

# Music and the World of Warcraft

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## Introduction

Music is becoming more ubiquitous in today's culture, making its way into many aspects of everyday life. The development of the Walkman and then the iPod allow people to choose what genre of music they want to listen to in a public setting, rather than listening to whatever is on the radio. Michael Bull found that "The creation of a personalized soundworld through iPod use creates a form of accompanied solitude for its users in which they feel empowered, in control and self-sufficient."<sup>[1]</sup> Music has become a decidedly important defining characteristic of an individual and the activity they choose to conduct while listening to music. This also holds true of various social networking tools like Myspace and Facebook, which give people online identities and ways to connect through certain media that offers specialized value to users.<sup>[2]</sup>

As people spend more and more time in front of their computers, approximately 54 million people in the United States alone<sup>[7]</sup>, video gaming has become increasingly popular. Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG's) in particular have grown in popularity, showing even greater interest in various methods of social interaction with online identities.

One game in particular that has come to the forefront of this MMO revolution is World of Warcraft(WoW). The entire game takes place within a digitally constructed universe called Azeroth.Users create various avatars that they use to complete quests, fight against other characters, and interact with other gamers. WoW combines a fantasy setting with social interactions among gamers around the world in the same sense that Facebook and MySpace do, but with many immersive elements such as roleplaying. Along with gaming and social interaction, World of Warcraft is also host to unique in-game music, which serves as a critical means for players to immerse themselves further into the fantasy world of Azeroth. Music, while

it may seem peripheral, plays such a large part in video gaming that we believe we can identify a connection between the relation of exterior music to fantasy video games.

After extensive reading from multiple World of Warcraft forums, it became quite apparent that music is an integral part to the gaming experience for many players. As music and game cultures expand, we seek to observe the interactions between the two. By examining the music tastes and tendencies of people playing World of Warcraft, we aim to first confirm and then determine why more players listen to rock/metal than other genres of music.

## **Background**

Thousands of new artists' spring up yearly in hopes of achieving the same fame and wealth that Hollywood glorified musicians receive. Due to the struggle to produce identifiably unique music and the constant technological advances we experience, the variety of music that exists has expanded immensely. Apple, a Silicon Valley tech company, announced in January 2009 that over 6 billion songs had been downloaded from its iTunes music store service since its creation in April 2003 and that the available database for song download consisted of over 10 million songs.<sup>[13]</sup> On February 24<sup>th</sup> 2010, Apple announced that over 10 billion songs had been downloaded.<sup>[14]</sup> Over 6 billion songs were downloaded in the approximately 6 year period from 2003 to 2009, whereas in the year between January of 2009 and February of 2010, 4 billion more songs were downloaded from iTunes, a 66% increase in downloads. One particularly popular and fairly newly emerged genre of music is heavy rock and metal.

Rock music began to gain much of its popularity in the 1940's. The use of electric guitars and a steady drum beat revolutionized the world of music and brought about an aggressive, new subgenre called heavy metal.<sup>[4]</sup> Characterized by heavy distortion, harsh vocals, and intense

drum, bass, and guitar styles, metal grew in popularity in the 1980's and blossomed into a full on force in the music industry in the early 90's. Bands such as Guns N' Roses and Metallica brought the genre alive by selling millions of albums and selling out venues across the globe. Following these legends, groups such as Slipknot and Mudvayne have continued to keep the heavier end of the genre popular, maintaining a dedicated fan base of metalheads. Bands like Korn and Disturbed take the middle ground, attracting both rock and metal fans with their somewhat less harsh sound. According to a study done by Jeffrey Arnett, when adolescent boys were asked why they liked listening to this genre of music, many participants replied that they appreciate the skill of the performers, namely that of the guitarists.<sup>[5]</sup> While metal music has a certain intricacy to it, so too do immersive computer games.

Another virtual phenomenon on par with the exploding iTunes sales that confirms increased internet use is World of Warcraft, released on November 23, 2004 by Blizzard Entertainment. In December 2008 a press release on the website revealed news that the game had more than 11.5 million monthly subscribers. World of Warcraft was also named the Best PC game of 2005 and 2006, according to Blizzard Entertainment. In 2007, World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, the first expansion pack to World of Warcraft, was named game of the year.<sup>[8]</sup> More recently, the release of the second expansion pack, Wrath of the Lich King, shattered the first day sales record with an astounding 2.8 million copies sold in the first 24 hours. The record was previously held by The Burning Crusade.<sup>[9]</sup> To understand the game's success, it is crucial to look to its similarity to the aforementioned social networking sites.

Warcraft is a medium in which players can meet real life friends or make new ones, just like Facebook. Players can create a customizable character and assume any role or personality they so desire in order to dive into the World or to interact with others. Even if a gamer joins the

World of Warcraft without knowing anyone else, bonds naturally develop between players as they either choose to or are forced to interact due to the largely group-based nature of the game. Once people get to know each other better, they will share music tastes to determine whether or not they have more in common. Music is an important part of social interaction; Facebook has a 'Favorite Music' section under personal information. Not only is popular music important, but so too is the background music within the game.

To attest to its success, the WoW: Wrath of the Lich King original game soundtrack received an average rating of 5 stars from 183 reviews on iTunes. Fassbender et al. found that in a visual and audio immersive learning environment, particular game soundtracks influenced the quantity of information remembered and that those who were more immersed into the virtual environment performed better.<sup>[17]</sup> The World of Warcraft soundtrack ranged from calming music to upbeat and dramatic crescendos, all fitting of the situation in which the soundtrack played.

The millions of people who play online video games have that interaction in common. When playing online with each other, however indirectly, there is a sense of being in a comfortable and accepting setting. Video gaming brings people together, as witnessed by the growing popularity of conventions and Local Area Network parties. Historically, music has done the same thing. Concerts and music festivals draw enormous amounts of people worldwide. Ozzy Osbourne played at BlizzCon 2009, combining these unifiers and further integrating popular music into the World of Warcraft.

According to a study done by Eladhari et al., one benefit of listening to music while gaming is "The ability to induce mood to the player as a means to increase the level of immersion in the game."<sup>[6]</sup> Rock and metal music tend to be a genre in which members can really get involved, just like World of Warcraft.

Up to a certain softness of sound, mosh pits form at nearly all metal shows and are encouraged by the band performing. A mosh pit forms when a number of people in a tightly packed audience begin shoving each other and throwing elbows. For the most part, this is not a display of violence or show of aggression but a catharsis. In the pit, the only things going on in the mosher's head are the music, the exultation of physical release, and the sense of commonality with the others around them. Nick Yee found that many players use MMO's as a way to deal with chronic stress from work and life that "seemed to function as a way of gaining a sense of peace at the end of the day."<sup>15]</sup> Han et al. found that "short-term therapeutic effects of music listening results in substantial reduction in physiological stress responses arising from anxiety." These similarities provide an interesting look into the psychological impacts of playing MMO's and listening to music.

If the music provided within the game is so integral to immersion, the question of why people choose to listen to other music while playing arises. This is the question we chose to look at in this study in hopes of determining an answer.

## **Method**

The research we conducted aims to identify and expand upon the connection of music-listening habits of gamers to music-listening habits while playing World of Warcraft. We made use of surveys and World of Warcraft online discussion forums to gather our data.

### **Study 1**

The first method we employed was to conduct research on forums across the web to determine what music players listen to during gameplay. We initiated threads and also recovered

information from ones already existent. The threads we initiated we did not post on twice so that we could in no way influence results. The question asked was always a variation of the following: “So what is everyone listening while playing WoW?”

Several different websites were used to collect information. WorldofWarcraft.com was the primary website used. Zam.com and. Wowladies.com were also used. On the World of Warcraft forums, the thread that was initiated outside of our influence was found in the General Discussion category. We posted our thread in both the General Discussion and the Off-Topic forums. Information was gathered from both Zam and Wowladies; no discussion topics were posted.

### **Terminology**

The term gamer was very loosely defined. The sole contingency was that the person plays or has played World of Warcraft, which allowed us to inquire regarding auditory habits during that time period, however long.

### **Compiling Results**

When tabulating results, the different genres of music were nearly all determined using iTunes. Conducting a search on the iTunes useful of either the song or artist listed provided a genre of music. We felt this to be a solid control because Apple is consistent in its classification of music. The few musicians that were not found on iTunes were Googled. In each case, the artists’ MySpace or personal website was found and the genre was determined from the musician’s self-proclaimed style.

### **Defining Music Genres**

The category Rock/Metal includes all subcategories of each that display decidedly similar styles or descended directly from one of the two. Genres that were part of the label include but

are not limited to metal, heavy metal, rock, hardcore, post-hardcore, metalcore, alternative metal, punk rock, hard rock, and thrash metal.

The category Electronic/Techno includes but was not limited to techno, electronic, house, trance, dance, dubstep, and drum'n'bass.

The category Anime consists of music based in anime culture, such as Pokemon and Naruto.

Rap and Hip-hop, Pop, Alt, and In-game are all easier genres to define. iTunes music categorization was deferred to fully here.

Lastly, the category Other was used to group the remaining results into a meaningful category instead of single genres. Genres included in the category Other were big band, classical, and world music.

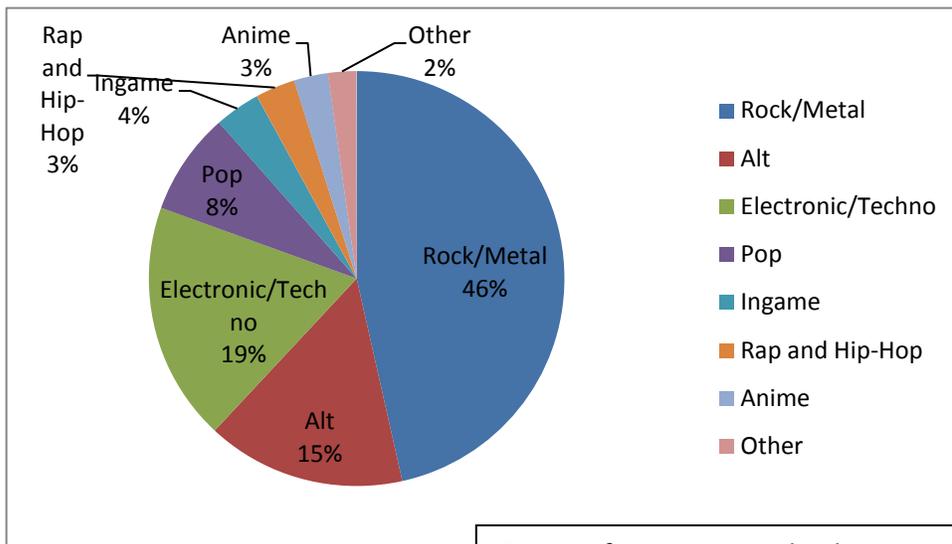
## **Study 2**

The second part of our research was conducted via a survey that was distributed in various methods. The survey contained questions regarding preferred music genres, music preference while playing WoW, and basic background questions. The survey was passed out to 19 students who are WoW gamers. Names were not requested and the surveys were anonymous. 5 surveys were sent to WoW players in-game who agreed to answer the questions. Despite the fact some of the in-game surveys had to be conducted in the form of an interview, the interviewer did not stray from the survey questions and copied answers word for word. The survey questions can be found in Appendix 1.

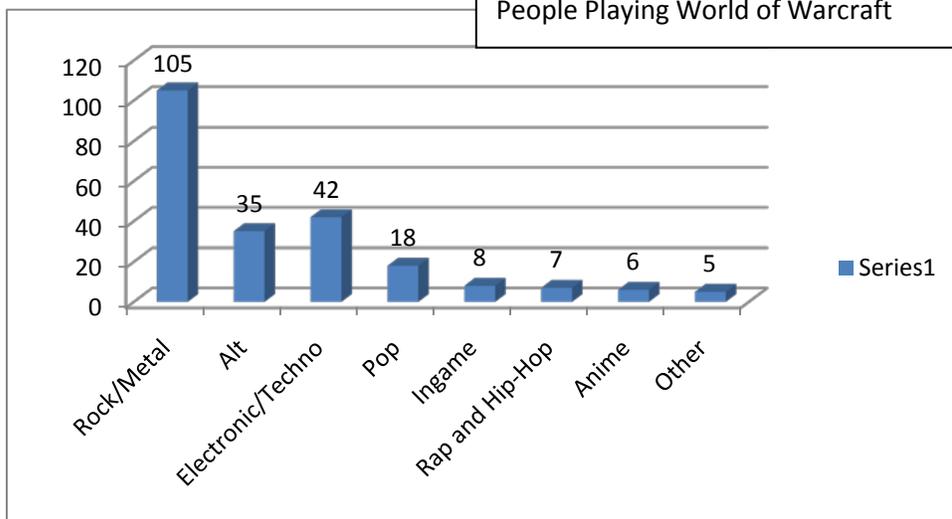
# Results

## Study 1

Ultimately, 226 forum posts from WorldofWarcraft.com and WowLadies.com were analyzed. The hypothesis was supported in the aspect that a majority of people listen to Metal/Rock while playing World of Warcraft. The category Rock/Metal consisted of 46.46% of the participants (n=105). The next closest genre listened to while playing WoW was Electronic/Techno with 18.58% (n=42). Alt and Pop followed with 15.48% (n=35) and 7.96% (n=18), respectively. In-game accounted for 3.53% (n=8), Rap/Hip-Hop for 3.09% (n=7), Anime for 2.65% (n=6), and Other for 2.21% (n=5).



Genres of Music Listened to by People Playing World of Warcraft



## **Study 2**

The qualitative data was extremely varied, so we will begin by relating the qualitative aspect of the survey. Of the 24 people surveyed, 20 were male and 4 were female. Ages ranged from 18 to 27 years old, with a mean of 19.58 years old. Hours played per week ranged from .5 to 50 hours with an average of 3.66 hours. The standard deviation for hours played was large, at 12.24. 16 players were alliance and 7 were horde.

A number of trends were found within the answers explaining participants' music preference while playing; trends were even observed between the 3 categories of music choice, in-game, other, or none. The following data are all responses to the 'please elaborate' on music listened to while playing.

### **Same Music As Always**

A number of the participants noted that they listen to the same type of music they always listen to when playing WoW. We found this trend among 10 of the participants, whether or not it was directly mentioned under reasons.

- "I just put my itunes on shuffle, just to be able to listen to the stuff I like" (19 male)
- "rap because its just my fav type of music" (24 male)
- "metal or rap because it's the music I like" (18 male)

Some mentioned other reasons for listening to their favorite genre of music, such as getting pumped up, but most directly explained the reason to be that it is what they always listen to.

## **Affects Gameplay**

8 of the participants' responses indicated a direct connection between choice of music and the way it affects how they play the game or the way they feel when they play the game. A noticeably common trend of responses was that upbeat music amplifies gameplay by adding enthusiasm.

- “probably alternative metal because it has a high paced beat for when I pvp” (19 male)
- “techno, cuz it pumps me up!” (27 female)
- “metal! It gets me pumped for raiding” (19 male)
- “on my dk all the time I just listen to rock, on my druid rap for pvp, and then for pve on my druid either rap or soft rock cos the music is generally fast and it pumps me up” (16 male)

The last response was the greatest indication of music tastes changing in direct regard to activities in-game.

## **Unimportant/Irrelevant**

We found that a number of players choose not to put on music while playing World of Warcraft, or leave the game sounds on without thinking about it.

- “because I did not think of listening to other music while playing” (19 male)
- “I usually don't play long enough or it doesn't occur to me to listen to any” (19 male)

5 participants fell within this category, and of those 3 listen to no music and 2 listen to in-game music.

## **Discussion**

### **Study 1**

The quantitative research confirmed the hypothesis that when playing World of Warcraft, it is likely that a person would be listening to metal/rock than any other genre of music. We do not find this too surprising considering the close relationship the game and its producer Blizzard has. A metal band named the The Artists Formerly Known As Level 80 Elite Tauren Chieftans (TAFKAL80ETC) was formed in 2003 by a number of Blizzard employees, and they sing about the lore of Warcraft, Starcraft, and Diablo, and have had their songs featured in said games. TAFKAL80ETC played at Blizzcon 2008, and Ozzy Osbourne, a well renowned metal singer, played at Blizzcon 2009. It makes sense that Blizzard, masters at keeping approximately eleven and a half million people interested in playing one game for nearly 6 years would cater to the music tastes of its players.

As laid out in the background, the fusion of video gaming and music must seem only natural to people walking into a convention hall filled with Blizzard memorabilia but blasting metal. Combining two things people enjoy amplifies their effect and provides for a great experience.

It was not difficult to obtain data for this study due in large part to the fact that so many pre-existing direct responses already exist on the internet. It may be time consuming, but we would recommend taking a larger sample size so that in depth statistical analysis may be conducted on results to determine level of significance and confidence.

Also, for data to be 100% reliable a control would need to be set. By using different threads and websites to gather data, and by the very fact that people can post anonymously on as many avatars as they please, there is no way to tell in this study whether or not any one given person responded more than once.

## **Study 2**

We feel that the qualitative research cannot be used as legitimate data to draw an effective conclusion from because the participants surveyed are very atypical of the general WoW gaming population. The NPD Group found that the average number of hours spent per week on online gaming in 2010 is 8, a 10% increase from 2009.<sup>[11]</sup> Of a total of 232 hours played per week by the 24 participants in the survey, 5 of those participants account for 150 of those hours. That means that 20.8% of the sample survey size accounts for 64.65% of the total hours played. Subtract those 5 individuals and the remaining 19 average 4.02 average hours of play per week. Another thing that needs to be taken into account is the fact that 4 of the 5 who make up 65% of the hours played were 4 of 5 who were surveyed on WoW itself.

In a survey conducted in 2005, Nick Yee found that “the average age of the WoW player is 28.3 (SD = 8.4). 84% of players are male. 16% are female. Female players are significantly older (M = 32.5, SD = 10.0) than male players (M = 28.0, SD = 8.4).”<sup>[13]</sup> The qualitative survey was similar when it came to distribution of sex: 16.6% female and 83.3% male. However, the age and age SD vary greatly. The average age is 19.5 (SD = 2.4). This is certainly enough to refute that the sample population is not indicative of the general WoW population.

This is further supported by a number of the qualitative responses. In addition to the responses posted above, the following is another response as to why an individual does not listen to music while playing:

“I don’t play the game enough to care.” (18 male)

Our final question was whether or not playing World of Warcraft had affected the player’s music taste. Only one responded that the game had directly affected his music taste. The way we see it is that not only did most participants of the survey not play WoW enough, but that they have not been playing for an extended period of time.

Our suggestion to further researchers in this field is better identify and isolate the questions we asked by setting a more reliable control and/or screening participants. Although directly affected by it, amount of play time is not as important when determining reasons for listening to music while gaming because one may happen upon other interesting social interactions or phenomenon. However, we suggest targeting a population of WoW players who spend greater amounts of time than average playing, and who have a long history of doing so. We believe this will increase the likelihood of positive responses, thus allowing a more in depth analysis of extended gameplay on auditory habits while playing World of Warcraft.

# Appendix 1

## SURVEY

Age:

Gender:

What is your favorite genre of music, if you had to put a label on it?

On average, how many hours a week do you play World of Warcraft?

What is your class and faction?

What is your race in the game?

What type of music do you listen to while playing the game?

- a. in-game music
- b. other music
- c. no music

If in game music, please elaborate on genre and why chosen?

If other music, please elaborate on genre and why chosen?

If no music, please elaborate on why you don't listen to music?

Has playing these games affected your taste in music? If so, please elaborate.

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