

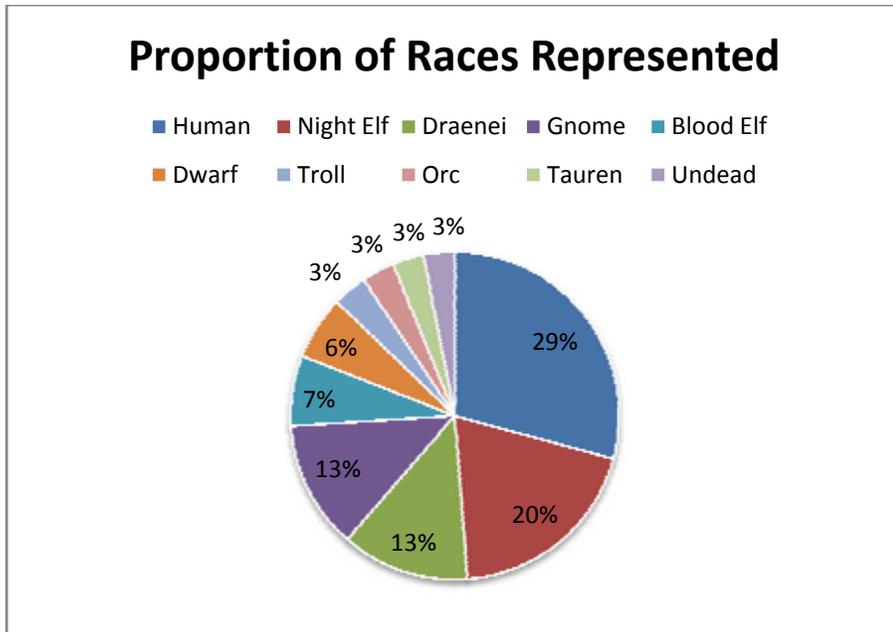
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No Really, What's in a Name?

Names are often given a great deal of attention, with copious baby name books and personalized towels, cups, trinkets and socks written in hundreds, thousands of names. But in life a person may pass through several names, not just nicknames from friend to friend, but with titles as well, and a single person may be known by an uncountable number of names. And yet there is sometimes the sense that a person could not be the same without the name attached, and perhaps this is the reason for such attention and focus. Many people often seem inclined to believe that names can have an effect over their bearers, and that the two must fit each other. And how does all this affect the avatars of gamers, most especially the names of characters participating in a huge social system, as in World of Warcraft? One way to approach the issue is by looking at how the name relates directly to the character as it exists in game, be it human, troll, warrior, mage, male or female. The aim of this essay, then, is to explore the trends of these names using a system created for such a project, attempting to see where gamers are more inclined to name an avatar one way or another.

Using data collecting largely from a PvP server on the Alliance side, I have compiled a set of names with the corresponding race, class and gender and put each one into a category that determines how the name correlates with some aspect of the character, if at all. As this paper progresses, I will explain each category and show some of the findings of that category. The reader should be warned, however, as the placement of one name into a particular category is on a high subjective basis, as only an active player can make certain correlations but may be very

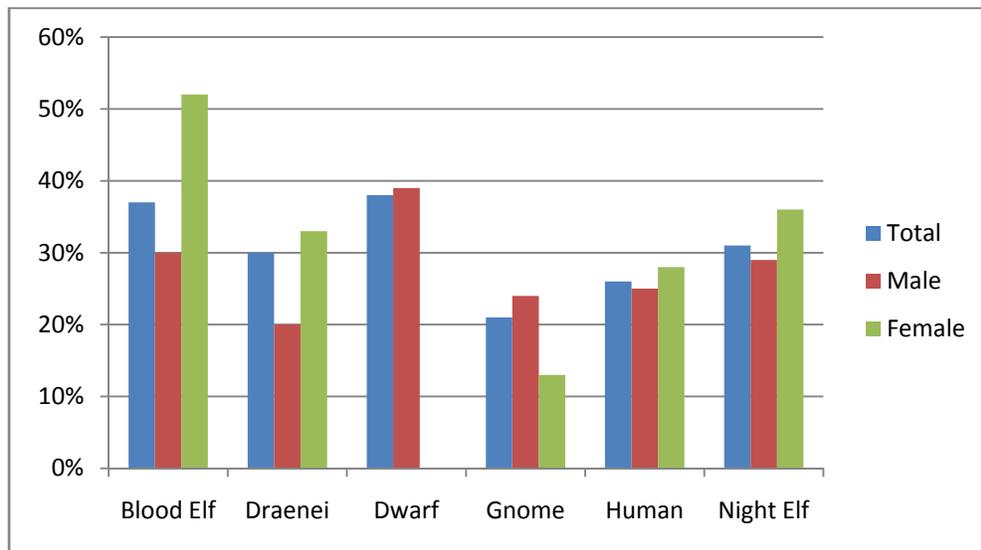
easily biased – I nevertheless defend the exercise as valuable, because even though only one opinion is represented here, I will make great effort to define my categories such that there should be little question as to the validity of categorizing any particular name. Also, the inequality of Alliance to Horde names may indeed skew some reflection of the numbers, but will hopefully still prove valuable.



Race/Gender

This category has by far the largest number of names, perhaps because it is both vague and lacking in easy description. The short of this description is that the name should easily fit into the lore and continuity of the world narrative, i.e. it should match the race and gender of the character and could have potentially been drawn from the random name generator provided by the game (most names will only appear when a certain choice of race and gender has been selected). Names in this category should not necessarily relate to the class of the character, as the idea of this category is that this is a name such a character would be born with, without any regards to a choice of profession later on. Below is a chart showing how frequently this type of

name was given to the race, including the differences between the genders. Four out of five races (excluding the Dwarves, whose sample base of females was too low) have females scoring higher than males, suggesting that gamers are more apt to give female characters a name that befits their race and gender, nothing else.



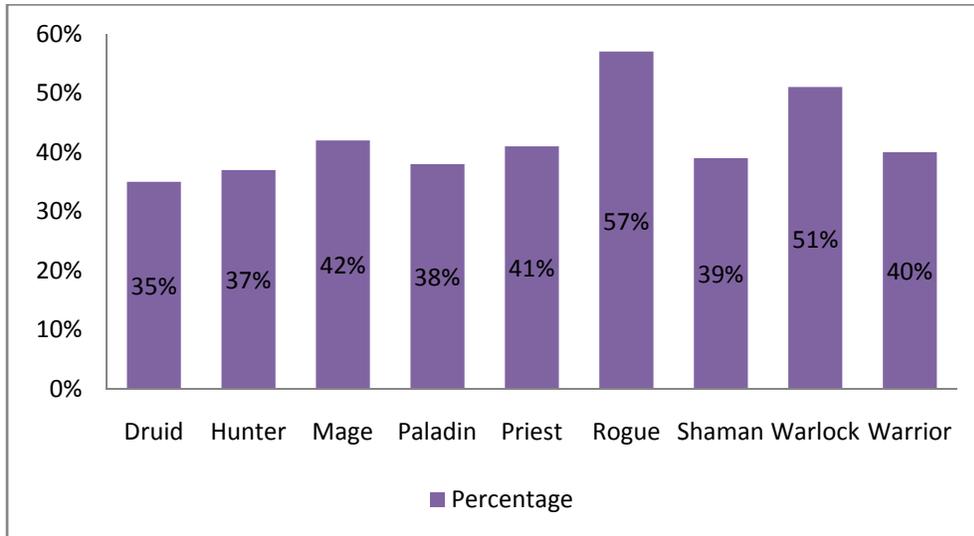
A sampling of names I have placed under *race/gender* includes:

- Aestra, Female Blood Elf Priest
- Locar, Male Human Rogue
- Muga, Male Orc Shaman
- Kaleneia, Female Draenei Shaman

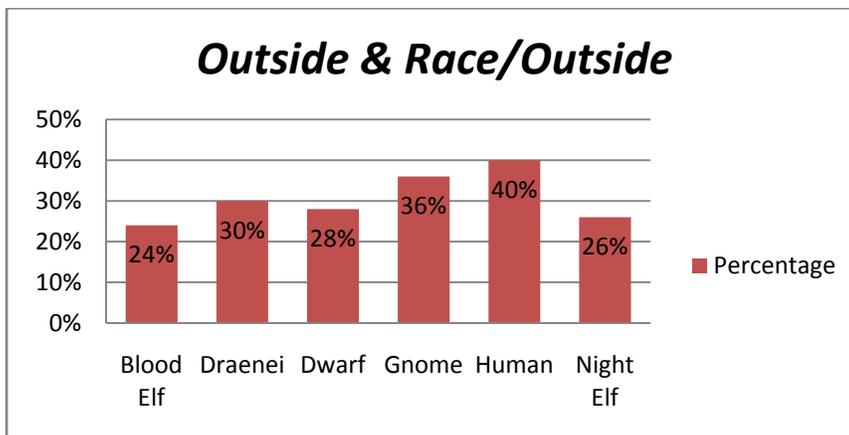
Outside

This category is for names that should not exist within the lore of the game or take inspiration from something in our own world. This can include names that use normal English words (Iseeyou, male Draenei Warrior), make a cultural reference (Pizzadahut, male Gnome Warlock), or perhaps make use of gamer slang (Pwnmiscuous, male Human Rogue). While there is a significantly large amount of names that I have categorized under this label, it is rather doubtful that there will be any major trends among the genders, races or classes. However, when coupled with other related categories, such as *class/outside* (where there is a connection to the class, but

is made in ways described above), *gender/outside* and *race/outside*, we may begin to see some trends.



The chart above shows that of all the Rogues in the set, nearly 60% of them were placed into either the *outside* or *class/outside* category, suggesting that players who name these characters are probably most motivated by outside influences, such as other games, pop culture, or the gaming community. As Rogues are common in PvP, there is a potential for bias – seeing that all the Alliance data was collected from a PvP server, the gamers on such a server may not be motivated as quickly to have names that suit the lore, but they simply need a name for their character, so most anything will suffice. Let us now take a look at *outside* and *race/outside*.



In this group we see that Humans have scored the highest. In a manner not unlike the situation with the Rogues mentioned above, many new players may first go to Humans, as they are normally the most straightforward and easiest to look upon. But being new players, they may not be so concerned with how well a name fits, but simply want to start playing, so most anything will suffice.

A sampling of some names placed into the *outside* categories includes:

- Killershrimp, male Gnome Warlock
- Dryice, male Tauren Druid
- Snickerz, female Night Elf Hunter
- Deadlyassassi, male Gnome Rogue

Conclusion

Though quite short and using a limited sample set, this essay begins to explain some of the apparent trends in how players name their characters. Though the exact motives will be almost entirely dependent on the gamer him/herself, there is little denying that there are some marked trends on how many players choose to name a particular race or class. There is some more work to be done in this area, perhaps mostly exploring the ways players relate to the in-game avatar they use and the concept of this self-creation, and this writer humbly hopes that this adds to the conversation.