Chapter 6:

Myth, Symbolism, Ritual, Magic, Narrative, Culture, and Conflict

Sarah Lynne Bowman ❖ Simon Brind
Elektra Diakolambrianou ❖ Kjell Hedgard Hugaas
Guus Quinten van Tilborg ❖ Josephine Baird
Alessandro Giovannucci

6.1 Introduction

So far, we have explored the structure of transformative role-playing games and their design with particular attention on the framing surrounding them and safety practices. In this chapter, we will dive more deeply into the types of mythic and symbolic content, cultural representations, conflicts, and ritual activities embedded in the game's design itself. While the structure provides the container within which transformation can take place and the safety within which it is held, the content within RPGs provides the narrative and metaphorical potency that often activates processes of transformation.

6.2 Myth

As humans, we tend to crave explanatory models for our experiences in life and the big questions surrounding existence. These models can be scientific in nature or they can be more humanistic and metaphorical. Myth allows us to contextualize important moments in humanity within a larger-than-life, epic, or supernatural framework. Typical questions we seek to answer through myth include:

1. **Creation:** Understanding how life began, how humans came to be, and our relationship relative to forces greater than ourselves;

2. **Maturation:** Coming into one's own as an individual being, finding inner strength to face challenges, understanding one's role in relation to others, and learning how to engage in the world ethically according to a moral code; and

3. **Apotheosis:** Facing the inevitable end of the self and the world as we know it, transcending human limitations, and learning what happens to our consciousness after death.

Such stories not only provide guidance in times of questioning, but they also imbue life with meaning far beyond our mundane experience.

Note that while some people experience myth as purely metaphorical or even literary, others believe in the absolute truth of such stories. Regardless of whether or not literal "truth" is embedded in these stories, the experience of something profound and true within them can be intensely moving for individuals.

It is this productive space between the "real" and "not real" within which much of role-playing games take place, whether realistic, fantasy, science fiction, or some other genre. We can consider the transformative space within games occupying this "somewhat" real space. The narratives are fictional, but often the potency of their symbols or the meanings particular moments communicate to us are profoundly important. When deeply immersed in a role-playing game, we *pretend to believe* that the events that take place are happening to us through the lens of our character's subjectivity (Pohjola 2004), also called perspective taking (Kaufman and Libby 2012). Unlike the *willing suspension of disbelief* (Coleridge 1985), in which we suspend social reality to passively encounter the narrative of another person as with traditional storytelling, when we pretend to believe, we actively adopt belief in the storyworld, and the people within it.

Such myths are especially important in an increasingly fragmented and secularized society within which common myths and rituals surrounding them are less common, which gives role-playing games a particularly important space to fill (Beltrán 2012). Playful engagement with living myth is one of the methods through which we can directly re-enchant everyday life, even if viewed through an *ironic imagination* that understands such stories to be fictional (Saler 2012). Returning back to concepts from Chapter 3 regarding narrative therapy and identity, these stories can become ways to make our own lives more intelligible and even rewrite the stories we tell about ourselves into ones that are more empowering (Andersen and Meland 2020; Bowman and Hugaas 2021; Tanenbaum 2022; Diakolambrianou and Bowman 2023).

Inspired by the work of Stephen Larsen (1990), Craig Page (2014) has explored the ways that players engage in mythmaking around particular larp communities. He identifies three layers of myth occurring in the context of a long-term post-apocalyptic campaign larp, *Dystopia* Rising (2009-):

1. **The World Myth,** or broader fiction within which the game takes place. Within the World Myth, he further delineates the *a) Immediate Myth,* or the Lie Agreed Upon, the basic information everyone should know entering the game; and *b) The Meta Myth*, the overarching metaplot within which these events are situated. Page explains that the Meta Myth is not always necessary for play, describing a short freeform larp as a counter example;

2. **The Heroic Myth,** referring to the character's journey, an "even playing ground" within which the players explore their character and themselves. As self-discovery is central to this layer of myth, the degree to which the character's archetype is "heroic" is less important;

3. **The Player Myth**, referring to the stories players tell after the game about their own characters and the stories of other characters. Page (2014)

explains that these stories "take on lives of their own, become learning experiences, and form the basis for cultural identity in the group in their making" (68).

Thus, just as myths often serve as the foundation for social structures in larger cultural contexts, mythmaking in role-playing games can similarly unite players under the same shared fictional umbrella, with the specific codes, meanings, and jargon attached to it. For more on narrative more broadly, see Chapter 4.

a) The hero's journey, archetypes, individuation, and counternarratives

Page's Heroic Myth references a pivotal theory related to myths of maturation called the *hero's journey*, or *monomyth*. While several versions of the hero's journey arose in the early twentieth century (see e.g., Rank 2004; Neumann 2014), by far the most well known was popularized by Joseph Campbell (1973). In its most simplified form, the hero's journey involves a male protagonist embarking on a quest within which he faces obstacles, often in the form of "monsters" that he defeats, in order to step into glory. Such glory can include receiving an important item, taking a role in helping rule the society he defends, and/or entering *apotheosis*, or spiritual transcendence in some form.

While the hero receives help along the way, side characters are there to support his individual success rather than existing in a symbiotic community structure. For this reason, the hero's journey has been critiqued as a Western male individualism fantasy which reproduces colonial structures, particularly when reproduced as violent power fantasies within RPGs (Bowman 2024). *Dungeons & Dragons* in particular models the less psychologically potent aspects of the hero's journey in the form of defeating "monsters," leveling, and gaining items. However, it is important to note that some players still find great empowerment through playing the hero's journey through *D&D* (see e.g., Walters 2021).

What is often missed in critiques of the hero's journey is its metaphoric role as evocative of the awakening of human consciousness, confrontation with one's Shadow within the unconscious, and growth into maturation (Bowman in press for 2024). The Shadow refers to the personal aspects of one's consciousness that one seeks to deny, suppress, and disavow. Also contained within the Shadow are aspects of the collective that societies hide underneath a peaceful surface exterior, for example, our tendency toward cruelty and destruction.

For Campbell, this inner journey is one of *individuation*, a concept by Carl Jung (1976) referring to the process by which people engage in *active imagination* in which they unearth their "inner images" similar to a waking dream; interact with *archetypes* within both their personal and collective unconscious; and evolve their Self-concept as a result of this confrontation. A concept arising from Plato's ideal forms, archetypes refer to archaic patterns embedded within human consciousness that express themselves through culture in limited ways, but have an essential potency that causes

them to replicate cross-culturally (Jung 1964). Regardless of whether one views these archetypes as inherent structures within all humans or a result of cultural patterns, this process has been connected to the process of enacting characters in role-playing games (Beltrán 2012, 2013; Burns 2014; Bowman 2012, 2017a, in press for 2025).

As evidenced by *D&D* and other RPGs, archetypes can be powerful design tools (Bowman 2010), as players can easily slip into the familiar character types. Notably, according to Jung, no one representation can reflect an entire archetype, so characters tend to highlight certain aspects like facets on a diamond. Two key tools are worth mentioning here that are sometimes used in character and relation design: tarot cards and Jung's 12 archetypes. Tarot cards are deeply laden with archetypal meanings and can be interpreted in a number of ways, which make them useful bases upon which to build characters (see e.g., Groth, Grasmo, and Edland 2021), or to use during play as an emergent narrative tool (see e.g., Kim, Nuncio, and Wong 2018; Nøglebæk 2021). While the 12 Archetype model is often ascribed to Jung, it was fully articulated by Carol S. Pearson. Pearson (2015) details the characteristics of the Innocent, Orphan, Warrior, Caregiver, Seeker, Lover, Destroyer, Creator, Ruler, Magician, Sage, and Fool, which have evolved to have different names over time depending on interpretation as archetypes tend to do. These archetypes give clear guidance for possible character personality traits, and are also often positioned in relationship to one another in dramatic tension, a practice that is highly informative for game design (see e.g., Bergmann Hamming and Bergmann Hamming 2013). We are using this model for character creation as we develop a transformative larp intended to teach some of the main principles featured in this book in an embodied fashion.

Importantly, while stories within role-playing games can reinforce existing beliefs within society, for example, hyperindividualism or colonialism, their collective and co-creative nature can also offer spaces for challenging existing myths and resisting the notions inherent to *dominant narratives*. A dominant narrative is a pervasive story present within the *collective consciousness*, which Émile Durkheim describes as "the body of beliefs and sentiments common to the average of members of a society" (qtd. in Oxford Reference 2024). Instead, players can choose to enact *counternarratives*, or other versions of stories that have explanatory power about the world and social relations within it. Such stories are not "new," but rather uncovered through a process of unearthing and giving voice to perspectives not often highlighted in the dominant culture. As the hero's journey has become a dominant narrative in modern storytelling even among psychoanalysts, counternarratives have developed, for example, heroine's journeys in which a woman character becomes heroic by striving to rescuing her loved ones, restoring her community (Frankel 2010), and becoming whole within herself by transcending the gender binary (Murdock 2020).

Enacting counternarratives in RPGs is also possible through exploring other archetypes within the typical mythic structure including the Witch (Rusch and Phelps 2022; Tannenbaum 2022) and other forms of the Monstrous (see e.g., Beltrán, Kelly, and Richardson 2017), Tricksters (Turner 2021), the Divine (Bowman 2024), and even Companion side characters-turned-protagonists in the hero's journey (Simpson 2020).

Designers, facilitators, and players can also choose to unravel typical Western narrative structures themselves, defying expectations by "hacking reality" in productive and empowering ways. Therefore, while examining traditional mythic symbols and narratives holds some explanatory power for understanding common role-playing game narratives, the RPG medium holds transformational power in its co-creative, spontaneous nature, in which players often have a great deal of agency to tell stories that are important to them, including counternarratives and non-Western story structures (Bowman 2024).

6.3 Ritual

One of the primary means through which myth is experienced is ritual (Turner 1995). A ritual is a repeatable compound of action, space, and time designed with a specific intent or purpose in mind. Ritual gives context and personal relevance to mythic content, allowing us to experience the power of narratives first-hand in an embodied way. If role-playing is a ritual in which players enter an altered state of sorts, rituals within games draw them deeper into this state and add extra layers of consciousness on top of them.

For example, if a player enacts a priestess character in a larp, then plays a scene in which the character briefly embodied a goddess in order to perform a religious ritual for the other characters (Brown et al. 2018), we have at least four layers of consciousness: the player, the character's personality, the social role of priestess, and the goddess. Similarly, if ritual deepens our social bonds through *communitas* (see Chapter 3), then we have three layers of social connectedness: the play group, the character relations, and the roles played by the character in the liminal ritual space, within which previous social roles are often reassigned and imbued with new meaning.

For this reason, ritual is a powerful technology within role-playing games that designers can use consciously and carefully to construct transformative experiences for individuals and groups alike.

a) Ritual theory

As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, ritual theory involves three stages (van Gennep 1960; Turner 1995):

1. **Preparation:** A departure from the mundane world with thorough separation,

2. **Liminal:** An entrance into an in-between "threshold" state called liminality, and

3. **Return:** A return to the mundane world with an incorporation of the liminal experiences.

However, what happens within the liminal state is also a designable surface, one which can be maximized for depth and specificity according to the transformative

goals informing your design. Rituals can be tightly structured, or they can be highly improvised, for example, players in a magic school collaboratively inventing components of the ritual on the spot through emergent playfulness (Bowman 2016b).

b) Ritual design

There are rules and norms to rituals that can be taught or assimilated. Rituals are common to all human societies and there are many common themes and techniques that can be found across cultures. However, some concepts, words, and images are unique to a single culture and context, often a sacred one; ritual design for transformative play needs to be sensitive to this and avoid appropriation (Kessock 2014; Mendez Hodes 2020). For example, while the use of masks in rituals is common, some specific masks have religious and cultural significance. Similarly, integrating religious or spiritual content from other cultures can be potent, but may have unforeseen consequences such as alienating players who are from those cultures, and therefore should be handled with care (Kim 2022). The symbols, colors, and props chosen should be culturally appropriate to the specific setting in which they will be applied and included responsibly. Furthermore, as Meguey Baker observes, a ritual "has a definite pattern, and if a part of the pattern is missing, the ritual will feel hollow, incomplete, or simply not work" (Baker, Meguey 2021).

The *basic* elements of a ritual are:

1. People
2. Space
3. Symbols / Methods
4. Time
5. Energy

It may help to think of a ritual as a map that describes the route from where you are now to where you want to be, or to what you want to become. For example, how can you design meaningful rites of passage that signify a character's social transformation from one identity to the next? These rites can be based on existing ones, e.g., marriages, funerals, or graduation ceremonies, or can be invented from scratch to serve the fiction, e.g., a magical acolyte being officially inducted into a wizard society (for more examples, see Bowman 2016b).

According to researchers at the Ritual Design Lab (2017), ritual requires "a deliberate and artificial demarcation"; for it to be effective, you should explicitly and carefully manage the entry and exit, and make it clear when the ritual has started and when it is complete. When designing a ritual, consider whether the ritual serves a specific function in the context of the game world, for example, a rite of passage ceremony or a sacred service. Make clear what the contents of the ritual are, as well as player roles and responsibilities, e.g., the ritual leader, assistants, and general participants. Detail tasks to participants clearly to minimize overlap. Integrate safety practices and make the participants understand that they can withdraw from the

ritual. You may even wish to debrief the ritual in-game, which can often be a potent experience for both characters and players.

Here are some guidelines for each phase:

Preparation: The process begins when participants prepare to enter the ritual space, and it ends when they return to the world. In a diegetic ritual, the participants are returning to the storyworld rather than the lifeworld (see Chapter 4).

However, as some participants need time to prepare themselves and get into the right state of mind and body to perform a ritual, consider starting with a meditation to ground oneself, dressing in ritual clothing (or removing clothing), fasting, bathing, anointing, and/or preparing the ritual space. Group silence can be a simple but effective tool to guide players into a ritual mindset.

Signal the passage from the everyday into the formal setting of the ritual during this separation phase. Liminal comes from *limen*, meaning "threshold" in Latin (Turner 1969). You can have players walk through an actual doorway from one room to the next to indicate the shift into the liminal space, or describe this shift in more metaphorical ways, e.g., guided meditations.

Liminal: Liminality refers to the central part of the ritual in which the major activities are contained. The ritual performer or participants go through the symbolic actions, e.g., chanting, dancing, making offerings, or other actions. Participants often take on new, temporary roles within the ceremony.

Whilst it is tempting to allow one person to take the lead in creating the ritual—particularly if they have experience of the form—some aspects of co-creation are useful. Participants who are actively invested in the ritual from inception tend to bring more energy to the experience.

Some rituals use storytelling, guided meditations, visualizations, symbols, or dance to guide participants through the ritual. Others rely on rhythms or chanting to raise energy in the ritual group and to release that energy to affect change. When designing your own ritual, consider:

- How can you use these components?
- What additional materials do you need?
- What are the ritual techniques you want to use?

Menter and Venkataramani (2021) suggest that you should focus on the participants the whole time, and from a facilitation point of view, keep returning to the emotional responses of the people in the ritual. Ask yourself:

- What will they be doing?
- What will they be feeling?

In a question that originates from larp design, we often ask "What are the verbs?" Ritual design is no different. Promote and facilitate players' engagement by the

inclusion of elements into which they can contribute and become involved, e.g., repeating something, performing an action, or providing an object for the ceremony.

Return: The return phase features a common ending to close the ritual and socialize participants back into society. At the close of the ritual, some signifier is also useful: a recognition of change in the form of a symbol or token; a celebration; as well as a time to decompress, to absorb, and to process. Whilst the ritual may be complete, this "landing time" is a part of the ritual design process.

For a more nuanced and detailed overview of ritual design in larp, please see Murphy's (2023) lecture, "Ritual: The Importance of Framing Transformational Experiences."

6.4 Symbolism

As mentioned before, symbols can be archetypal and replicated cross-culturally, for example, the Witch, Trickster, or Hero. Alternatively, they can be culturally specific, originating from a clear and explicit entry point, for example, the blue phone box called the Tardis in *Doctor Who* or the elder god Cthulhu. While these symbols may originate from deeper urges within human consciousness, for example, the desire to fly or escape the passage of time, or the fear of the overwhelming monstrous, they originated from particular authors within popular culture, then spread into a cultural phenomenon. Role-playing characters and symbolism within games are often inspired by one of these two origin points (Bowman 2010).

6.5 Narrative and postmodern magic

In this next section, we will explore the power of narrative in shaping our concepts of ourselves and our understanding of our lives. We will also explore forms of postmodern "magic," in which players can use the power of intentionality, ritual, and action to help shift their self-concepts. Note that the psychological potential of such acts is potent regardless or not if magic is "real" in the literal sense. These concepts can help us further understand the deeper mechanisms underlying transformation through play, as well as providing language and conceptualizations for how players can empower themselves more directly.

a) Narrative therapy and narrative identity

In Chapter 3 we introduced the concept of narrative identity, i.e., "the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life" (McAdams 2011). We also talked about narrative therapy, a form of psychotherapy developed by Michael White and David Epston (1990) that emphasizes people's personal stories and the meaning around them, with the intention to explore them, understande them, and ultimately challenge them through alternative healthier stories (White 2007) and redemptive narrative arcs (McAdams 2011). Here we will

explore a bit further the ways in which we can use these elements to facilitate active engagement with identity transformation for players.

As we previously discussed, people use narratives as a way to organize stimuli into coherent concepts and patterns; to manage information overwhelm; and to consequently make sense of their experiences. Thus, the narratives people construct play a central role in meaning making and self-perception, and coalesce into their narrative identity (McAdams 2011). When negative external evaluation or systemic pressure becomes internalized into a core belief, people are led to the construction of problematic dominant narratives. These stories often encompass limiting beliefs about the person's competences and about reality itself, particularly when reinforced by frustration, disappointments or trauma. Especially when combined with social identities that are marginalized or oppressed, these internalized beliefs can prove remarkably hard to question, as various social interactions, stereotypes and prejudices may reproduce and reinforce them.

Narrative therapy aims to deconstruct such harmful meanings, and to give the person the agency to construct their own stories. By employing techniques such as externalizing conversations, deconstruction, and unique outcomes , the narrative therapist aims to facilitate the process of re-authoring identity (White and Epston 1990), often in the form of a redemptive story arc (see Chapter 3). The process of constructing and narrating such redemptive arcs has significant transformative potential, as it works to reframe one's viewpoints, enhance personal agency, and modify the core principles that influence a person's lived experience (Diakolambrianou and Bowman 2023; Murphy 2023).

Players are building a narrative through the process of content creation, often reproducing their dominant stories, especially when the player is playing close-to-home, thus turning the game content into potential psychotherapeutic material (Diakolambrianou 2021). In other cases, however, the differences between the players and their characters can give role-playing games the opportunity to illuminate the connection between the narrative identities of the character and the player (Bowman and Hugaas 2021). The player may realize that some of their character's abilities are, in fact, their own. Alternatively, the character's story may function as a cautionary tale for the player. Experiences like these are reinforced when the other players acknowledge and validate the person as capable in-game, i.e., playing to lift (Vejdemo 2018), and are particularly powerful when the person is acknowledged as capable out-of-game (Diakolambrianou and Bowman 2023; Kilmer et al. 2023).

Furthermore, the gameplay itself may often operate as a narrative therapist. Embodying characters can act as an externalizing conversation, and may often provide unique outcomes, since the other people we are playing with may at times, knowingly or unknowingly, challenge our dominant stories. Furthermore, transformative role-playing experiences can provide the players with realizations that make them aware of their stories and help them deconstruct them, resulting in one or more re-authored identities (Tanenbaum 2022); fundamentally, the embodiment of every

character embodiment can be viewed as a re-authored identity. Nontheless, the role of processing, preferably in the form of formal or informal debriefing, in the actualization of the psychotherapeutic potential of these processes is vital. These transformative impacts can also be facilitated by pre-game workshop activities for character creation (Diakolambrianou 2021, 2022).

b) Role-playing and postmodern magic practices

The term "postmodern magic" refers to magical schools of thought based on the notion that all faiths and creeds can generate magical outcomes. Given the fact that any belief system, religious or magical, contains unverifiable and/or fictional elements, then we can presume that a fictional dogma would also have the ability to produce similar effects, provided that the magician performing the ritual genuinely believes in its truth. Thus, postmodern magicians argue that individual belief, and not partaking in certain magical traditions, is what leads to magic (Evans 2007, as cited in Harviainen 2011). In this section we will discuss how such magical practices can be seen as relevant to role-playing and inform its transformative potential and processes.

i) Magic as "the larping that is not larp"

In his article "The Larping that is not Larp" (2011), J. Tuomas Harviainen discusses the components of forms of role-play considered adjacent to larp, and thus showcases that the practice and phenomenon of larping can be encountered in fields that are not defined as such. One of these areas is postmodern magic.

Harviainen relates the invocation techniques used in postmodern magic practices to the role-taking and immersion into character processes encountered in larping. He describes the invocation of deities as a three-way process, where the magicians invoke the deity in the third, then second, and then first person, until they "become" that deity. He notes that essentially "the magician pretends to be the deity until a (supposed) possession is reached" (Harviainen 2011, 182). Furthermore, he mentions that in certain practices such as chaos magic, performing a magic ritual can be described as heavily resembling psychodrama, as well as highly formalistic larps; he specifically notes that "questions of magic's veracity aside, there is form-wise nothing that separates a chaos magic invocation ritual from a larp" (Harviainen 2011, 183).

Given the common elements upon which both larp and postmodern magic rituals are constructed, combined with the playful approach they share, it becomes evident that there are links and common spaces between them in terms of forms as well as function (Harviainen 2011). At the same time, certain kinds of magic are discussed by their practitioners as "acting through the idea of a virtual world where change is possible" (Dukes 2001, as cited in Harviainen 2011, 183); a phrase that could potentially be used to describe the transformative potential of role-playing.

ii) Magic as a poetic act

Psychomagic is a form of shamanic psychotherapy created by Alejandro Jodorowsky (2010, 2015), which utilizes the powers of dreams, art, and theater to empower people to heal personal and generational wounds. In order to allow psychological realizations to cause true transformation, Jodorowsky employs "poetic acts," i.e., symbolic and/or ritualistic acts aimed to heal the unconscious mind. He argues that in order to reach the unconscious we must not rely on rational thought, but use the language of the unconscious to communicate with it, i.e., the language of dreams, art, and symbolism. In his *Manual of Psychomagic* (2015), he offers numerous psychomagic remedies for a variety of psychological, psychosexual, emotional, as well as physical issues, along with guidelines for practitioners who want to develop their own unique psychomagic solutions. These poetic acts are part of a strategy aimed to shatter the dysfunctional façade of the person and allow connection with a deeper, more authentic self.

In their article "Existential Transformational Game Design: Harnessing the 'Psychomagic' of Symbolic Enactment," Doris Rusch and Andrew Phelps (2020) explore indexical symbolic enactment as a factor that can enhance the transformative potential of games, and discuss Jodorowsky's psychomagic within this framework. They utilize the concept of symbolic enactment as an fundamental element of pretend play, and more specifically the symbolic enactment of indexical symbols, i.e., symbols that refer to intangible and psychologically ineffable concepts. Thus, they argue that indexical symbolism has a lot to offer to game design in terms of personal transformation and growth potential. Although they focus on digital games, the guidelines they identify as ways to utilize games in fostering authentic and harmonious ways of being and living are very relevant to analog role-playing.

One of Jodorowsky's poetic acts Rusch and Phelps explicitly refer to as an example is called "To Die and Be Reborn," aimed at people "who cannot free themselves from the feeling that they have failed" in their life (Jodorowsky 2015, 44). The psychomagic solution guides the person through an intricate procedure of symbolic death and rebirth, that involves a funeral speech and ritual, getting buried in a shallow pit, and being "reborn" with a new name, while also burying the belongings of their old self in the pit. Rusch and Phelps (2020) discuss the various indexical symbolisms present in this poetic act, as well as the deeper meaning of the "identity rebooting" process that is rendered tangible and attainable through these symbolic actions. At the same time, they refer to the work of anthropologists Thompson et al. (2009), who underline the significance of performance in the context of transformation-oriented symbolic work within a therapeutic context, and argue that the effectiveness of psychotherapy is actually linked to its performativity. Thus, attempting to assess the value of exploring poetic acts such as Jodorowsky's in constructing theoretical approaches to deep game design, Rusch and Phelps (2020) conclude that, although one cannot really die and be reborn, in the words of Thompson et al. (2009, 134), "doing (even in the mind's eye) makes it so."

Related to this topic, Kjell Hedgard Hugaas (2023a, 2023b) has conducted quantitative research exploring whether or not playing out death in larp affects players' death anxiety, avoidance, or acceptance (Ray and Najman 1974; Gesser, Wong, and Reker 1987). One of the notable findings of this study is that larpers in general appeared to have a greater acceptance of death than comparison groups. An interpretation of this data is that enacting many lives—not only deaths—may lead players to be more willing to confront death in their daily lives.

iii) Magic as manifestation

In their article "Magic is Real: How Role-playing Can Transform Our Identities, Our Communities, and Our Lives" (2021), Sarah Lynne Bowman and Kjell Hedgard Hugaas discuss magic as a form of manifestation. There are many different conceptualizations of manifestation as a magical process, some of which derive from modern witchcraft and focus on spell-casting, while others employ a New Age perspective and focus on summoning desired experiences into our lives by aligning our attention and imagination toward them. While acknowledging the limitations of such concepts, e.g., potentially dismissed as unscientific and/or coming from a place of privilege in the arena of structural inequalities, Bowman and Hugaas are interested in examining the transformative insight that manifestational theory and practice can offer to role-players.

Within this framework, they employ the perspective of Mat Auryn, who views manifestation as the ability to utilize intentional thinking, willpower, and creative action in order to alter ourselves and the world. In his book *Psychic Witch* (2020), he explicitly connects role-playing to magic and recommends an exercise he calls "psychic immersion" as a way for psychic practitioners to notice their inherent abilities by role-playing a gifted psychic for a day—an exercise not far away from the practice of Fixed Role Therapy that we discussed in Chapter 3.

Furthermore, Auryn describes seven dimensions of reality, within each of which several steps need to be made in order for manifestation to take place. Following the emphasis he puts on inspired action, willpower and envisioning the imagined desired reality as cornerstones of the manifestation process (Auryn 2020), Bowman and Hugaas (2021) draw further parallels between role-playing and manifestation magic. They argue that the basic principles Auryn is describing are relevant in a wide range of growth and creativity processes: Space for the person to grow needs to be established; sentimentality, cognition and intertionality need to be purposefully aligned; action based upon this focused willpower needs to be taken; and the person needs to let go of any attachment to the result. They believe these processes can enrich our conceptualization of participating in role-playing games, as well as the integration of our desired transformative goals after the role-playing experience, "establishing space and time to process the events of play; distilling takeaways; and continuing to align thoughts, emotions, and actions toward concretizing these takeaways in daily life" (Bowman and Hugaas 2021).

iv) Magic as a world-changing shift of consciousness

In their article "Larp as Magical Practice: Finding the Power-From-Within" (2021), Axiel Cazeneuve combines the witch philosopher Starhawk's vision of magic with Jonaya Kemper's work on emancipatory bleed (2017, 2020) to provide a deeper understanding of the world-changing potential of role-playing.

Starhawk is an ecofeminism activist, philosopher, and Neopagan witch who believes that consciousness and reality shape each other mutually and simultaneously. Within this interdependent process, she views magic as "the art of changing consciousness at will" (Starhawk 1997, 13). Finding this magic path to changed consciousness can be facilitated by various practices, both practical (e.g., activism) and esoteric (e.g., mindfulness). No matter the path, magic is essentially about finding the *power within*, i.e., the power that derives from our agency and capability, as opposed to *power over*, i.e., the power derived from hierarchy, constraint, or force (see also Hunjan and Keophilavong 2010, see later in this chapter). Finding the power within and the consequent shift of consciousness leads to actions and choices aimed to induce change, thus contributing to reality itself evolving to a different balance (Starhawk 1997; Cazeneuve 2021).

Cazeneuve argues that the greatest thing that can be achieved through roleplaying is namely that shift of consciousness which, although temporary, can have long-lasting repercussions that allows role-playing games to influence the world. Such a shift, however, is much more profound that pretense and shallow impersonation of a character; for magic to happen, we need to intentionally dive deeper into our sense of identity and allow our core beliefs to be shaken and redefined. Furthermore, Cazeneuve links the concept of "wyrding the self" (Kemper 2020) to an internal struggle of not exercising our power-over while increasing our power-from-within. Within this framework, they view emancipatory bleed (Kemper 2017) as a way through which role-playing can help us overcome our internalized limitations, thus allowing magic to change our mental structures, achieve personal liberation, and, ultimately, take meaningful collective actions towards changing the oppressive societal and cultural structures around us (Cazeneuve 2021).

6.6 Culture in RPGs and communities

Culture is a complex topic that infuses play experiences both within and outside of role-playing games. Furthermore, role-playing games are part of culture themselves, with subcultures forming around them. While we cannot go into much depth on these complex topics, as a shorthand, we will discuss culture in five different ways with regard to transformative role-playing games: 1) fictional and real cultures and subcultures portrayed in games; 2) wider cultures and subcultures to which players belong; 3) design cultures and styles; 4) play cultures; and 5) discourse cultures.

a) Five types of cultures and subcultures in RPGs

i) Fictional and real cultures and subcultures portrayed in games

Exploration of cultures, either within a single culture, or cultures clashing, can be highly rewarding in role-playing games. Most RPGs feature some element of culture, whether from highly accurate and realistic real world settings or wildly fantastical ones. When we design or play a game, we bring with us cultural lenses, assumptions, understandings, and biases based on our upbringing and life experiences. When we lack knowledge about a specific culture, we tend to rely on stereotypes, cobbling together assumptions based upon what little understanding we have or on inaccurate representations we may have seen (Burton, Trammell, and Jones 2024). Therefore, even when designing fantasy worlds, if the cultures in your game are inspired by real-world groups in any way, it is best to conduct research in order to portray them respectfully. Furthermore, strongly consider adding a cultural consultant to your team who is knowledgeable and/or is from that culture, ideally involved throughout the design process.

1) Fictional culture design

When designing a fictional culture, culture design can be considered within the Venn diagram that overlaps worldbuilding and character design (see Figure 1).
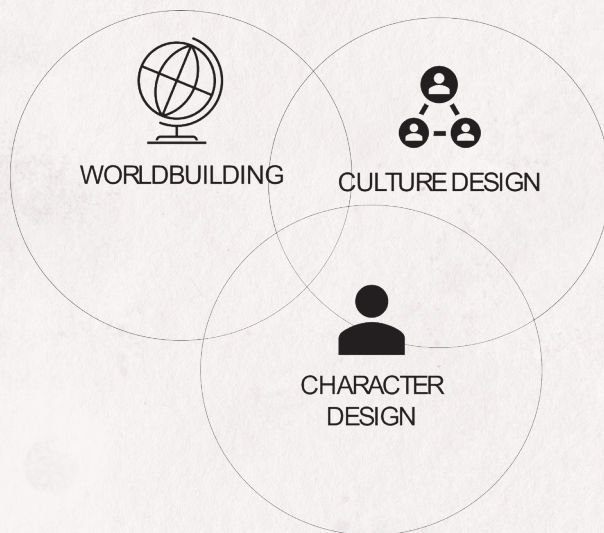
Figure 1: The overlap between worldbuilding, character design, and culture design.

Fictional cultural design is a creative task that represents a playable subset of worldbuilding. For example, if we consider Tolkien's (2020) Middle Earth to be an example of worldbuilding, with its rich history and cartography, myths, legends, and languages, the society of the Shire represents a culture design within it. It explains the way that the people who live in the world behave and interact with one another; their cultural norms and taboos; and their values. It does not describe the individual characters or their interactions, but rather gives a broad guide to what it is to be a hobbit.

The other key word here is playability. Some ideas for culture design may be interesting, but may adversely affect the play experience of certain types of characters within the storyworld. For example, in a society where low status characters are forbidden to speak to high status characters some additional design effort is required to ensure that the game is interesting to all players. Playability is particularly important to consider in a nano-game, as playtime is limited and less opportunity exists to hack the experience or course correct. For more details on designing narratives and cultures, see Chapter 4.

ii) Wider cultures and subcultures to which players belong

As covered before, scholars such as Turner (1982) classified play as an activity that can be regarded as a form of ritual and cultural expression. Play allows players to deepen their social bonds and engage in communitas: a common experience in which a community, or a wider culture or subculture in the cultural context, engages. James Paul Gee (2017) allotted this concept to spaces, whether they are physical, virtual, or a hybrid. An assembly space for communitas is what he calls an *affinity space*. In such spaces, people gather because of a shared interest, generally disregarding the players' (real life) background, such as race and occupation. Ideally, these spaces aim for a magic circle-like experience. Of course, this is an ideal scenario, since cultural clashes can still occur during play, in addition to other phenomena like dark play and inappropriate use of alibi (Stenros 2015; Trammell 2023).

Cultures and subcultures of role-play can act as affinity spaces. There, players can seek out connections with peers who share a similar interest. As Henri Tajfel's (1974) *social identity theory* suggests, people appreciate a way to self-identify and resonate with a bigger community such as a (sub)culture; this also applies to those engaging within the realms of role-playing games. As a result, the behavior of members of these larp cultures can be influenced and informed by their engagement with these cultures. Note that engagement here does not only refer to play itself, but also to subcultural activities surrounding play, such as attending conventions, engaging in online discussions, or watching live streams of Actual Play (AP) sessions with other fans.

Expression and active engagement in such cultures has been widely studied. One prominent scholar of subculture and fandom studies is Henry Jenkins (1992), who has been studying the phenomenon of *participatory culture:* the notion that interaction with a medium, such as a role-playing game, can transcend the mere consumption of it. In fact, it has the potential to be a source for newfound creativity and consumer-generated content, such as fan fiction or art (Jenkins 1992).

Players often base their perspectives and expectations on their own experiences and worldviews on play. The way players act, interpret, and contribute to a role-playing game subcultures is heavily dependent on their cultural background. For example, a Swedish player may have a very different approach to a larp than a Chinese player. Think of the ways people socialize: is it more common to be reserved in their culture or more outspoken? The way players approach social interaction in their daily lives in their own culture can heavily impact the steps and barriers a player must overcome before engaging in role-play.

All these different views and expectations of role-play can be a challenge for designers; they may have to incorporate many elements to appeal to a broad multicultural audience. It should be noted that there is no perfect culturally informed template or standard for the approach to larp that is deemed the correct way. *Cultural relativism* (Encyclopedia of World Problems 2020) advocates for the idea of an equal cultural playing field in which no culture can be objectively ranked or judged as superior or inferior. For more on this concept and how culture can affect design, see later in this chapter.

iii) Design cultures and styles

Another important form of culture that influences RPG practice is the culture around design, which also includes the discourses and gaming styles shaped by it. This book would not be possible were its authors not engaged in these discourses, as they have been relevant to our specific entry points and cultural contexts. Furthermore, in this book, we are forming our own discourses around transformative game design that are informed not only by our scholarly and practical work on these topics, but also through our interactions with each other and the learning occurring. Thus, one could say this book is emerging as evidence of design cultures and discourses in action.

While many notable discourse communities have emerged in role-playing game studies (see e.g., Torner 2024), we will touch upon a few here that have been especially important to the innovation of RPG design and practices surrounding it:

1. **Wargaming and simulation:** The first official role-playing game, *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974) emerged from wargamers and simulations funded by the US government (Peterson 2012; Trammell 2015). From these roots grew the mechanized combat systems and tactical emphasis visible in much of traditional tabletop and larp design, especially in the US.

2. **Gothicpunk™ and personal horror:** The next most popular role-playing games emerged from the World of Darkness in the 1990s, shifting the emphasis from heroic fantasy play to internal and external "darkness." The World of Darkness explicitly uses the Jungian concept of *shadow* in its design (Beltrán 2013), emphasizing personal horror and the confrontation with one's own unconscious as main themes of the game (White Wolf 1991). However, the mechanized combat, supernatural abilities, and tactical emphasis inherited from *Dungeons & Dragons* are still visible in much of WoD tabletop and larp design.

3. **The Forge and Story Game diaspora:** In the late '90s, a design community originating from online discussion forums developed that challenged traditional role-playing game design. Members of the Forge discussion forum often broke traditional and indie tabletop games into their component parts, analyzing their affordances in terms of the *creative agendas* of their players, e.g., interest in the story (*narrativism*); rules and tactics (*gamism*); or simulating a realistic scenario and character

(*simulationism*) (Kim 1997; Edwards 2003). This community analyzed their play sessions with one another, which they called Actual Play reports at the time, without the implications of recording that has come to be associated with the term (Torner 2021). An emphasis on designing for co-creative narrative agency, or "Story Games," and on supporting community projects developed out of this group, influencing the seminal indie games *Fiasco* (Morningstar 2009) and *Apocalypse World* (Baker and Baker 2010) among others.

4. **Nordic larp and adjacent communities:** Meanwhile, in the Nordic countries, a group of larpers interested in avant-garde aesthetics and pushing the boundaries of play began to collaborate across boards. A style of play later called "Nordic larp" emerged, which is difficult to define, but often features collaborative playstyles; realistic scenarios on serious themes; immersive environments that aid for a 360 degree illusion (Koljonen 2007); discouragement of "win conditions" with an emphasis on playing to lose (Nordic Larp Wiki 2019), playing for drama, or playing to lift (Vejdemo 2018). *Immersionism* was added to the creative agenda framework to indicate prioritizing deeply immersing in the thoughts and feelings of one's character (Bøckman 2003). This playstyle has spread to influence many different communities, including recent versions of World of Darkness tabletop (Renegade 2023) and larp (Participation Design Agency 2016, 2017; Dziobak 2016). These developments are examples of these subcultures of design that were previously separate learning from one another and synergizing (for World of Darkness examples, see Bowman 2016a, 2016c, 2017b; Pettersson, Juhana 2018; Pettersson, Maria 2018).

These accounts of design communities make up the dominant narrative, so to speak, of role-playing game theory. However, of course many other design communities exist around the world, developing their own terminology, norms, and innovations around play, e.g., in Russia (Fedoseev, Harviainen, and Vorobyeva eds. 2015), the Arab World including Palestine (Anderson, Kharroub, Levin, and Rabah 2015), China (Xiong, Wen, and Hartyándi 2022; Botts 2023a), Brazil (Iuama and Falcão 2021), Japan (Kamm 2019, 2022), and many other places in Europe, e.g., the UK (Brind et al. eds. 2018), Italy (Giovannucci et al. eds. 2022), Hungary (Botts 2023b, 2023c; Turi and Hartyándi 2023), Czech Republic (Kuběnský and Vávrová 2021a, 2021b), Croatia (Fors and Hell 2017; Botts 2022a), Greece (Kontiza 2021; Botts 2022b; Alexiou 2022), and others. With the ease of access afforded by social media and Internet websites, it is far easier for subcultures to share knowledge with one another, even when their groups play very far apart from one another. Such cultural exchange is not always easy, but often leads to innovation and growth that would occur more slowly or not at all without communication.

iv) Play cultures

Even more diverse than design cultures, but strongly influenced by them, are the play cultures surrounding RPGs. Play cultures refer to the norms within groups around what role-playing games are, what they should look like, and how play within them should unfold. As with wider cultural concepts, the norms within such groups strongly define behavior within them, as well as what sorts of game experiences are considered part of the *in-group* vs. the *out-group* (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

The types of norms developed within play groups are numerous and sometimes overlap, but can inform aspects such as:

1. **Genre:** What types of genres are most typical, e.g., fantasy, science fiction, post-apocalyptic, romance, realism?

2. **Character design:** Who designs the characters, e.g., designers, facilitators, players, or a mixture? Are characters pre-written or devised during the game itself?

3. **Format of play:** Is the game limited to one session as a one-shot, is it a series, or a campaign played over multiple sessions, sometimes indefinitely?

4. **Mechanics, Rules, and Meta-techniques:** What are their purposes and how do they define play, e.g., do they convey story information; serve as communication tools between players; define what can and cannot be done; function as conflict resolution mechanics?

5. **Size of game:** Are games played in small, medium, or large groups, e.g., a 4-player tabletop game, a 30-person chamber larp, or a 5000-person combat larp?

6. **Role of facilitator:** Is the facilitator or organizer someone who arbitrates rules, tells the story, establishes the frames, or simply sets up the logistics?

7. **Purpose of play:** Are the games meant as "entertainment," art, or personal or social development, e.g., in education or therapy? Is discussion around the player's emotional or intellectual responses to the game common or even acceptable?

8. **Locations:** Does play take place in homes, forests, large fields, community centers, hotels, festivals, museums, therapy offices, castles, or classrooms?

9. **Community building:** Is the game itself the only space for interaction? Or are the players friends, colleagues, classmates, or members of a larger community? Does the group take part in non-game activities, e.g., charity work, travel, grant projects, or activism?

10. **Immersion:** Does the game culture emphasize immersion into activity, game, environment, narrative, character, and/or community? (See Chapter 3 for descriptions).

While some of these categories might seem more neutral than others, players will often define what is normative based on their experiences within their early play

groups. Broadly speaking, players within groups that encourage trying out many different formats tend to be more accepting of innovation, whereas players of more traditional games that focus on one genre and style tend to be surprised when they learn about different formats, and possibly even suspicious or rejecting of other styles (Vanek 2011). We can interpret these latter reactions as a form of identity defense (Illeris 2004; see Chapter 3). For example, due to a strong identification with the group, players may feel threatened by forms that have a different purpose, e.g., fantasy boffer larps intended for entertainment vs. art larps intended for personal or social development.

Spaces such as festivals and conferences that provide platforms for people from different play cultures to share can be quite important in breaking down these silos. In fact, such spaces can be considered their own play cultures to a degree with norms around openness to new types of games or styles of play and trying different games over the course of a weekend.

v) Discourse cultures: Leisure theory, art, academia, journalism

Finally, discourse cultures surrounding games are also important to consider, i.e., the ongoing discussions surrounding role-playing games. These discourses are often related to design and play cultures, but can also be connected to other concepts or disciplines, for example, applying theories from one's art or psychology background to a game. Discourses can be multi-purpose, but broader categories exist, including ongoing conversations in leisure theoretical, academic, journalistic, and arts-based spheres.

These discourses can take place in many locations:

1. **Online discussions,** including forums or social media posts, e.g., Facebook groups, TikTok, Twitter/X, Discord, the Forge and Story Games forums;

2. **Publications,** including zines, magazines, blogs, books, anthologies, and journals, e.g., the *Larp Design* book (Koljonen et al. eds. 2019); *The Routledge Handbook of Role-Playing Game Studies* book (Zagal and Deterding eds. 2024); the *International Journal of Role-Playing, Analog Game Studies, Nordiclarp.org,* the *Nordic Larp* book (Stenros and Montola eds. 2010); the Knutepunkt/Solmukohta books (Nordic Larp Wiki 2022); the *Wyrd Con Companion Books* (2012-2015).

3. **Conferences, seminars, and symposia,** including disciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary gatherings, e.g., Knutepunkt/Solmukohta, GENeration Analog, Living Games, the Popular Culture Association, Edu-Larp Conferences.

4. **Museum and gallery spaces,** e.g., edu-larps or lectures in museums, special exhibits related to RPGs, other public spaces with room for discussion, such as panels, gatherings, Q&As, and local initiatives. Such events can occur in places such as libraries, schools, cultural centers, heritage sites, places of worship, town halls.

Importantly, many of these spaces were created as a direct result of conversations about RPGs often being marginalized or stigmatized in more mainstream publications. As such, engagement in broader cultural conversation, for example, through public journalism, can also be seen as a form of activist outreach.

b) Benefits and risks of integrating cultures in design

Franz Boas, who is considered the founder of American anthropology, introduced the idea of *cultural relativism* (Encyclopedia of World Problems 2020). This concept argues that cultures cannot be objectively ranked or judged as superior or inferior. Instead, every culture is viewed through its own unique lens, with people interpreting and evaluating the world according to their culturally ingrained norms. Boas believed that the aim of anthropology is to gain a better understanding of how culture shapes people's perceptions and interactions with the world.

In the context of live-action role-playing experiences, designer and researcher Kaisa Kangas (2015) advocates for the application of *experimental anthropology* in the design process, essentially embracing Boas' idea of cultural relativism. At the 2015 Nordic Larp Talks in Copenhagen, Kangas argued how the simulation and recreation of events to experiment with the social, cultural, and behavioral aspects of human life allow for reflection on societal and cultural questions. This way, complex cultural aspects can be put into practice, making them more tangible and concrete.

She gives examples of such experiences, like *KoiKoi* (2014; see e.g., Fatland and Edland 2015) a game about a fictional hunter-gatherer society inspired by real tribes, and *Brudpris* (2013; Linder Krauklis and Dahlberg 2015) a game centered around a patriarchal honor culture. Experimental anthropology experiences like these emphasize the importance of immersion and reflection to explore cultural diversity. However, it is crucial to approach this integration with sensitivity and authenticity to avoid misrepresentation and appropriation, ensuring that the benefits of cultural diversity and representation are realized without causing harm (Beltrán 2015; Kessock 2014; Mendez Hodes 2020)

When executed well, the inclusion of minority settings in RPGs can be an enriching experience for players, according to Beltrán (2015). She argues that the increased visibility of underrepresented cultures combats a Western-centric *defaultism*: the normative bias of over-representing Western cultured storytelling that overshadows less represented cultures.

George (2021) offers an interesting insight into the design process of a successful cultural integration in design that worked to avoid potential misrepresentation or offensiveness. He describes his experience writing for *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* (2021), highlighting the challenges of being the first writer of Indian origin to contribute to Indian-inspired content to *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974). His goal was to draw from a diverse range of Indian cultural elements, while avoiding harmful stereotypes to create a respectful and authentic portrayal of Indian-inspired horror. To achieve this, George focused on the customs of the fictional location Kalakeri, steering clear of cliched characters. He developed the Favor system, inspired by

Hindu mythology and the caste system, allowing players to gain favor with powerful characters through specific actions. This system governs social interactions in Kalakeri, reflecting the complex dynamics of Indian society, and requires players to navigate these intricacies to survive and influence power struggles within the game.

In a later publication, Kangas (2017) concludes that engaging with the stories of others does not evoke the same emotions or experiences that they have gone through. This avoids the problematic presumption that games will necessarily lead to empathy as players "walk a mile" in the shoes of another person (Pozo 2018), as one cannot fully understand the experiences of another person. However, with appropriate post-game reflection, engaging with stories of others can enhance our understanding of their circumstances and create a sense of solidarity. Additionally, participating in others' narratives can offer insights into ourselves, causing us to reevaluate both our social and cultural environments.

In addition to post-game reflection, Nielsen (2014) argues for pre-game *cultural calibration*: a workshop approach before the start of a larp to make players aware of the experience that is to come. This way, players can mentally prepare and ground themselves. Furthermore, Nielsen (2014) mentions that a key component of the workshop method is the use of test-scenes, in which players enact scenarios that reflect cultural norms within the game world. These scenes are observed by other participants, who then discuss and evaluate the cultural norms portrayed. This iterative process helps refine and align the players' understanding of the culture before finally participating in the actual larp.

While larp might not perfectly simulate living within another culture, it serves as a potentially powerful tool for integrating culture in design. Here is a brief overview of potential benefits and risks:

Table 1: Overview of benefits and risks of integrating culture in design synthesized from Beltrán (2015) and Nielsen (2014).

Benefits	Risks
• Diverse storytelling (i.e., combatting Western-centric defaultism)	• Cultural misrepresentation
• Increased visibility of minorities and underrepresented cultures	• Cultural appropriation
• Cultural reflection	• Superficial "flat" representation (tokenism)
• Transformative potential with proper contextualization (workshops and debrief)	• Uncomfortable themes and roles for some players, e.g., colonialism, oppressor and oppressed.

6.7 Conflict in RPGs and communities

This section will discuss several aspects of conflict within RPG design, play, and the communities surrounding them. We will discuss the way that conflict is often a central component within much of role-playing game design, but also the way conflicts can arise among designers, organizers, and players for a variety of different reasons.

a) Definitions of conflict

Conflict has many definitions, from rather trivial clashes such as scheduling conflicts, to extreme fights, such as physical violence and wars (Dictionary.com). Our definition of conflict is broad and meant to be inclusive of many different experiences: a disruption of harmony arising when positions, interests, feelings, and needs differ or feel threatened. Such a disruption can occur within a person's own psychology, i.e., an *internal conflict*, or between one or more parties, i.e., an *external conflict*. Conflict can affect us in four major ways: personally, relationally, structurally, and culturally (Lederach 2014).

Many of us have been taught to recognize conflict only when it presents in a certain aggressive, often violent way, but it is important to understand that conflicts are not always visible. In fact, we may not always notice when conflicts are impacting us or affecting our interactions with others. A common example is underlying power dynamics, which are often a factor in any given interaction, but may not always be obvious to one or more people in the situation. Alternatively, we may only notice the *presenting issue* or *triggering event* in a conflict rather than its deeper roots and history. For example, if someone experiences a *microaggression*, in which another person makes a comment that they feel targets them due to one of their marginalized identities, the instance itself is only the presenting issue, whereas the conflict itself is often informed by the person's entire lifetime of experiences of marginalization.

i) Conflict transformation

Our model of role-playing game design seeks to use play as a potential site of *conflict transformation*. John Paul Lederach (2014) defines conflict transformation as a process intended:

to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships. (16)

Unpacking this notion of conflict as providing "life-giving opportunities," Lederach distinguishes between *destructive* and *constructive* approaches. Conflict transformation involves initiating and maintaining change processes that help people heal from "long-standing cycles of hurt and destruction" (17) and "maximize the potential for growth and well-being in the person as an individual human being at physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual levels" (25).

Such processes often necessitate the cultivation of *positive peace* in communities. While *negative peace* focuses on reducing *direct violence* in communities, whether physical or emotional, positive peace involves striving to ensure all members' basic human needs are met (Addams 1907; Galtung 1969), e.g., love/belonging, safety/security, freedom, fun, and power (Glasser 1998). From this perspective, constructive forms of power strive to avoid exerting power over others, instead cultivating shared *power with* others (Follett 1940), the *power to* advocate on behalf of others (Pansardi and Bindi 2021), and *power within* to increase self-advocacy, agency, and fulfillment (Hunjan and Keophilavong 2010).

Furthermore, this perspective raises awareness on other forms of violence in society beyond direct harm: *structural violence*, in which discrimination is embedded in laws and other institutions (Galtung 1969); *cultural violence*, in which oppressive beliefs permeate socio-cultural contexts and interactions (Galtung 1990); and *symbolic violence*, in which people internalize these external forms of violence into their beliefs about their worth, their ability to act, and their behaviors in the world (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990), further reinforcing privilege and marginalization in society.

Positive peace, the types of power, basic human needs, and the types of violence are all fruitful concepts to explore in role-playing game design. RPGs have historically emphasized actions of *power over* as the default verbs available to players (Albom 2021) and rewarded by the system, e.g., acts of violence leading to experience points. While exerting power over others through games can lead to important insights through shadow work or other forms of processing (Bowman in press for 2025), games that reinforce more constructive ways to get the characters' needs met would align better with a conflict transformation approach. Furthermore, even in teamwork scenarios in which power with is essential for success, such as with *D&D* adventuring parties (Connell, Kilmer, and Kilmer 2020), nonviolent communication strategies (Rosenberg 2015), collaborative forms of power, and peacebuilding strategies are worth practicing in transformative RPGs (Hugaas and Bowman 2024).

Important to our study of role-playing, Lederach (2014) specifically encourages acknowledging identities as important factors within conflicts, as well as adopting a both/and mentality in which parties collaborate to envision solutions that are beneficial to everyone, as opposed to either/or thinking. This notion is similar to the "yes and" approach to improvisation that often makes for good role-playing, in which players accept new fiction offered and add additional details rather than shutting down the creativity of others. The same process can be applied to conflict.

With regard to RPGs, conflict transformation can be embedded in:

- The goals of the transformational container surrounding the game, e.g., a game in which characters oppress one another in-game, but care for each other off-game; or

- The activities within the game itself, e.g., practicing prosocial behaviors, engaging in democratic processes to increase peace and justice for everyone in the community.

However, we believe that games without a sufficient container to frame and process such experiences may fall short in terms of transformative goals. For example, communities that fail to support one another as they are experiencing difficult bleed or processing important takeaways from an intense role-playing experience may interrupt or stall change processes that person is undergoing. This does not mean transformation cannot occur; we know that players within leisure games intended for "entertainment" and lacking the framing of a transformational container can still experience incidental or accidental change catalyzed by play. However, we believe that role-playing game practice has only scratched the surface of the potential of the medium for conflict transformation and encourage further design innovation in this area.

ii) Types of conflict in RPG design

Literary analysis often emphasizes a close reading of a text that identifies internal and/or external conflicts. As with other techniques from this field (Jara and Torner 2024), the same method can be used to understand much of role-playing game design.

Conflicts can be understood as occurring on various levels. Some examples that might emerge in role-playing games include:

- **Intrapersonally**, or internally in one's own psychology, e.g., an "inner committee" of parts of the self arguing over how to proceed in a situation;
- **Interpersonally**, or between two people, e.g., a romantic couple on the brink of breaking up;
- **Intragroup**, or within a group, e.g., members of a family arguing over inheritance;
- **Intergroup**, between groups, e.g., factions within a larp maneuvering for power;
- **Regionally**, e.g., rival schools playing a football match for a championship;
- **Nationally**, e.g., a civil war;
- **Internationally,** e.g., diplomatic negotiations between two nations to avoid violent hostilities escalating;
- **Interplanetary,** e.g., colonization of one planet by another;
- **Interspecifically**, e.g., two species vying for dominance in a particular territory;
- **Within objects**, e.g., interactions at the molecular level;
- **Between objects**, e.g., a debate between two non-living objects.

A common way to formulate conflict in role-playing games is *player vs. player,* or PvP (sometimes called *character vs. character*, or CvC), in which characters compete against one another or role-play antagonistic relationships. This type of conflict is often contrasted with *player vs. environment*, or PvE, in which the characters bind

together for a common cause, usually against an external enemy or force. Some games feature both types, e.g., the *Dystopia Rising* (2009-) zombie post-apocalypse game, in which factions squabble amongst themselves for resources until the zombies come and they must set aside their differences and band together to stay alive.

Notably, in role-playing game design, the imagination's the limit in terms of what kinds of conflicts can be represented. For example, the freeform *Still Life* (2014) focuses on intrapersonal conflicts within rocks who discuss deep philosophical questions with one another. Therefore, additional categories may very well exist or develop over time. Furthermore, whether conflict is a necessary component of design is a matter for debate, as arguably conflicts will likely emerge in play regardless of pre-designed dynamics; alternatively, many experiences in life can be interesting without a strong component of conflict.

iii) Dystopia/oppression vs. utopia/hopepunk

With the first popular role-playing games evolving from wargaming (Petersen 2012; Trammell 2015), it is no surprise that violent conflict still plays a big part in contemporary mainstream role-playing games. As discussed before, many indie role-playing designers historically have believed that conflict is crucial for creating interesting play (see e.g., Baker, Vincent 2003-2004), even those that explicitly state that they wish to create games without violence. The main argument seems to be that games centered around achieving prosocial goals are believed to be unengaging or boring for the players, lacking the dynamic tension that stems from conflict. While designers such as Victor Baker (2024) have reconsidered such claims in recent years, the sentiment is still shared commonly in discourses around role-playing games.

When role-playing games have been designed to envision potential futures, this belief in conflict as central to any game experience, coupled with an understanding of conflict as something necessarily volatile and violent, has probably been one of the main drivers of the countless dystopian future games that have been created over the years. While there are merits and transformative potential in exploring dystopian futures, such as for instance practicing ethical decision making, through debating moral dilemmas (Wright, Weissglass, and Casey 2020; Hollander 2021), showing mercy, or disobeying orders, we believe that the practicing envisioning utopian futures holds just as, if not greater transformational power. The genre hopepunk imagines future scenarios that offer "radical hope for living better" (BBC 2022), similar to imaginative practice also undertaken by futurists (McGonigal 2023). Furthermore, we should carefully consider what skills would be most helpful to practice considering the need to carve a resilient future for ourselves in the face of climate collapse, wars, and other tragedies.

b) Conflicts embedded in RPG design

Regardless of the setting, the conflicts embedded in role-playing games often reflect issues embedded in human cultures. As discussed in Chapter 5, games can explore themes of prejudice based on "sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, religion, disability/impairment, neurodiversity, body shape/size" and others (Holkar 2016). Examples include larps focusing on women's and queer histories (Friender 2022) or themes of class divides (Holkar 2017). Holkar (2016) discusses five levels in which such material can be included, indicating the escalating intensity levels represented by each one respectively:

- Prejudice exists in the background materials;
- The character has been victimized by prejudice in the past;
- The character has been prejudiced against others or expressed it in the past;
- The character is expected to be victimized during the game; and
- The character is expected to feel or express prejudice during the game. (Holkar 2016)

Alternatively, games can *erase* issues of prejudice that are uncomfortable, difficult, or inconvenient to handle (Holkar 2016). This practice is common and often unconscious, as the narratives reinforced in Western history often elide these stories (Friedner 2022), e.g., emphasizing the Great Man theory of history rather than a people's history that is inclusive of many groups (Zinn 1989). While this strategy might be better in some cases than handling such materials inappropriately, it runs the risk of erasing the lived experience of people living in conditions of marginalization—experience that is often central to their identities. Erasure tends to further reinforce dominant narratives, one that is often rooted in imperialism, colonialism, misogyny, racism, homophobia, etc. Deciding whether to approach conflicts rooted in culture, politics, and/or prejudice, and if so, how to include such topics respectfully, are essential considerations in RPG design. Furthermore, learning how to design for intersectional identities is an important skill to develop (Jones, Holkar, and Kemper 2019). As we have explored in Chapter 5 and will unpack in the following sections, each design choice has potential benefits and consequences.

i) Politics and culture

Political concepts are often so embedded in role-playing games that we often do not even recognize it. Consider how often we see the classic fantasy RPG regional/national conflict with an adventure party supporting a people's revolution against a tyrannical king. One might not reflect much over this central and old RPG trope, but at its core, it is an exercise in promoting the virtues of democratic engagement over the flaws of tyrannical autocracy, whether realistic or not for the setting. This phenomenon is called *larp democracy* (Fatland 2006), which can be considered a form of memetic bleed (Hugaas 2019), where players' ideological values bleed-in to their character's actions in the scenario.

Other examples of often encountered political concepts beyond systems of government embedded in RPG are different versions of:

- Nationalism (national / intergroup),
- Varieties of cultural exclusion (international / national / regional / intergroup / intragroup),
- Different economic systems (international / national),
- Struggles for civil rights (national),
- Colonialism (international),
- Jingoism (international), and
- Crime and punishment (intergroup / national / regional).

The list is far from complete. When we start to consider how many different political concepts we engage with when role-playing, we quickly realize how embedded these are in our games. Of particular importance are topics related to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, about which we go into more detail later in this chapter.

Similarly, culture also permeates RPGs. One can make an argument that geek culture historically has been predominantly White, male, and also mostly middle class, and it is no surprise that early games were heavily influenced by this lens. Although these demographics have been and are changing these days, one can further argue that the historical inheritance is still strongly affecting contemporary game design.

In particular, the concept of *Othering* (Said 1978) has and is still affecting game design and game play. In *Orientalism: Western Concepts of The Orient*, Edward Said (1978) challenged the continued contemporary *orientalism* practices of Western scholars, and argued that the creation of the postcolonial anthropological lens is partly a result of Western culture's need for an Other: another culture to define one's own culture in opposition toward. In other words, Othering is the way in which we define ourselves as the norm in opposition to those who do not fit that norm. For instance, in a classic fantasy setting, the world is based on an idealized Europe in the Middle Ages and every concept and character is defined to fit into this imagined setting. Everything outside of this is *the Other*: that which is not the mythical norm (Kemper 2020) and therefore threatens it. Even more concerning is that a game design tradition that does not challenge this hegemony, will, often without realizing it, recreate conflict lines that exist in our own postcolonial world, effectively Othering players whose background does not fit neatly into the frames of the games.

We advise game designers who wish to create transformative games to do what they can to become aware of these embedded cultural conflicts, so that they minimize the risk of re-creating them in their own games. A transformative game should try its utmost to be accessible to players of all cultural backgrounds.

On the other hand, role-playing games can be designed specifically to address as well as to counter these issues. An example of that was the Erasmus+ Programme "DiveIN" project from 2019-2020. Within the project, five edularp scenarios were

created to address the various stages of the radicalization process among young people, and their effectiveness was assessed by a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The findings indicated that the edularp methodology indeed has the potential to deeply impact people's political attitudes, including those that can function as an immunity barrier from radicalization processes (Dive In Consortium 2021).

Games can also touch on political themes in a less obvious way, i.e., through the narrative and game mechanics. An example is Johan Eriksson's *Oceania 2084* (2024), "an Orwellian TTRPG about resistance against a totalitarian world, ushered in by ecological collapse and authoritarian populism." While a leisure game with science fiction themes, Eriksson's goal was to symbolically represent existing and often silent structures of surveillance and suppression within contemporary Swedish society (Eriksson 2023).

ii) Race and ethnicity

As discussed in Chapter 5, role-playing games emerged from Western culture with embedded racist tropes in its fictional progenitors such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (Mendez Hodes 2019b, 2019c) and H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos (Goldfond 2021). As a result, themes of overt racism are often embedded in role-playing games. Examples include discrimination toward non-human "races," recently corrected to be labeled "species" (Dashiell 2024) in *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974); fear of the Other expressed as tribal cultures and dark, monstrous gods in *Call of Cthulhu* (Petersen 1981); entire species of mutants born into enslavement in *Dystopia Rising* (2009-); and appropriating Indigenous sacred practices in New England larp (Eddy, Zoë Antoinette 2020). Such themes are found in more socially realistic games as well, e.g., enslavement and subjugation in a Danish–Norwegian colony in the Caribbean in 1792 with the larp *St. Croix* (2015, Norway; Holkar 2016); discrimination between cultures and against Black and Indigenous American characters in the Western larp *Hell on Wheels* run in the Czech Republic (2013; Staňková and Appl 2016).

As with any form of role-playing, such experiences can increase perspective taking and empathy, raising awareness for people who do not experience that same marginalization in daily life (Leonard, Janjetovic, and Usman 2021). Furthermore, players with backgrounds of racial and ethnic discrimination can experience emancipatory bleed, in which they are able to challenge systems of oppression while steering toward liberatory play (Kemper 2017, 2020, see Chapter 3). However, such play can also invite stereotypical in-game behavior, especially if the player base has little understanding about the groups represented (Leonard, Janjetovic, and Usman 2021). Players from oppressed racial and ethnic backgrounds are often imposed upon to educate White players about the problematic nature of these themes, often without compensation (Eddy, Samantha 2020). To support more responsible play, some cultural consultants offer their insights to the community in the form of articles, such as James Mendez Hodes (2019a) offering recommendations for how to respectfully play

characters from another race than the player. Whenever possible, including the direct involvement of paid consultants throughout the design process is best practice.

Another issue that can arise especially in games designed by White, Western teams is stereotypical depictions of groups outside the default mythical norm (Garcia 2017; Kemper 2020), which is based in colonialist structures (Eddy, Zoë Antoinette 2020). For example, while *Oriental Adventures* (Trammell 2016) is an early form of representation of people of color in *D&D*, the content is problematic and exoticized. Furthermore, non-White (or non-human) groups are often not represented at all (Beltrán 2015), or *symbolically annihilated*, as in early versions of the 5th edition Player's Handbook of *Dungeons & Dragons* (Long 2015, 2016). As mentioned before, one approach *D&D* has taken recently is to hire people from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups to design fantasy settings with reference to their backgrounds, e.g., in *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* (2021; see George 2021), and *Journeys through the Radiant Citadel* (2022; see Denkmann and Burrows 2022; Higgins 2023). Such practices not only are less likely to incur cultural appropriation (Kessock 2014; Mendez Hodes 2020), but often help players from marginalized backgrounds feel more included in gaming subcultures.

iii) Gender and sexuality

Conflict in relation to gender and sexuality can be explored in several ways. Perhaps most obvious is the exploration of interpersonal conflict as it pertains to relationships in regards to sexuality. Another design consideration is whether or not such relationships are also considered in terms of a socio-cultural context that casts such relationships as taboo or illegal, thus leading to themes of potential cultural or intergroup conflict. The struggle of dealing with socio-cultural policing of gender and sexuality could be internal as well (intrapersonal conflict) as an individual may struggle with the desire to express themself within a context which would punish such subjectivity. The exploration of issues that arise out of internalized sexism, homophobia, and transphobia could be approached through many of these forms of conflict navigation and transformation, e.g., including regional or national conflicts in terms of the beliefs of different groups/countries/states within a culture. Intragroup conflict could also be explored in terms of, for example, an LGBTQIA+ group trying to determine the best way to advocate or lobby for their rights to self-expression.

These sites of conflict must be considered carefully for the very real impact they may have on players who experience them even within a safer container of play. Considering safety practices specifically related to these topics (see Chapter 5) is critical therefore, because what may even appear on the surface to be innocuous conflict related to gender and sexuality, may have profound impact on players who have had to experience such conflict consistently in their everyday lives. Care should be taken to avoid stereotypical depictions (Trammell 2014; Stang and Trammell 2020; Stang 2021).

Attempts to create transformative games to explore gender and sexuality and the conflicts that often arise related to these topics are laudable in their goals,

e.g., in games like *Just a Little Lovin'* (2011-; Groth, Grasmo, and Edland 2021). However, as with all sensitive content, such designs should be informed by careful consideration; education on the history and socio-cultural contexts of such conflict; and safety mechanisms.

iv) Benefits and risks in conflict design

The exploration of conflict in a safer container of play has the potential to have a number of related benefits. First, players can explore a complex or fraught dynamic without the usual risks inherent to doing so in everyday contexts. Examples can be as mundane and interpersonal as avoiding the possibility of irking a friend as you explore the positions of an argument, to the reproduction and exploration of extremely harmful global, social, cultural, or intergroup conflict and/or violence.

Second, such designs offer the opportunity to practice conflict transformation and to "practice difference" (Turkington 2016). Practicing difference can involve inhabiting different senses of self or subjectivity, before consciously attempting to embody such identities in everyday life outside of the game. Role-playing conflict in safer containers of play provides the player the opportunity to practice being in potentially challenging situations with fewer consequences to their actions. They can steer play towards strategies they wish to experiment with or play out different reactions to various forms of conflict. Even without conscious steering of play, engaging with fictionalized conflict may allow players to informally learn through doing, including how to engage with conflict when it may arise in everyday life.

Third, role-playing provides the opportunity to explore alternative positions in a conflict, which may provide insight in a way less possible in everyday life. As discussed before with Kangas (2016), such play must be done with consideration and care, not with the presumption that by simply exploring the fictionalized position of another, that one implicitly understands said position. However, by role-playing conflict from different perspectives in safer containers of play, players are presented with the opportunity to "walk with" (rather than "walk in the shoes of") persons with different experience. In addition, by exploring such positions, empathy may be fostered for those we find ourselves in conflict with, even if their arguments may be different from our own in everyday life.

On a broader level, if a small community, organization, or group role-plays conflicts that pertain to their collective experience or interests, they may be able to seek out common solutions without the usual consequences of such engagement in their everyday lives. They may be able to experiment with strategies or solutions to "play out" where they may lead, both positively and negatively, in order to consider the possible outcomes of different engagements with their collective points of potential conflict. On an even larger scale, one could consider the knock-on influence this could potentially have; those who have been able to experiment with these forms of role-play may be able to explore solutions and strategies, employing them in broader communities outside of play.

The potential benefits of conflict role-play however, must be considered in relation to the potential risks associated. First, we cannot assume that empathy will certainly be created through any specific gameplay; game-based learning will always be subject to a variety of factors including group dynamics, context, and socio-cultural positionality. Designing on the presumption that your game will *definitely* lead to an empathetic response, is likely to be frustrating at best and potentially problematic at worst. Empathy arising from an overly simplistic conception from playing a role that one does not express in everyday life is likely to lead to overly simplistic conceptions of similar roles and how they function in society.

Such practices can also lead to serious issues of potential misrepresentation and dark tourism (Leonard, Janjetovic, and Usman 2021). Problematic misrepresentation of real historical, socio-political, and interpersonal conflict can range from representing individuals and groups in stereotypical ways to being potentially offensive, disrespectful, or minimizing the impact such conflict can have in everyday life. Misrepresentation can also lead to fictionalized conflict becoming real conflict as players in the game are harmed by each other and/or the game design as played.

An overly simplistic understanding of conflict in general can lead to other safety issues. Role-playing fictionalized conflict in a container of play that feels unsafe for players has greater potential to lead to significant discomfort and harm. When the fictionalized conflict becomes more intense and/or touches on particularly sensitive topics for players, this risk becomes greater. When designing with conflict in mind—whether your design attempts to recreate fictional conflict explicitly or not—safety mechanics that allow players to express discomfort or resolve real conflict which may arise during gameplay are essential (see Chapter 5).

v) The Representation Tier List

Furthermore, when considering representing a community, we recommend reflecting upon your design choices according to James Mendez Hodes' Representation Tier List (2022). He specifies six categories or representation ranging from most harmful to best:

- **F Tier:** *Negative stereotype* of the group in question, which has a high chance of causing harm;
- **D Tier:** *No representation at all*, i.e., erasure;
- **C Tier:** *Generic negativity*, meaning negative tropes unrelated to stereotypes about that community; or *positive stereotypes*, which can be rationalized as "just a compliment";
- **B Tier:** *Generic positivity*, meaning positive representations that are not culturally specific, and/or *Kinda the same*, meaning the representation presents this community as "kinda the same" as everyone else;
- **A Tier:** *Identity-specific struggles and content,* meaning themes, conflicts, and topics specific to a community; and
- **S Tier:** *Constructive criticism, identity trauma narratives, and reclaimed stereotypes*, which are extremely difficult to present in ways that are authentic and meaningful without causing harm or offense (Mendez Hodes 2022).

We recommend comparing your attempts at representation with this list before sharing your design with players.

c) Advocacy, activism, inclusion, and accessibility

This section will offer some general comments on the use of larp to further social causes, advocate for others, work toward greater inclusion, and design regarding accessibility. We will discuss these topics in more detail in *Implementing Transformative Role-playing Games*.

i) Advocacy/Activism

There are potential benefits to practicing engagements with political conflict in RPGs, an endeavor that is often particularly fraught, unsafe, and with potential dire consequences in everyday life (Kangas, Loponen, and Särkijärvi, eds. 2016). Through role-play, the complex engagements that advocacy and activism require can be explored in a safer container of play. Such play includes navigating the arguments contained within any particular action of advocacy and/or activism, but also practicing doing so within the potentially heated and inequitable structures that might necessitate it. The skill and confidence to advocate for the self, group, or organisation can be practiced and role-played from different angles and perspectives, with the potential to bleed out into everyday life.

ii) Inclusion

The opportunity to design for different societal structures is inherent to all game design and art. Role-play design in particular allows for the exploration of those structures in a co-creative way. Of particular interest to social transformation is the ability to design gameplay experiences seeking to model or replicate more inclusive environments for its players. By exploring the possibilities of more inclusive social dynamics and the creation thereof, role-playing has the potential to provide space for imaginative solutions to real-world conflict. As with any transformative game, the difficult step after design, implementation, and play are done is figuring out how to distill the takeaways from the experience and use them to build more inclusive structures in our own societies.

iii) Accessibility

There are numerous ideas and tools designers can utilize not only to make role-playing games more accessible, but to furthermore give space and voice to communities that equally deserve to see themselves represented in the fictional worlds we create. Through intentional design choices and inclusion of disabled people in the design process, disability can become an asset and the creative potential of the disabled community actualized into transformative potential. In this way, our design choices can

contribute in combating the paradigm of narrative prosthesis[6] and eugenics,[7] not only in the role-playing community but in society in general (Kretchmer 2022).

6.8 Summary

This chapter has covered many topics and practices that can enhance transformative role-playing game experiences. We discussed the inclusion of myths, symbolism, archetypes, and rituals. We also presented various forms of culture as represented within games, as well as informed by and surrounding games. We presented concepts from conflict transformation that might be helpful when using design as a means to explore difficult personal and social conflicts. We discussed several examples of topics that can be represented within role-playing games, often through the lens of conflict, including politics, culture, gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. While such topics can lead to raised awareness, perspective taking, and empathy, we also discussed ways in which such representations can be fraught and challenging to explore without causing harm. Finally, we discussed the potential for topics within role-playing games to cultivate skills in activism, advocacy, inclusion, and accessibility.

In our final chapter, we will shift our attention to the process of academic research in general and studying role-playing game design in particular, giving a brief overview of existing studies that have focused on the largely positive impacts of such games on participants.

---

6   Narrative prosthesis is a theory introduced by critical disability scholars David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (2000) that discusses the pervasive appropriation and use of disability in literary works as a storytelling device for character development, a narrative obstacle, a tool for representation, or a metaphor for morality.

7   Eugenics is the scientifically inaccurate theory and practice of improving the genetic quality of the human species by selectively mating people with specific desirable hereditary traits, thus "breeding out" diseases, disabilities and other so-called undesirable characteristics from the human population (History.com Editors, 2019). Jennifer Kretchmer (2022) advocates that the exclusion of a group of people from idealized fictional worlds and their erasure from imagination is indeed a form of eugenics.

References

Addams, Jane. 1907. *Newer Ideals of Peace*. New York: Macmillan.

Albom, Sarah. 2021. "The Killing Roll: The Prevalence of Violence in Dungeons & Dragons." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 11: 6-24.

Alexiou, Alexandros. 2022. "Exploring Larp Landscapes: The Journey of a Young Greek Larp Professional." In *Distance of Touch: The Knutpunkt 2022 Magazine,* edited by Juhana Pettersson, 70-77. Linköping, Sweden: Knutpunkt.

Anderson, Ane Marie, and Katrine Jacobsen Meland. 2020. "Bleed as a Skill." Nordiclarp.org, December 28.

Anderson, Ane Marie, Riham Kharroub, Hilda Levin, and Mohamad Rabah. 2015. *The Birth of Larp in the Arab World*. Denmark: Rollespilsakademiet.

Auryn, Mat. 2020. *Psychic Witch: A Metaphysical Guide to Meditation, Magick & Manifestation*. Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications.

Baker, Meguey. 2021. "Ritual in Game Design." Lumpley Games.

Baker, Vincent. 2003-2004. "Roleplaying Theory, Hardcore." Lumpley Games.

Baker, Vincent. 2024. "Revisiting Task & Conflict Resolution." Lumpley Games, May 12.

Bastarrachea Magnani, Miguel Angel. 2023. "A Coin with Two Sides: Role-Playing Games as Symbolic Devices." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 13: 57-67.

Beltrán, Whitney "Strix." 2012. "Yearning for the Hero Within: Live Action Role-Playing as Engagement with Mythical Archetypes." In *Wyrd Con Companion Book 2012*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman and Aaron Vanek, 89-96. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Beltrán, Whitney "Strix." 2013. "Shadow Work: A Jungian Perspective on the Underside of Live Action Role-Play in the United States." In *Wyrd Con Companion Book 2013*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman and Aaron Vanek, 94-101. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Beltrán, Whitney Strix. 2015. "Why Minority Settings in RPGs Matter." Tor.com, April 27.

Beltrán, Whitney "Strix," Marissa Kelly, and Sarah Doom Richardson. 2017. *Bluebeard's Bride*. Magpie Games.

Bøckman, Petter. 2003. "The Three Way Model Revision of the Threefold Model." In *As Larp Grows Up,* edited by Morten Gade, Line Thorup, and Mikkel Sander, 12-16. Denmark: Projektgruppen KP03.

Botts, Morris. 2022a. "Episode 2: Croatia." The World of RPGs, August 5.

Botts, Morris. 2022b. "Episode 3: Greece." The World of RPGs, August 19.

Botts, Morris. 2023a. "Episode 11: China." The World of RPGs, December 24.

Botts, Morris. 2023b. "Episode 10: Hungary Part 1." The World of RPGs, November 4.

Botts, Morris. 2023c. "Episode 10: Hungary Part 2." The World of RPGs, November 4.

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Jean-Claude Passeron. 1990. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture.* 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2010. *The Functions of Role-playing Games: How Participants Create Community, Solve Problems, and Explore Identity*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2012. "Jungian Theory and Role-playing Immersion." In *Immersive Gameplay: Essays on Participatory Media and Role-Playing*, edited by Evan Torner and William J. White, 31-51. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2016a. "End of the Line: White Wolf's First Official Nordic-Style Larp." Nordiclarp.org, March 21.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2016b. "When Trends Converge – The New World Magischola Revolution." Nordiclarp.org, July 4.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2016c. "White Wolf's Convention of Thorns – A Blockbuster Nordic Larp." Nordiclarp.org, December 6.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2017a. "Active Imagination, Individuation, and Role-playing Narratives." *Tríade: Revista de Comunicação, Cultura e Midia* 5, no. 9: 158-173.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. 2017b. "Enlightenment in Blood: A Pervasive World of Darkness Nordic Larp." Nordiclarp.org, May 29.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne. In press for 2025. "Games of Personal Horror: Shadow Work and Role-playing Experiences." In *Monstrosity in Contemporary Game Cultures and Societies*, edited by Mikko Meriläinen, Joleen Blom, Lobna Hassan, and Sarah Stang. Amsterdam University Press.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne, ed. 2014. *The Wyrd Con Companion Book 2014*. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne, ed. 2015. *The Wyrd Con Companion Book 2015*. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne, and Aaron Vanek, eds. 2012. *Wyrd Con Companion Book 2012*. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne, and Aaron Vanek, eds. 2013. *Wyrd Con Companion Book 2013*. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Bowman, Sarah Lynne, and Kjell Hedgard Hugaas. 2021. "Magic is Real: How Role-playing Can Transform Our Identities, Our Communities, and Our Lives." In *Book of Magic: Vibrant Fragments of Larp Practices*, edited by Kari Kvittingen Djukastein, Marcus Irgens, Nadja Lipsyc, and Lars Kristian Løveng Sunde, 52-74. Oslo, Norway: Knutepunkt.

Brind, Simon, Juliet Brind, Emmylou Laird, John Shockley, and Martine Svanevik, eds. 2018. *The Peckforton Papers*. London: Wychwood Chase.

Brown, Maury, and Benjamin A. Morrow. 2015. "Breaking the Alibi: Fostering Empathy by Reuniting the Player and Character." In *The Wyrd Companion Book 2015*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman, 102-116. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Brown, Maury, Sarah Lynne Bowman, Quinn D, Kat Jones and Orli Nativ. 2018. "Immerton: A Society of Women." In *Shuffling the Deck: The Knutpunkt 2018 Color Printed Companion*, edited by Annika Waern and Johannes Axner, 41-52. ETC Press.

Burns, Dylan. 2014. "The Therapy Game: Nordic Larp, Psychotherapy, and Player Safety." In *The Wyrd Con Companion Book 2014*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman, 28-41. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Burton, Adrianna, Aaron Trammell, and Katherine Castiello Jones. 2024. "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Role-playing Games." In The *Routledge Handbook of Role-playing Game Studies*, edited by José P. Zagal and Sebastian Deterding, 456-469. London: Routledge.

Campbell, Joseph. 1973. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cazeneuve, Axiel. 2021. "Larp as Magical Practice: Finding the Power-From-Within." Nordiclarp.org, Aug. 13.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. 1985. *Biographia Literaria: The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life & Opinions*. Ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate. Bollingen. Princeton University Press.

Connell, Megan, Elizabeth D. Kilmer, and Jared N. Kilmer. 2020. "Tabletop Role Playing Games in Therapy." In *Integrating Geek Culture into Therapeutic Practice: The Clinician's Guide to Geek Therapy*, edited by Anthony M. Bean, Emory S. Daniel Jr., Sarah A. Hays. Fort Worth, TX, USA: Leyline Publishing.

Dashiell, Steven. 2024. "Dungeons & Dragons Is Shedding 'Race' in Gaming. Here's Why It Matters." Scientific American, July 31.

Denkmann, Libby, and Jason Burrows. 2022. "D&D's 'Radiant Citadel' Changes the Game for BIPOC Players." KUOW NPR, July 18.

Deterding, Sebastian. 2018. "Alibis for Adult Play: A Goffmanian Account of Escaping Embarrassment in Adult Play." *Games and Culture* 13, no. 3: 260–279.

Diakolambrianou, Elektra. 2021. "The Psychotherapeutic Magic of Larp." In *Book of Magic: Vibrant Fragments of Larp Practices*, edited by Kari Kvittingen Djukastein, Marcus Irgens, Nadja Lipsyc, and Lars Kristian Løveng Sunde, 95-113. Oslo, Norway: Knutepunkt.

Diakolambrianou, Elektra. 2022. "Beyond the Couch: Psychotherapy and Live Action Role-playing." Transformative Play Initiative. YouTube.

Diakolambrianou, Elektra, and Sarah Lynne Bowman. 2023. "Dual Consciousness: What Psychology and Counseling Theories Can Teach and Learn Regarding Identity and the Role-Playing Game Experience." *Journal of Roleplaying Studies and STEAM* 2, no. 2: 5-37.

Dictionary.com. 2024. "Conflict." Disctionary.com.

Dive In Consortium. 2021. *DIVE IN - Dip Beyond Your Reality: The Manual for Educators and Youth Workers on EduLARP Methodology*.

Dukes, Ramsey. 2001. *S.S.O.T.B.M.E. Revised: An Essay on Magic*. England: The Mouse That Spins.

Durkheim, Émile. 1964. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by J. W. Swain. George Allen & Unwin LTD.

Eddy, Samantha. 2020. "More than a Game: Racecraft and the Adaptation of 'Race' in Live Action Role Play." *Humanities* 9, no. 4: 124.

Eddy, Zoë Antoinette. 2020. "Playing at the Margins: Colonizing Fictions in New England Larp." *Humanities* 9, no. 4: 143.

Edwards, Ron. 2001. "GNS and Other Matters of Role-Playing Theory, Chapter 2." The Forge, October 14.

Encyclopedia of World Problems. 2020. "Cultural Relativism." UIA, April 10.

Eriksson, Johan. 2023. "Recreating the Aesthetic Experience of Orwell's Book Nineteen Eighty Four as a Tabletop Roleplaying Rule Set : A Systemic Perspective on Rules as the Aesthetic Space in Oceania 2084." Master's thesis, Uppsala University.

Evans, Dave. 2007. "The History of British Magic after Crowley: Kenneth Grant, Amado Crowley, Chaos Magic, Satanism, Lovecraft, the Left Hand Path, Blasphemy and Magical Morality." Doctoral diss., University of Bristol. The United Kingdom: Hidden Publishing.

Fatland, Eirik. 2006. "Interaction Codes." In *Role, Play, Art*: Collected Experiences of Role-Playing, edited by Thorbiörn Fritzon and Tobias Wrigstad, 17-34. Föreningen Knutpunkt.

Fatland, Eirik, and Tor Kjetil Edland. 2015. "KoiKoi – Drums! Rituals! Inaction!" Nordiclarp.org, February 20.

Fedoseev, Alexey, J. Tuomas Harviainen, and Olga Vorobyeva, eds. 2015. *Nordic-Russian Larp* Dialog. Comcon.

Folger Shakespeare Library. N.d. "As You Like It." Folger Shakespeare Library.

Fors, Johan, and Niclas Hell. 2017. "Balkan Larp: A Sprouting Blossom in the Garden of Larp." Nordiclarp.org, March 13.

Frankel, Valerie Estelle. 2010. *From Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey through Myth and* Legend. McFarland.

Friedner, Anneli. 2022. "We Were Always Here: Representation, Queer Erasure, and Use of History in Larp." Nordiclarp.org, August 15.

Gal, Corinne, Brigitte Leroy-Viémon, and Vincent Estellon. 2020. "The Use of Fiction in Psychodrama with Psychotic Adults." *Cahiers de Psychologie Clinique* 55, no. 2: 351-362.

Galtung, Johan. 1969. "Violence, Peace and Peace Research." In *Journal of Peace Research* 6: 167–191.

Galtung, Johan. 1990. "Cultural Violence." *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3: 291-305.

Garcia, Antero. 2017. "Privilege, Power, and Dungeons & Dragons: How Systems Shape Racial and Gender Identities in Tabletop Role-Playing Games." *Mind, Culture, and Identity* 24, no. 3 (2017).

Gee, James Paul. 2017. "Affinity Spaces and 21st Century Learning." *Educational Technology* 57, no. 2: 27–31.

Geertz, Clifford. 2005. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." *Daedalus* 134, no. 4: 56-86.

George, Ajit. 2021. "Ajit George: The Beautiful Challenge Of Bringing India To D&D's Ravenloft." Chuck Wendig: Terrible Minds, November 18.

Gesser, G., Paul T. Wong, and Gary T. Reker. 1988. "Death Attitudes across the Life-Span: The Development and Validation of the Death Attitude Profile (DAP)." *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 18, no. 2: 113-128.

Giovannucci, Alessandro et al., eds. 2022. *Larpbook 2022*. Larpbook.it.

Glasser, William. 1998. *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal* Freedom. Harper.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books.

Goldfond, Joshua. 2021. "The Deep Ones and the Kuo-Toa: Lovecraft's Racial Politics in Dungeons & Dragons." *Analog Game Studies*, Special Issue: The Fiend Folio (October 8).

Groth, Anna Emilie, Hanne "Hank" Grasmo, and Tor Kjetil Edland. 2021. *Just a Little Lovin': The Larp* Script. Drøbak.

Harviainen, J. Tuomas. 2011. "The Larping that is Not Larp." In *Think Larp: Academic Writings from KP2011*, edited by Thomas D. Henriksen, Christian Bierlich, Kasper Friis Hansen, and Valdemar Kølle. Copenhagen, Denmark: Rollespilsakademiet.

Harviainen, J. Tuomas. 2022. "Simulation." Encyclopedia of Ludic Terms, April 21.

Higgins, David M. 2022. "A Fierce, Fragile Utopia: A Conversation with Ajit A. George." LARB: Los Angeles Review of Books, September 24.

History.com Editors. 2019. "Eugenics." History.com.

Holkar, Mo. 2016. "Larp and Prejudice: Expressing, Erasing, Exploring, and the Fun Tax." In *Larp Realia: Analysis, Design, and Discussions of Nordic Larp*, edited by Jukka Särkijärvi, Mika Loponen, and Kaisa Kangas, 95-102. Helsinki: Ropecon ry.

Holkar, Mo. 2017. "History, Herstory and Theirstory: Representation of Gender and Class in Larps with a Historical Setting." Nordiclarp.org, 2017.

Hollander, Aaron T. 2021. "Blessed Are the Legend-Makers: Experimentation as Edification in *Dungeons & Dragons*." *Political Theology* (Feb 26): 1-16.

Hugaas, Kjell Hedgard. 2023a. "Playing Dead: How Role-Play Game Experiences Can Affect Players' Death Attitude Profiles (DAP-R)." Master's thesis, Uppsala University.

Hugaas, Kjell Hedgard. 2023b. "Practicing Dying: How Role-playing Games Can Help Us Accept Death and Boost Our Quality of Life." In *Fictional Practices of Spirituality I: Interactive Media*, edited by Felix Schniz and Leonardo Marcato, 137-160. Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag.

Hugaas, Kjell Hedgard, and Sarah Lynne Bowman. 2024. "Envisioning Role-playing Games as Vehicles for Galvanizing Conflict Transformation." CEEGS 2024, Nafplio, Greece, October 11, 2024.

Hunjan, Raji, and Soumountha Keophilavong. 2010. *Power and Making Change Happen*. Carnegie UK Trust.

Illeris, Knud. 2004. "Transformative Learning in the Perspective of a Comprehensive Learning Theory." *Journal of Transformative Education* 2, no. 2: 79-89.

Iuama, Tadeu Rodrigues, and Luiz Falcão. 2021. "Analog Role-Playing Game Studies: A Brazilian Overview." *International Journal of Role-playing* 12: 6-21.

Jara, David, and Evan Torner. 2024. "Literary Studies and Role-Playing Games." In *The Routledge Handbook of Role-playing Game Studies*, edited by José P. Zagal and Sebastian Deterding, 280-298. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Jodorowsky, Alejandro. 2010. *Psychomagic: The Transformative Power of Shamanic Psychotherapy*. Inner Traditions/ Bear & Co.

Jodorowsky, Alejandro. 2015. *Manual of Psychomagic: The Practice of Shamanic Psychotherapy*. Simon and Schuster.

Jones, Kat, Mo Holkar, and Jonaya Kemper. 2019. "Designing for Intersectional Identities." In *Larp Design: Creating Role-play Experiences*, edited by Johanna Koljonen, Jaakko Stenros, Anne Serup Grove, Aina, D. Skønsfjell, and Elin Nilsen, 167-173. Copenhagen, Denmark: Landsforeningen Bifrost.

Jung, Carl G. et al. 1964. *Man and His Symbols*. Edited by Carl G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz. London, UK: Dell Publishing.

Jung, Carl G. 1976. *The Portable Jung*. Edited by Joseph Campbell. Translated by R.C.F. Hull. New York: Penguin Random House.

Kuběnský, Petr, and Iva Vávrová. 2021a. "Czech Chamber Larp Through the Years, Part 1." Nordiclarp.org, October 25.

Kuběnský, Petr, and Iva Vávrová. 2021b. "Czech Chamber Larp Through the Years, Part 2." Nordiclarp.org, October 25.

Kamm, Björn-Ole. 2019. "A Short History of Table-Talk and Live-Action Role-Playing in Japan: Replays and the Horror Genre as Drivers of Popularity." *Simulation & Gaming* 50, no. 5 (October): 621-644.

Kamm, Björn-Ole. 2020. *Role-Playing Games of Japan: Transcultural Dynamics and Orderings*. Springer.

Kangas, Kaisa. 2015. "Experimental Anthropology – Kaisa Kangas." Nordic Larp Talks. YouTube, February 12.

Kangas, Kaisa, Mika Loponen, and Jukka Särkijärvi, eds. 2016. *Larp Politics: Systems, Theory, and Gender in Action*. Helsinki, Finland: Solmukohta 2016, Ropecon ry.

Kangas, Kaisa. 2017. "Playing the Stories of Others." In *Once Upon a Nordic Larp… Twenty Years of Playing Stories*, edited by Martine Svanevik, Linn Carin Andreassen, Simon Brind, Elin Nilsen, and Grethe Sofie Bulterud Strand, 152-158. Oslo, Norway: Knutepunkt.

Kaufman, Geoff F. and Lisa K. Libby. 2012. "Changing Beliefs and Behavior through Experience-Taking." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 103, no. 1: 1-19.

Kemper, Jonaya. 2017. "The Battle of Primrose Park: Playing for Emancipatory Bleed in Fortune & Felicity." Nordiclarp.org, June 21.

Kemper, Jonaya. 2020. "Wyrding the Self." In *What Do We Do When We Play?,* edited by Eleanor Saitta, Johanna Koljonen, Jukka Särkijärvi, Anne Serup Grove, Pauliina Männistö, and Mia Makkonen, 211-225. Helsinki, Finland: Solmukohta.

Kessock, Shoshana. 2014. "Cultural Appropriation and Larp." In *The Cutting Edge of Nordic Larp,* edited by Jon Back, 125-134. Denmark: Knutpunkt.

Kilmer, Elizabeth D., Adam D. Davis, Jared N. Kilmer, and Adam R. Johns. 2023. *Therapeutically Applied Role-Playing Games: The Game to Grow* Method. Routledge.

Kim, John, et al. 1997. "The rec.games.frp. advocacy FAQ: Part I: The Threefold Model." Darkshire.net.

Kim, Yeonsoo Julian. 2022. "Journey into Fear: Horror as a Vehicle for Healing and Transformative Play – Yeonsoo Julian Kim." Transformative Play Initiative. YouTube, May 29.

Kim, Yeonsoo Julian, Morgan Nuncio, and Jen Wong. 2018. "Epiphany – A Collaborative Mage: the Ascension Larp." Nordiclarp. org, February 1.

Koljonen, Johanna. 2007. "Eye-Witness to the Illusion: An Essay on the Impossibility of 360° Role-playing." In *Lifelike*, edited by Jesper Donnis, Morten Gade. and Line Thorup, 165-187. Copenhagen: Projektgruppen KP07.

Koljonen, Johanna et al. 2016. "Creating Play in the Magical Classroom: Part 5." Nordiclarp.org, May 17.

Koljonen, Johanna, Jaakko Stenros, Anne Serup Grove, Aina D. Skjønsfjell, and Elin Nilsen, eds. 2019. *Larp Design: Creating Role-Play Experiences.* Copenhagen, Denmark: Landsforeningen Bifrost.

Kontiza, Eleni. 2021. "ESPAIROS: 20-year Anniversary Presentation." Presentation at the 9th Portal Larp Convention, Athens, Greece. Foteino Mavro. YouTube, September 10.

Kretchmer, Jennifer. 2022. "Disability and Accessibility in RPGS." Generation Analog 2022. YouTube, July 29.

Larsen, Stephen. 1990. *Mythic Imagination: The Quest for Meaning Through Personal Mythology*. New York: Bantam Books.

Lederach, John Paul. 2014. *Little Book of Conflict Transformation: Clear Articulation of the Guiding Principles by a Pioneer in the Field*. New York: Good Books.

Linder Krauklis, Anna-Karin, and Carolina Dahlberg. 2015. "Brudpris." Nordiclarp. org, January 23.

Long, TiMar. 2015. "Character Creation: The Symbolic Annihilation of Race in *Dungeons & Dragons.*" In *The Wyrd Companion Book 2015*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman, 124-144. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Long, TiMar. 2016. "Character Creation Diversity in Gaming Art." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 7: 23-29.

McAdams, Dan P. 2011. "Narrative Identity." In *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, edited by Seth J. Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, and Vivian L. Vignoles, 99-115. New York: Springer.

McGonigal, Jane. 2023. "How To Think Like A Futurist & Be Ready For Anything | Jane McGonigal | EDU2022." Lecture at the Energy Disruptors: UNITE Summit. YouTube, December 15,

Mendez Hodes, James. 2019a. "'May I Play a Character from Another Race?'" Jamesmendezhodes.com, Feb 14.

Mendez Hodes, James. 2019b. "Orcs, Britons, and the Martial Race Myth, Part I: A Species Built for Racial Terror." Jamesmendezhodes.com, January 14.

Mendez Hodes, James. 2019c. "Orcs, Britons, and the Martial Race Myth, Part II: They're Not Human." Jamesmendezhodes.com, September 1.

Mendez Hodes, James. 2020. "How to Change Your Conversations About Cultural Appropriation." Jamesmendezhodes.com, January 2.

Mendez Hodes, James. 2022. "Representation Tier List." Jamesmendezhodes.com, December 29.

Menter, Adam, and Arvind Venkataramani. 2021. *The Ritual Design Toolkit*. Ritual Design Toolkit.

Mitchell, David T, and Sharon L. Snyder. 2000. *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. University of Michigan Press.

Most Improbable LLC. 2009-. *Dystopia Rising*. Live action role-playing game]. Most Improbable LLC.

Murdock, Maureen. 2020. *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for* Wholeness. Shambhala.

Murphy, Caro. 2023. "Ritual: The Importance of Framing Transformational Experiences -- Caro Murphy." Transformative Play Initiative. YouTube, October 4.

Neumann, Eric. 2014. *The Origins and History of Consciousness.* Princeton University Press.

Nielsen, Martin. 2014. "Culture Calibration in Pre-larp Workshops." Nordiclarp.org, April 22.

Nøglebæk, Oliver. 2021. "Tarot for Larpers." Nordiclarp.org, November 5.

Nordic Larp Wiki. 2019. "Playing to Lose." Nordic Larp Wiki, September 3.

Nordic Larp Wiki. 2022. "Knutepunkt-books." Nordic Larp Wiki, August 15.

Ottenheimer, Harriet. 2009. *The Anthropology of Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Oxford Reference. 2024. "Collective Conscience." Oxford Reference.

Page, Craig. 2014. "Playing With Myth: Applying Mythic Imagination to Live Action Role-Play." In *Wyrd Con Companion Book 2014*, edited by Sarah Lynne Bowman, 60-67. Los Angeles, CA: Wyrd Con.

Pansardi, Pamela, and Marianna Bindi. 2021. "The New Concepts of Power? Power-over, Power-to and Power-With." *Journal of Political Power* 14, no. 1: 51–71.

Pearson, Carole S. 2015. *Awakening the Heroes Within: Twelve Archetypes to Help Us Find Ourselves and Transform Our* World. HarperOne.

Peterson, Jon. 2012. *Playing at the World: A History of Simulating Wars, People and Fantastic Adventures, from Chess to Role-playing Games.* San Diego, CA: Unreason Press.

Pettersson, Juhana. 2018. "Lobbying for the Dead – Vampire Larp at the European Parliament." Nordiclarp.org, January 23.

Pettersson, Maria. 2018. "Larping in the Political Heart of Europe." Nordic Larp Talks. YouTube, March 20.

Pohjola, Mike. 2004. "Autonomous Identities: Immersion as a Tool for Exploring, Empowering, and Emancipating Identities." In *Beyond Role and Play*, edited by Markus Montola and Jaakko Stenros, 81-96. Ropecon ry.

Pozo, Teddy 2018. "Queer Games after Empathy: Feminism and Haptic Game Design Aesthetics from Consent to Cuteness to the Radically Soft." *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 18, no. 3 (December 2018).

Rank, Otto. 2004. *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Exploration of Myth.* Trans. Gregory C. Richter and E. James Lieberman. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ray, J.J., and J. Najman. 1974. "Death Anxiety and Death Acceptance: A Preliminary Approach." In *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 5, no. 4: 311–315.

Ritual Design Lab. 2017. "About Ritual Design." Ritual Design Lab.

Robson, David. 2022. "The Sci-fi Genre Offering Radical Hope for Living Better." BBC, January 14.

Rosenberg, Marshall. 2015. *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life.* 3rd Ed. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.

Rusch, Doris C. 2017. *Making Deep Games: Designing Games with Meaning and Purpose*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Rusch, Doris C., and Andrew M. Phelps. 2020. "Existential Transformational Game Design: Harnessing the 'Psychomagic' of Symbolic Enactment." *Frontiers in Psychology* (November 4).

Rusch, Doris C., and Andrew M. Phelps. 2022. "The Magic of The Witch's Way." In *The Magic of Games*, edited by Nikolaus Koenig, Natalie Denk, Alexander Pfeiffer, and Thomas Wernbacher, 55-73. Edition Donau-Universität Krems.

Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism - Western Concepts Of The Orient.* Pantheon Books.

Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality.* Oxford University Press.

Stang, Sarah. 2021. "The Fiend Folio's Female Fiends: Kelpies, Vampires, and Demon Queens." *Analog Game Studies, Special Issue: The Fiend Folio* (October 10).

Stang, Sarah, and Aaron Trammell. 2020. "The Ludic Bestiary: Misogynistic Tropes of Female Monstrosity in Dungeons & Dragons." *Games and Culture* 15, no. 6: 730-747.

Staňková, Tereza "Ciri," and Filip "Drirr" Appl. 2016. "Hell on Wheels – Experience the Wild West." Nordiclarp.org, August 5.

Stenros, Jaakko. 2015. "Playfulness, Play, and Games: A Constructionist Ludology Approach." PhD diss, University of Tampere.

Stenros, Jaakko, and Sarah Lynne Bowman. 2024. "Transgressive Role-play." In *The Routledge Handbook of Role-playing Game Studies*, edited by José P. Zagal and Sebastian Deterding, 425-441. London: Routledge.

Stenros, Jaakko, and Markus Montola, eds. 2010. *Nordic Larp.* Stockholm, Sweden: Fëa Livia.

Tanenbaum, Theresa Jean. 2022. "Restorying Trans Game Studies—Theresa Jean Tanenbaum." Transformative Play Initiative. YouTube, Nov. 29.

Tajfel, Henri. 1974. "Social Identity and Intergroup Behavior." *Social Science Information/Sur les Sciences Sociales 13*, no. 2: 65–93.

Tajfel, Henri, and John Turner. 1979. "An Integrative Theory of Inter-group Conflict." In *The Social Psychology of Inter-group Relation*s, edited by W. G. Austin and S. Worchel, 33–47. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Thompson, Jennifer Jo, Cheryl Ritenbough, and Mark Nichter. 2009. "Reconsidering the Placebo Response from a Broad Anthropological Perspective." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 33, 112–152.

Tolkien, J.R.R. 2020. *The Lord of the Rings*. Clarion Books.

Torner, Evan. 2021. "Actual Play Reports: Forge Theory and the Forums." *Watch Us Roll: Essays on Actual Play and Performance in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*, edited by Shelly Jones. McFarland & Co.

Torner, Evan. 2024. "RPG Theorizing by Designers and Players." In *The Routledge Handbook of Role-playing Game Studies*, edited by José P. Zagal and Sebastian Deterding. London: Routledge.

Trammell, Aaron. 2014. "Misogyny and the Female Body in Dungeons & Dragons." *Analog Game Studies* I, no. III.

Trammell, Aaron. 2015. "The Ludic Imagination." Ph.D. Diss. Rutgers University.

Trammell, Aaron. 2016. "How Dungeons & Dragons Appropriated the Orient." *Analog Game Studies* III, no. I (January 11).

Trammell, Aaron. 2023. *Repairing Play: A Black Phenomenology*. MIT Press.

Turkington, Moyra. 2016. "Rehearsing Difference." In *Larp Politics: Systems, Theory and Gender in Action*, edited by Kaisa Kangas, Mika Loponen, and Jukka Särkijärvi, 94-104. Helsinki, Finland: Ropecon ry.

Turi, Bálint Márk, and Mátyás Hartyándi. 2023. "Playing With The Fictitious 'I': Early Forms of Educational Role-Playing in Hungary, 1938-1978." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 14 (September): 47-60.

Turner, Allen. 2021. "'Disrupting Monkey, Laughing Raven: The Magic of the Tricksters' Dance' by Allen Turner." Transformative Play Initiative. YouTube, November 1.

Turner, Victor. 1982. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. PAJ Publications.

Turner, Victor. 1995. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

Vanek, Aaron. 2011. "The Non-United Larp States of America." In *Talk Larp: Provocative Writings from KP2011*, 124-133. Rollespilsakademiet.

Vejdemo, Susanne. 2018. "Play to Lift, not Just to Lose." In *Shuffling the Deck: The Knutpunkt 2018 Color Printed Companion*, edited by Annika Waern and Johannes Axner, 143-146. Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University: ETC Press.

Venkataramani, Arvind, and Adam Menter. 2020. "Integrating Self and Systems Through Ritual Towards Deeper Systems Practice." In *Proceedings of Relating Systems Thinking and Design RSD9 Symposium*, Ahmedabad, India. 2020.

Walters, B. Dave. 2021. "Diversity and Inclusion in the Content Creation Space." Keynote presented at *GENeration Analog* 2021 (online).

White, Michael. 2007. *Maps of Narrative Practice.* New York: Norton.

White, Michael, and David Epston. 1990. *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends.* New York: Norton.

Wright, Jennifer Cole, Daniel E. Weissglass, and Vanessa Casey. 2020. "Imaginative Role-Playing as a Medium for Moral Development: Dungeons & Dragons Provides Moral Training." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 60, no. 1: 99-129.

Xiong, Shuo, Ruoyu Wen, and Mátyás Hartyándi. 2022. "The Chinese Hotpot of Larp." In *Distance of Touch: The Knutpunkt 2022 Magazine*, edited by Juhana Pettersson, 86-89. Knutpunkt 2022 and Pohjoismaisen roolipelaamisen seura.

Zagal, José P., and Sebastian Deterding, eds. 2024. *The Routledge Handbook of Role-playing Game Studies*. London: Routledge.

Zinn, Howard. 1980. *A People's History of the United States.* New York: Harper & Row.

Ludography

Baker, D. Vincent, and Meguey Baker. 2010. *Apocalypse World.* [Tabletop role-playing game]. Lumpley Games.

Bergmann Hamming, Jeppe, and Maria Bergmann Hamming. 2013. *Sarabande.* [Freeform]. Alexandria.dk.

Edland, Tor Kjetil, and Hanne Grasmo. 2011-. *Just a Little Lovin'.* [Live action role-playing game]. Various countries.

Gorman, Wendy, David Hertz, and Heather Silsbee. 2014-. *Still Life.* [Live action role-playing game]. Golden Cobra Challenge.

Gygax, Gary, and Dave Arneson. 1974. *Dungeons & Dragons.* [Tabletop role-playing game]. TSR, Inc.

Linder Krauklis, Anna-Karin, Carolina Dahlberg, Tor Kjetil Edland and Trine Lise Lindahl. 2014. *Brudpris.* [Live action role-playing game]. Norway.

Morningstar, Jason. 2009. *Fiasco.* [Tabletop role-playing game]. Bully Pulpit Games.

Petersen, Sandy. 1981. *The Call of Cthulhu.* [Tabletop role-playing game]. Chaosium

Raaum, Margrete, Eirik Fatland, and Tor Kjetil Edland. 2014. *KoiKoi.* [Live action role-playing game]. Norway.

Simpson, Laura. 2020. *Companion's Tale.* [Tabletop role-playing game]. Indie Press Revolution.

White Wolf Publishing. 1991. *Vampire: The Masquerade.* [Tabletop role-playing game]. Stone Mountain, GA: White Wolf.

Wizards of the Coast. 2021. *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft.* [Tabletop role-playing game]. Seattle, WA: Wizards of the Coast.

Wizards of the Coast. 2022. *Journeys through the Radiant Citadel.* [Tabletop role-playing game]. Seattle, WA: Wizards of the Coast.