo movement which had a more ad hoc nature arising quite rapidly following the allocations of sexual misconduct of Harvey Weinstein, demonstrating the collective power of people

across various social media platforms (Jaffe, 2018). Digital technologies empower people to come together and provide tools for spreading awareness.

Our fourth and final insight is methodological. Our study reveals that virtual technologies are "double-edged" insofar as they can enforce the dominant discourse but also empower people to resist the domination through various forms of resistance (Bloomfield & Coombs, 1992; Doolin, 2004). The gendered nature of resistance in virtual worlds further sharpens the 'double edges' and thus requires careful engagement. First, as we have shown that these virtual worlds are not separate fantasy worlds but mirror not just our social lives (Behm-Morawitz, 2013) but also the complex power-infused realities of the everyday world, this suggests that a domination strategy (exercise of power) in a technological context (Citation Suppressed) will have far-reaching consequences in forms of resistance from the oppressed (such as LGBT social movement). Second, forms of resistance are now bleeding into the digital context (such as virtual social movements) and also emerging in the virtual worlds, e.g., many social movements nowadays emerge on Twitter and other digital platforms and have consequences for society at large.

Our study has some practical implications as well. We found that members of an oppressed group (in our case, the LGBT population) are particularly sensitive to a change in power relation. Often what is dismissed as a technical change can be harmful to the oppressed. When a virtual place was destroyed by a software upgrade, it was not just a new version of the existing software, it was a new version of reality. Therefore, the managers and policymakers are advised to pay attention to the diversity in work and social environments and ensure that a technical change is aligned with the everyday social reality of the people. Similarly, our findings call for a more inclusive and diverse workplace as well as society writ large[6]. Many otherwise harmless unwritten and unspoken rules and regulations can wield greater and destructive power over the oppressed (Hodson, Jackson, Cukier, & Holmes, 2018). By incorporating the oppressed and marginalized values and identities in social and organizational policies,

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[6] See *The Workplace Pride* and *The Declaration of Amsterdam*, which calls for and suggests a range of strategies towards inclusivity and a greater acceptance of LGBT in society.
https://workplacepride.org/download/declaration-of-amsterdam

steps can be taken toward an inclusive society, a world where many worlds exist together (Escobar, 2018).

A limitation of this study is that the fieldwork was conducted between January 2010 and November 2012. Despite the temporal distance from the event, we believe our findings still relevant to the contemporary society. Similar problems persist in the contemporary discourse. A recent report revealed that digital platforms such as YouTube continue to discriminate against the LGBT population[7]. Hence our findings are still relevant to the contemporary LGBT groups. LGBT have now also expanded into other virtual worlds and environments such as Final Fantasy and Star Wars. Findings are also limited by the single virtual world and a specific social movement. Future research could explore other virtual and non-virtual settings that LGBT movement has expanded into or include other recent social movements of the oppressed such as #IdleNoMore (Ortiz, et al., 2019). Another limitation of this study is that Blizzard (the game developer organization) refused to be involved in our research. Although this is a common problem faced by many WoW researchers (Nardi, 2010), future researchers are encouraged to involve the interested games developers. Finally, researchers are also encouraged to take quantitative and experimental approaches to studying the ideas we have presented.

In conclusion, we hope that our study redirects the scholarly gaze of the scholarship to the more sensitive and less explored aspects of gender and power. Although rights of the oppressed communities have been evolved significantly (at least in some parts of the developed world), the relevant empirical research has to catch up and critically engage with the contemporary dialogue. Future studies should consider how practitioners and policymakers can learn from the marginalised practices and how to bring those practices from the margin to the centre of the design and management of technologies and make way toward a more inclusive digital society.

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[7] "YouTube discriminates against LGBT content by unfairly culling it, suit alleges," see
https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/08/14/youtube-discriminates-against-lgbt-content-by-unfairly-culling-it-suit-alleges/

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Appendix A WoW Sample Patch

Patch 4.0.3a notes

The Shattering of Azeroth

In the frigid wastes of Northrend, the final battle against the merciless Lich King ended in victory for Azeroth's defenders. Upon returning home, veterans of the unforgiving conflict against the Scourge were showered with praise for their valiant sacrifices, while the honorable dead were mourned. Yet as hope flared anew in the wake of the Lich King's fall, Azeroth's native elemental spirits grew confused and erratic, setting off a series of deadly natural disasters. Horde and Alliance leaders scrambled for clues about the troubling state of the world, but nothing could have prepared them for what was to come.

Without warning, the corrupted Dragon Aspect, Deathwing, erupted from the stone heart of Deepholm, the domain of earth within the Elemental Plane. Jagged fissures were torn across the earth, and monstrous waves pummeled coastal regions. From Thousand Needles to the Blasted Lands, the surface of Azeroth was reforged through violent upheavals. Now, the Horde and the Alliance must defend their homes against Deathwing and his minions, burdened by the unsettling fact that the world as they know it has changed... forever.

General

- Azeroth Shattered

    - Deathwing's return has had an immeasurable impact throughout the Eastern Kingdoms and Kalimdor. Players will notice drastically altered terrain, thousands of new quests from levels 1-60, and updated level ranges for some zones to improve the questing flow.

- New Race/Class Combinations

    - In the wake of a world on the brink of destruction, members of the Horde and Alliance have taken to new cultures and studies, mastering crafts previously foreign to them. Many existing playable races now have new class combinations.

- The World of Warcraft: Cataclysm cinematic trailer and login screen have been added to the game.

- Experience required to gain levels 71 through 80 has been reduced by 20%, which increases levelling rate by 25%.

- Many quests in zones on Eastern Kingdoms and Kalimdor have been removed from the game to make way for new adventures. These quests have been automatically removed from players' Quest Logs.

The patch note is too long to present here in its entirety, the remainder of the patch note can be found at: https://wow.gamepedia.com/Patch_4.0.3a

Appendix B WoW Related Terms

Character: the player's avatar that they use to explore the virtual world.

Non player character (NPC): A computer controlled character or animal.

Quest: a series of activities provided by a quest giver, an NPC. Upon completion of the quest, the player is rewarded with experience points, money, an item, or any combination of these.

Raid: a large number of players cooperating, often for hours at a time, in order to defeat a powerful monster than a solo player alone would not be able to defeat.

Level: one of the most important activities in WoW is levelling a character. To achieve a higher level, the character must perform quests and kill in-game monsters, or participate in raids, which reward experience points. Once a character has earnt enough experience points, they will "level up". Levelling up increases the strength and power of the character, and allows them to learn new spells and abilities which may only be available once a character has achieved a certain level. Levelling is also important because it allows a character to travel around Azeroth.

Faction: there are two factions, Horde and Alliance, who are at war with each other. A player chooses which faction they want to belong to. Communication with players on the opposing faction is not possible.

Azeroth: the world in which WoW is set. This world is comprised of three major continents and several smaller islands.

Zone: each continent is also divided up into zones. Each zone is suited to characters of a certain level, and may have political alignment to the major factions of WoW, or may be considered a neutral zone

City/town/village: each zone usually consists of a city and smaller towns and villages. Players of opposing factions may not be able to enter politically aligned cities and towns.

Player vs. Environment (PvE): the player-controlled character competing against the game world and its NPCs, as opposed to Player vs Player (PvP).

Player vs Player (PvP): the player-controlled character combating other players of the opposing faction.