

Dungeons and dragons: Critical peace praxis at play

By

Darryl Andrew Zuend

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba
In partial fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Joint Master's Program in Peace and Conflict Studies

University of Manitoba / University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, MB

Copyright © 2022 by Darryl Andrew Zuend

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	ii
Dedication.....	v
Abstract.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Glossary.....	viii
Role-Playing Games	viii
Fiction and Fantasy	viii
Story and Narrative.....	ix
Patient and Educated Hope	ix
Constructive Storytelling.....	x
Power	x
Agency.....	x
Violence	xi
Horizon of Action	xi
Horizon of Intent.....	xii
Positive Negative Play.....	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter Overviews.....	4
Conclusion.....	5
Chapter 2: Context.....	6
Introduction	6
D&D Modern History	7
Growth in Conflict.....	14
Wargaming.....	15
Ancient Games.....	18
The Hickman Revolution	19
My Story of Stories.....	23
Modern Influence	28

D&D's Modern Professional Influence.....	30
Therapeutics	31
Education	33
Criminal Justice	36
Community engagement	40
Conclusion.....	43
Introduction	44
D&D and storytelling.....	45
D&D as a creative simulation space.....	48
Education	53
Critical and Imaginative Peace Educators.....	54
Oppression	56
Morality.....	60
Critical Thinking.....	61
Culture	64
Knowledge and Meaning Making	64
Power and Agency	68
Life, Death, and Violence	70
Inclusion and Accessibility	73
Play.....	75
Imagination	76
Games	78
Story	82
Emotion.....	84
Utopia.....	85
Identity.....	87
Race.....	88
Gender	91
Religion.....	93
Conclusion.....	96
Chapter 4: Methodology.....	98
Introduction	98
Autoethnographical method.....	98
Positionality	102
Significance of the study	102

Limitations of the study	105
Conclusion.....	106
Chapter 5.....	108
To Dream, Perchance to Dream: Mummies, Dragons, and Arrows – Stories That Liberate the Mind and Inform Action	
	108
Introduction	108
Millil and the Case of Mummy Rot - <i>Story of Self</i>	109
Story of Us.....	111
Story of Now	114
A Family Tragedy - <i>Story of Self</i>	117
Story of Us.....	120
Story of Now	124
Of Elven Arrows and BATNA - <i>Story of Self</i>	128
Story of Us.....	129
Story of Now	133
Findings	136
Who.....	136
What.....	138
Where	141
When.....	142
How	143
Conclusion.....	145
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	147
Introduction	147
Overall key findings.....	148
Future research and practice	150
Conclusion.....	152

Dedication

To my wife Christina,

my sons Alexius and Arthur,

and to my parents Alexius and Annigje

You're the best things to ever happen to me. You inspire me daily, and you are the reasons why I hope to contribute to a more peaceful world for all of you.

Abstract

This thesis examines the potential of Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) as a new peace method. Using an autoethnographic approach informed by Ganz's (2015) 3-level storytelling method and Haven's (2015) core story components, this exploratory research grounds D&D in PACS literature and theory. While sharing compelling examples of how critical peace skills and critical consciousness development can be facilitated by playing a game of imaginative worldbuilding and creative conflict simulation.

This thesis probes D&D's PACS relevance through cultural, educational, play, and identity lenses and explores how D&D can deploy theoretical PACS principles as active, positive peace training. The significance of this study is twofold. First, it lays the groundwork for further research into the positive peace potential of D&D while simultaneously contributing utopian storytelling experiential knowledge to the growing field of PACS literature. Second, it challenges the traditional hegemony of patient hope-sustaining banking education systems of knowledge replication.

Acknowledgements

I wish to begin with a sincere thank you and boundless gratitude for all my mentors at the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg. Chief amongst them, Dr. Sean Byrne who very gently and very patiently provided me the opportunity to find myself as a storyteller and develop my fledgling critical consciousness in his classrooms and throughout this writing process. Without his steady hand and support throughout all the ups and downs of my academic experience, I would have been lost. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Nancy Hansen, Dr. Jessica Senehi, and Dr. Lloyd Kornelsen who provided me with much needed guidance and constructive feedback throughout this process, and for helping me grow even when I doubted myself. Thank you also, to Dr Adam Muller, Jason Brennan, and Susan Ducharme for all your support facilitating my positive academic and volunteer experiences in PACS and at the Arthur Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice like the Winnipeg International Storytelling Festival organized each year by Dr. Jessica Senehi.

My special thanks to my wife Christina for supporting me in all the ways I needed and for persevering and helping me to do so even through the darkest of days along the way. Without your steadfast backing and calming hand, I know with certainty I'd have faltered along the way.

I would like to also thank my family and friends for their tangible and intangible support. Thank you to my parents for allowing my brother and I to host countless sessions of D&D in our home growing up despite the satanic panic. Thank you to my brother and my role model in most things including DMing for inviting me to his game and to my best friend Michael who has taken this wild storytelling journey with me down through the years.

Glossary

In all things, precise use of language inclusive of definitions is important, especially in attempting to write academically innovative papers. However, as Upton (2015) suggests, definitions need not be exhaustively researched or mutually exclusive. Multiple meanings of the same thing can be correct and different. The utility and purpose of a chosen definition is to be conceptually convenient as a facilitator of valuable discourse (Upton, 2015, p. 13). Therefore, while writing this thesis, some standard terms below are intentionally defined or combined for this discourse with a particular discussion in mind.

Role-Playing Games

TTRPGS (Tabletop Role-Playing Games), CRPG (Computer Role-Playing Games), and JRPGS (Japanese Role-Playing Games) are each term's that represent a specific platform or format of gaming family within the subcultural genre of Role-Playing Games (RPGs). To avoid multi-definition confusion and inconsistencies inherent to these subcultural divisions, focusing on Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) as representing the entire RPG phenomena enables me to simplify the discourse while effectively contributing to the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) literature on this emerging new peace method.

Fiction and Fantasy

Authors in various fields utilize these terms with variable meanings. For purposes of this thesis, fantasy is deployed as a specific genre subdivision of the term fiction representative of fictional stories such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Conan*, *Game of Thrones*, and countless other stories involving monsters, magic, heroes, villains, and adventure in

medieval or medieval-like fiction. Fiction is a broader term encompassing all genres, including fantasy, science fiction, and steampunk, etc. Fiction is broadly used throughout this thesis to inclusively describe something as born of the imagination rather than materially placed. In contrast, fantasy is used to identify a specific genre of fiction.

Story and Narrative

These terms have gathered incalculable definitions throughout human history. To facilitate the body of this thesis, I use a definition of story I've used before: A story is someone telling someone else that something happened. To this end, the story is inclusive of fiction and non-fiction. It's multimodal as it can be experienced in all mediums, and since it infuses every aspect of our lives, it is simply understood universally by everyone (Gottschall, 2012, p. 15). Further, the term story or narrative is used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

Patient and Educated Hope

There are two types of hope discussed throughout this thesis, patient hope and educated hope. Patient hope is an anti-utopian form through the imposition of 'practical' social, economic, and political limitations to imagined revolutionary ideals (Levitas, 2008). This pragmatic approach may also function in critical spaces and effectively puts utopian visions at risk of failure due to a prioritization of gradual change that subjects the original transformative image to gradual compromise rendering its revolutionary essence inert. Levitas also defines educated hope as the desire to nurture utopian seeds by imagining other worlds (Levitas, 2008, pp. 42-43).

Constructive Storytelling

Associated with positive peace, constructive transcultural storytelling is a method of establishing collaborative power with rather than power over others. Constructive storytelling is inclusive and fosters mutual recognition by creating opportunities for open, inclusive, dialogue and reflexive insight. In this way constructive storytelling builds understanding, awareness, and enables and validates the voice of those who might otherwise be silenced (Senehi, 2002, pp. 44-45).

Power

Power has an expansive library of meanings and uses which left unaddressed could create complicating confusion as to its intended use and definition in this thesis. Boulding (1990b) notes two alternative concepts of power. The first expressly differentiates between three distinct categories of power, threat power or the power to destroy, economic power the power to produce and exchange, and integrative power that enables the creation of relationships and legitimacy (Boulding, 1990b, p. 10). While these partitions of power and a deeper investigation into Boulding's literature on the matter would likely be quite salient to the topics explored in this thesis, for this autoethnographic exploratory thesis, Boulding's second definition is used for its universality and simplicity. Power is the capacity to get others to do things that contribute to what we want (Boulding, 1990b, p. 10).

Agency

For the duration of this thesis the term agency is frequently utilized. While Hancock (2017) correctly suggests that agency is a combination of active interaction and participation,

productive work, a sense of belonging, and autonomy and capacity to choose, the scope of this thesis limits our ability to address each of these needs appropriately (pp. 259-260). As a result, for the duration of this thesis these four elements should be regarded as the necessary basis from which agency, defined simply as the power of actors to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure (Jay, D. & Jay, J., 1991, as cited in Hancock, 2017, p. 258).

Violence

Bartos and Wehr (2002) assert that violence exists both intrapersonally, interpersonally, in groups, and organizations and on both national and internal stages (as cited in Byrne & Senehi 2012, p. 14, p. 22). While the opportunity to discuss the origins and varied causes of violence and how to urgently address them is a valuable pursuit, the scope of this thesis does not include this exploration as we rely on Johan Galtung's (1996) definition of direct, structural, and cultural violence with some personal adjustments with the context of this thesis in mind to frame our inclusive use of the term violence. Violence, therefore, should be understood for the duration of this thesis as the use of direct or indirect, systemic or otherwise, that denies people economic opportunity, fulfilment, social equality, human rights, and or dignity (Byrne & Senehi, 2012, p. 35).

Horizon of Action

The horizon of action is the totality of actions available to a player within the boundaries of the sum of the game's boundaries both internal and external, whether they are aware of those moves or not (Upton, 2015, pp. 45-47).

Horizon of Intent

The horizon of intent is the sum of viable actions available to a player within the boundaries of game's boundaries both internal and external of which the player might choose. This reflects the exclusion of unfavourable possible actions for a short listing of all favourable possible actions (Upton, 2015, pp. 47-49).

Positive Negative Play

Positive negative play is defined as play that explores transgressive, challenging, or negative content and themes that contribute to deeper meaningful learning and personal growth for players outside of traditional educational contexts and outcomes (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p. 4).

Chapter 1: Introduction

I was asked by my advisor Dr. Sean Byrne in my thesis proposal defense how my M.A. thesis project on Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) has made me think differently about peace and conflict studies (PACS) and the social sciences. When I reflect on my journey towards understanding peace, I come to the realization that the evolution of my answer began long before I ever enrolled in PACS and before I realized I was on that journey. When I arrived in PACS, I would have defined peace as nonviolence between states. This changed when I read *Peacemaking Circles: From Crime to Community* in Dr. Senehi's Interpersonal Communication course. My understanding of what peace meant was fundamentally and unexpectedly adjusted to embrace diverse ideas especially about practice, forever altering not just my academic conceptualization of the peace term but also my educational experience in the program and the world around me. Concurrently, this was when, in my judgement, my capacity for self-critical thought was jumpstarted after decades of prescriptive learning and status quo training.

Due to the relatable narrative writing style of Kay Pranis's book and the provocative advocacy of challenging the explicit status quo criminal justice knowledge production system, I was immediately provoked into a self-critical process that continues to influence my awareness and perspectives on peace today. Having a justice studies background, introducing culturally specialized alternatives to the established criminal justice system immediately concerned me as it represented a slippery slope towards a tiered criminal justice system. This kind of program, in my view at the time, would threaten society's ability to legitimately operate an unbiased and equal justice system for everyone. Early in my reading of Kay Pranis's book, the criminal justice system I revered so much was described as structured

sanctioned vengeance. While it took me some time to come down from my agitated difference of opinion, this description would slowly activate my critical awareness and eye toward what I would eventually come to know as my own objectively oppressive colonial attitudes. It was only after reading this book that I'd start reconciling that justice wasn't peace to me and that peace wasn't something the state had an exclusive monopoly over.

When I came to this understanding, I was finally able to consider the more nuanced lessons of personal and community-centered peacebuilding within the book, PACS, and in the context of the education both academically and culturally I had received to date. It was only then that I'd come to several personally revolutionary insightful revelations. First, my experience as a wraparound facilitator with Wraparound Durham, a client-driven social service pilot program that aimed to connect at-risk individuals with existing supportive community members was similar in many ways to healing circles. Both Wraparound Durham and peacemaking circles are healing focused, grounded in individual and collective accountability, reliant upon community rather than the state, and focused on getting the client in context well (Pranis, et. al., 2003, p. 10). Second, my time spent pursuing justice, law, and order, and what I perceived as right was not my authentic passion for peacebuilding but rather the status quo perversion of that passion (Pranis, et. al., 2003, p. 24). Society had shown me that the good and right thing was to punish criminals for the harm they had committed against society. Pranis et. al. (2003) reminded me that how we deal with differences is important for ourselves, our families, and our communities (p. 26). I no longer believe punitive vengeance is justice, nor do I believe it is beneficial for achieving peace.

By pursuing justice law and order I had been searching for a way to affect positive change using the tools I had been given but without, until reading about peace circles, knowing that it was peace and healing that I was looking to affect instead. And finally, the ideas presented within this initially controversial book didn't initially resonate with me, in

time I came to understand they were intimately familiar to me in structure and function due to my decades of experience playing D&D. D&D is a structured form of play where the structure itself serves only as a facilitator of the game's explicit purpose and implicit effects. In this way the rules act as the universally applicable language for fun in the same way that the Wraparound program served as a facilitatory support for client driven resolutions and the circle process facilitates healing and peace.

Ultimately, being asked how my views on PACS had changed over time deserves mention at the beginning of my thesis because that change is directly connected to my newly emerged critical consciousness and the conception of how D&D and games are a bridge into PACS practice work. Accepting that what I had believed for so long could not only have been wrong but also harmful to others forced me to critically examine truths I once embraced in search of new ones. In effect, *Peacemaking Circles: From Crime to Community* has opened my eyes to new ideas and ways of thinking and has implicitly activated my critical consciousness. I had naively entered the PACS Joint Master's Program thinking it was only focused on facilitation, arbitration, negotiation, mediation, and elite diplomacy. I am now working towards leaving the program with a much deeper appreciation and understanding of PACS, having adapted to my new capacity for critical discourse and self-awareness.

The Aim of the Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the grounding of D&D in the PACS literature as a viable practice method and generator of knowledge production. The thesis connects multidisciplinary research within existing PACS literature to facilitate critical discourse capable of awakening others; as my experience preparing for this thesis has done for me. This experience led to my awareness to perceive D&D as more than a game of escapist fiction, and at the same time, however, to see it as a space for training the moral imagination with the

effect of decolonizing people's access to the traditional and prescriptive language and practice of knowledge production

This thesis aims to address the primary research question: In what ways does D&D relate to the PACS literature, and how is it relevant to PACS praxis? By contributing my culturally grounded storytelling experience with D&D and my PACS-inspired journey of self-re-evaluation and discovery, I hope that this thesis' findings may one day ignite the imaginations and critical awareness of others as it has done for me. By scaffolding my experiential knowledge upon existing critical peace literature, my goal is to explore my research question and share my experience with culturally grounded non-traditional elicitive peace training and connect it to PACS with the hope that others could one day be inspired to build upon my work.

Chapter Overviews

This thesis is written in 6 chapters. To facilitate my aim of presenting D&D as salient to the future of PACS praxis, I will rely on the hybridization of experiential knowledge, existing PACS theory, and multidisciplinary research. Chapter one is written with the intent to introduce both myself and the central theme of this autoethnographic thesis. Chapter two of this thesis reviews the evolving history of D&D from its ancient roots to present-day use of D&D by professionals. Chapter three serves as a limited review of existing literature relating core elements of the PACS and interdisciplinary literature with D&D and PACS praxis. This chapter is categorized into four conceptual silos: education, culture, play, and identity. Chapter four outlines the autoethnographic methodology I use in the thesis. It outlines my positionality and explores this study's potential significance and limitations. Building upon the four conceptual silos of chapter three, chapter five autoethnographically explores three

D&D experiences. I examine their aesthetic relevance and influence on me and reflect upon them using my insider's perspective and drawing connections to PACS literature. Chapter six provides an overview of my PACS-inspired experiential findings and suggests future avenues in which PACS can further explore D&D within the body of PACS literature and praxis.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a short overview of how I came to be writing this thesis and my motivations for doing so. It also introduced my research question and outlined the structure of the thesis. To facilitate a collaborative exploration of D&D's narrative-based capacities, the following chapter explores some of the historical context of D&D and the game's relevance for professionals today.

Chapter 2: Context

Introduction

Before the utility and transformative potential of D&D to PACS praxis can begin, a concerted effort must first be made to identify what D&D is. Defining D&D is not easy, even on the surface of things. To many Dungeon Masters (DMs), D&D could simply be an opportunity to hang out with friends or share a fantasy story they've imagined with their friends. It could be an opportunity to get out of the house or be the social cornerstone of the participants' week. Moral entrepreneurs claim that D&D causes youth to reject traditional values and disassociate from reality. Gamer apologists might describe D&D as 'just a game' or 'harmless escapism.' Both views of D&D fail to understand the metacommunicative frame, that is how it teaches players, child and adult alike, through play (Laycock, 2015, pp. 214-215).

D&D can be much more than these definitions of D&D, yet when searching for my meaning, I have often struggled to manifest the language to create one. With no shortness of personal frustration, I often resort to discounting D&D's complex social footprint in my life and those around me by describing it as acting with friends around a table or even as fantasy escapism, a word that can carry with it subtle but toxic utilitarian judgment. Vu defines D&D as fantasy fiction framed by actuarial science where paratextual discourse displaces core text (2017, p. 283, p. 286). This attempt to define D&D highlights the structured elements of chance injected by the randomness of dice and interpersonal interaction. Even the sometimes-complex mathematics required to calculate any number of thresholds for success and failure during the game is more than the sum of the activity. These game-based experiences are practice at a real-world mathematical skill that could be included with Vu's definition by acknowledging the presence of something more than the sum of D&D's rules. Additionally,

Garcia defines D&D as a rules system that dictates constraints and ideologies used for group cultural meaning-making (2017, p. 232).

This chapter goes on an unconventional historical journey in content and method. Unlike traditional historic accounts, the context chapter begins with the inception of D&D to establish an initial concept of the game and the real-world conflict that helped shape the game and the people behind it. With this grounding, a journey back in time to trace its's origin story outlines D&D's considerable cultural heritage before returning to my personal history with D&D and its present-day significance in more and more corners of society. Along this journey, we take a path beginning with the formative moments of D&D before turning to the cultural roots of the phenomenon in wargaming and ancient games. Returning to the modern-day, we briefly review the Hickman Revolution (1982) and how this event mirrors previous interactions between games and story. We next explore how various professions are using D&D today. Finally, the chapter explores how D&D's history and my 200-year present collide with the expanding influence the game has to date.

D&D Modern History

D&D, first conceived of in 1969 and later published in 1974, has persisted and flourished through seven editions. Witwer (2015) reasonably suggests that the history of D&D began with Charles Roberts company's publication of *Tactics* in 1953 as the first commercially available wargame (p. 51; Laycock, 2015, p.35). While other historical accounts assert that D&D's roots rest in the ancient practice of wargaming, a practice believed to have begun in the Gupta Empire in the sixth century CE (Laycock, 2015, p. 31-32). Published in the same year, Upton (2015) notes that games, inclusive of D&D, are manifestations of the impulse to play both ancient and pre-cultural (p. 4). For the purposes of this examination of D&D's history, I deliberately select the release of *Tactics* in 1953 as the

beginning of D&D's modern history to isolate its history from the following contextual section investigating the ancient history of wargaming even though Tactics was not the beginning of the wargaming hobby. The first wargame for civilians was H.G. Wells' *Little Wars: A Game for Boys of Twelve Years of Age to One Hundred and Fifty and for That more Intelligent Sort of Girl Who Likes Boys' Games and Books* in 1913 (Laycock, 2015, p. 34). In contrast to wargames that preceded it, which taught strategy and trained soldiers, *Little Wars* was instead designed to be fun and satisfy players' impulses that might otherwise lead to actual war, marking the explicit transition of wargaming from science into art (Laycock, 2015, p. 34). Consequently, demonstrating a shift in intent away from war education towards explicit war prevention could be salient.

The earliest signs of a transition from wargaming to roleplaying appeared in 1941 when *Life Magazine* published an article describing a 19-year-old's club focused on a fictional world called Atzor. Each member of the club created a persona and ruled a nation. Parties were attended in costume, and an entire system was designed for war, currency, trade, and even a postal system and languages were invented, making the wargame a sort of performance art (Laycock, 2015, p. 34). This kind of creative expression within the wargaming framework marked a notable cultural backlash against reason and efficiency-driven wargaming that had, until then, dominated the practice for centuries (Laycock, 2015, p. 34-35).

Beginning in 1953, following the end of World War II and spurred on by a single United States (U.S.) army infantryman's enjoyment of military war games, a new form of entertainment grounded in centuries-old military practice was offered up to the world. Charles Roberts' wargame 'Tactics' would become the staple upon which his company would thrive. These games were designed to be fun, historical, realistic, strategic, and competitive tabletop miniature games, in contrast with more traditional board games

available at the time. The Avalon Hill Company would become the fourth-largest producer of adult board games by 1962 and start a revolutionary wargaming subculture that included magazines, clubs, and a thriving market of customized wargames with different historical contexts (Laycock, 2015, p. 35).

In these social circles that D&D icons like Wesley, Gygax, and Arneson, the co-creators of D&D, flourished not as strategists or community leaders but as innovators, creators, and storytellers within the community. The first step away from wargaming came from an often-overlooked innovator named Dave Wesley. He hosted a game called “Braunstein” in 1968, introducing the idea of non-competitive games to the hobby and moving players away from zero-sum competition gaming (Laycock, 2015, pp. 35-36). While the game “Braunstein” would ultimately fail as a wargame, it evolved into a roleplaying game (RPG) that is eventually known to have influenced Dave Arneson. “Braunstein” would become known to describe a new genre of open-ended war games where teams of people with specific roles cooperated towards nebulous ends (Laycock, 2015, p. 37).

In 1971, Gygax began to see some more significant success with his game publishing endeavours, most notably with his landmark game system *Chainmail* (Witwer, 2015, p. 91). Unlike *Napoleonic Diplomacy II*, which he had published in 1969, *Chainmail* was notable for its pioneering traits, such as the symbolic individualization of minis and the introduction of customizable fictional equipment for individual heroes and a random outcome generator (Witwer, 2015, p. 87). Further, *Chainmail* contained never-before-seen supplemental fantasy material, including in a 1972 second edition publication, the opportunity to play as fantasy races. These novel rules encouraged and empowered players to re-imagine the fantasy worlds and battles of J.R.R. Tolkien and Robert E. Howard resulting in another break from traditional historical wargaming towards heroic fantasy. The wargaming scene shifted away from historical zero-sum competitive battle re-enactments towards cooperative open-ended

heroic fantasy and away from grand armies and strategies toward individual heroic choices (Witwer 2015, p. 98). These new games, as Laycock asserts, would, for the first time, resemble both science and art by combining the analytical with the creative (Laycock, 2015, p. 32, pp. 38-39).

In 1972, Gygax had the opportunity to play in Dave Arneson's adapted *Chainmail* campaign called *Blackmoor*. With wargaming's diplomatic strategy and negotiations, Arneson's never-before-seen adapted rules for tabletop combat and spontaneous immersive improvisation continued the evolution of the non-competitive gaming world. This effort would ultimately inspire Gygax toward the first conceptualizations of D&D (Witwer, 2015, p. 94). Gygax and his creative writing skills set matched with Arneson's pseudo-historical campaign that had the players play as themselves in a fantastic fictional setting would lead to a collaboration provisionally named *The Fantasy Game*. In addition to bringing players themselves as a character into a historical fantastic setting, the campaign these player-characters interacted with would focus on individual interactions rather than battles. *Blackmoor* introduced the now widely used gaming term and mechanic of levelling up and shifted *Chainmail* away from a focus on war and battlefields to indoor settings like castles and caverns (Laycock, 2015, pp. 40-41).

Together, Gygax and Arneson published their first game called *Don't Give Up the Ship*, which additionally introduced concepts such as armour class, hit points, and morale to the hobby, terms that are now widely used well beyond D&D itself (Laycock, 2015, p. 42). *The Fantasy Game*, renamed by Gygax's young daughter Cindy before it was published in 1974 to *Dungeons & Dragons*, was a first-of-a-kind, 50-page rules manuscript sourced from Gygax's previous game writing experience, Arneson's contributions through *Blackmoor* and *Don't Give Up the Ship*. After being rejected for publication by The Avalon Hill company because it was too controversial due to its fantasy nature, 1,000 copies were printed by

Gygax's self-publishing company Tactical Studies Rules, Inc. (TSR). The inaugural introduction of a cooperative, first-person narrative element to the gaming community had been set loose (Laycock, 2015, pp. 42-43, Witwer, 2015, p. 104). Gygax described the process as "recombining existing elements to form a new compound heretofore unknown" (as cited in Witwer, 2015, p. 98).

In 1975 TSR Hobbies' company was founded, replacing Gygax's self-publishing company, and in 1976 TSR opened its first store. Spinoff games and gaming systems were published frequently by other companies due to D&D's innovations. The first mentions of fantasy roleplaying games arose in 1976 following a rival company's forced removal of D&D from their product's description after a successful lawsuit, ultimately replacing the reference with "other fantasy roleplaying games." That same year the expanding counterculture ignited by D&D saw the first sci-fi publication, *Metamorphosis Alpha: Fantastic Roleplaying game of Science Fiction Adventures*, successfully jumping fictional genres. In 1978, TSR released *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (AD&D)*, the system with which I first experienced D&D, as a standalone, evolved, and more detailed version of D&D. D&D had successfully spawned an entire gaming counterculture to what was traditionally valued within society.

By explicitly including the imagination in the original list of supplies needed to play the game, D&D invited players to play fiction. By introducing religion into the game through classes like wizards and holy men known as clerics, D&D would cross specifically and directly between the profane and sacred in a manner that continues to be salient today (Laycock, 2015, p. 42, p. 45). D&D could be said to have subtly pried open creative doors generationally closed by utility-focused multi-generational institutions and has done so consistently since its inception. Even institutions like the U.S. military helped spread much of D&D's early interest and popularity, having used wargames since 1890 in the U.S. army curriculum and at the Naval War College at Annapolis, Maryland (Laycock, 2015, p. 34).

1979 would become a crucial moment in the history of D&D. With over \$2 million in sales annually, D&D was starting to acquire media attention as a “bizarre intellectual game.” Theories about D&D’s harmful influence on children and its perceived threat to peace-loving parents began to surface, mainly when boosted by a suspicious missing person incident and resulting police investigation (Witwer, 2015, pp. 145-148). In August 1979, James Egbert went missing from his Michigan State University dorm leaving behind several D&D publications in his dorm room. Police and the private detective hired by the family to find their son initially considered the possibility that D&D had damaged the student’s sense of reality and caused him to make fatal decisions, a theory that was later revealed to be an intentionally sensational falsehood spread by opportunists and the press (Witwer, 2015, pp. 147-148). While Egbert was later located and returned home safe weeks later, the media frenzy had tarnished the game by continuously publishing sensational opinions about the game connecting D&D to suicidal tendencies, violence, and even satanism (Witwer, 2015, p. 148).

Views for and against D&D have been advanced for years by fundamentalist groups like Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons (BADD) and Parent’s grieving the loss of their children, such as Patricia Pulling in her book *The Devil’s Web: Who Is Stalking Your Children for Satan?* (Witwer, 2015, pp. 148-149). Even professional influencers of the time like Dr. Thomas Rodeck would persist in publishing unfounded sensational claims about the game. Peter Leithart’s 1987 book *The Catechism of the New Age: A Response to Dungeons and Dragons* explicitly condemns RPGs for allowing too much freedom, which encourages critical thinking and ipso facto heretical thought (Laycock, 2015, p. 212, p. 219; Witwer, 2015, p. 147). The media’s negative coverage would serve as a formative two-sided curse while creating attention in news media, movies, novels, amplifying alarmist theories. As a result of the comprehensive media coverage, D&D’s sales grew from 2 million to 8 million in

one year. Within a few more years, D&D's sales would reach \$30 million, while the resulting stigma attached to the hobby would, at large, hold D&D out of the mainstream (Witwer, 2015, p. 151).

The 1980s and 1990s would see a flurry of activity at TSR as it navigated complex internal politics and external pressures. In 1982, TSR was named one of the 100 fastest-growing companies by Inc. magazine, and in 1983 D&D the cartoon premiered on CBS. In 1994, the RPG phenomenon entered the electronic world of gaming as Gygax contributed to the increasingly mainstream geek culture with computer roleplaying games (CRPGs). Universal Studios expressed interest in working with Gygax on a D&D movie in 1984, which ultimately didn't materialize due to internal squabbling and mismanagement of the company (Witwer, 2015, p. 165, p. 173). In October 1985, Gygax was removed as President and CEO of the company he had founded, and he moved on to introduce his ideas and experience with TTRPGs to new TTRPGs and CRPGs until his death in 2008 (Witwer, 2015, p. 203). In 1989, TSR released D&D's second edition, which retained many of Gygax's original ideas and yet it failed to innovate the game enough to turn the company's fortunes around (Witwer, 2015, p. 197). TSR was purchased by Wizards of the Coast (WotC) in 1997, which has stewarded the expansion of D&D through several newer editions, including 3rd, 4th, and the current 5th edition of D&D released in 2014 (Witwer, 2015, p. 201).

On February 1, 2019, during my presentation titled *Dungeons & Dragons: A Quest for Peace* at the 3rd Annual Peace and Conflict Studies International Graduate Students' Conference held at the Arthur V. Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice, I was asked to clarify how a game that contains tabletop violence could be considered a tool for peacebuilding and problemsolving. Even though I didn't realize it then, I felt that this question was rooted in the same enduring stigma that D&D and related TTRPGs are real threats to 'peace-loving parents' as first proposed in the late 1970s (Witwer, 2015, p.148). While the active belief that

D&D could be a recruitment tool for promoting satanism through mind control is sparsely advanced today, the ghosts of D&D's past remain salient today. Arguably, these unfounded fears contribute to D&D's under-deployment as a peacebuilding method in PACS praxis.

Growth in Conflict

D&D's rise to cultural prominence was neither simple nor assured, as outlined above. While D&D actively encourages the exploration of imagined conflict situations and conflict resolutions as an integral inheritance from its wargaming roots, it hasn't done so isolated from its real-world conflict. Gygax, the principal creative contributor who recombined existing game elements to create D&D, relied on the contribution of friends, as well as creative, and business partners like Arneson, the Blumes, and the Kayes, all of whom would shape his experience in the development of D&D through conflict (Laycock, 2015, p. 43; Witwer, 2015, pp. 97-98, p. 100). Some of these relations would bend or break throughout the game, and TSR's development, ultimately influencing the bedrock upon which D&D's foundation would be laid. Some of the most notable partnerships would include his relationship with co-contributor Arneson, the Blumes, and the Kayes, which would cause interpersonal conflict that challenged relationships and changed the game's very history.

Before D&D was even named, frustrations arose between Gygax and Arneson when it became clear to Gygax that while Arneson had great creativity and imagination, he was less capable of putting the structure of a game together compellingly and understandably (Witwer, 2015, pp. 92-93). This initial frustration, combined with a pervasive disagreement on the game's direction, would see communication between the two men falter and fall apart, facilitated by an irregular postal service and unaffordable long-distance telephone calls (Witwer, 2015, p. 100). Ultimately the detachment between the two would come to a head again following Arneson's unproductive and brief employment at TSR. Several lawsuits over

royalty payments that threatened already struggling personal and business relationships resulted in an out of court settlement on second edition royalties, ultimately contributing to the financial burdens placed on TSR and severing relations between the co-creators (Laycock, 2015, p. 47; Witwer, 2015, p. 126, pp. 135-136). It wouldn't be until 1997 that TSR's entitlements to Arneson were finally settled by TSR's new owner WotC who also provided a settlement with Gygax preventing any lingering conflicts of interest (Laycock, 2015, pp. 49-50).

Don Kaye, Gygax's friend, and Don's wife, Donna Kaye, would have a significant role in D&D's story. Don's financial contribution in the form of a loan against his life insurance would provide the initial funding necessary for his friend to establish TSR and prepare to self-publish D&D. However, these funds were ultimately insufficient to achieve their initial goals. Blume provided further funding and acquired a one-third equal partnership (Witwer, 2015, p. 108, p. 110). This successful effort to obtain the resources and capacity to publish D&D was swiftly met with tragedy. Upon the death of Don Kaye, his one-third ownership of TSR would ultimately pass to Kaye's widow, Donna. As she was never enthusiastic about her husband's participation in TSR, she sold it to Blume's father, enabling the dissolution of TSR and the creation of TSR Hobbies (Laycock, 2015, p. 44). This marked the beginning of Gygax's sorted history of corporate interpersonal conflict that led to extended political duelling and, ultimately, his termination and the demise of TSR (Laycock, 2015, pp. 48-49; Witwer, 2015, p. 114, p. 117, p. 157).

Wargaming

While Gottschall convincingly asserts that D&D is a crossbreed of games and story and, therefore, the future of story (2012, p. 189), it is essential to recognize that D&D's origins do not lie in storytelling but in wargaming (Laycock, 2015, p. 31). Games and war are

fundamentally different. War only makes sense when it is an extension of politics. Games explicitly do not depend on this requirement as games are subject to artificial and formal physical and illusionary limits and boundaries. A wargame may, therefore, be described as a game of strategy separated from real war by one or more of these features while all the while endeavouring to simulate as closely as possible real-life warfare as artificial boundaries allow with the intent of limiting violence (Creveld, 2013, pp. 4-5). Wargames can provide an escape from debilitating tedium and existential boredom by providing an alternative to the banality of life and work while appealing to the players' excitement, adventure, grandeur, and self-esteem (Creveld, 2013, p. 8). Huizinga has argued that play and games represent the source of all human culture and everything true and sound by creating its own little world (as cited in Creveld, 2013, p. 1). While much of modern academia traces war games back to Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, or the Gupta empire in the sixth century, pre-Prussia wargames can be seen to differ from post-Prussia wargames in that pre-Prussia wargames were symbolic of war rather than simulations of war. As a result, wargaming and the counterculture started by Charles Roberts in 1953 draw their origins from 19th-century Prussian military practice (Creveld, 2013, pp. 6-7; Laycock, 2015, pp. 31-32).

Creveld (2013) warns that this perspective replicates a deceptively limited view of the history of wargames played by tribal societies worldwide and ancient empires alike. He presents single combat and conflict in texts like the Old Testament and the Iliad and the gladiatorial fights of the Roman empire, tournaments, and duels as some of the deadliest wargames of all time. He includes modern war games such as those conducted by modern militaries or at national military colleges or even games of laser tag, paintball, or historical re-enactments [LARP] as wargames frequently forgotten by a hyper academic focus on individual specialties rather than the more comprehensive narrative. In contrast, Creveld's work contributes a novel and inclusivist objective historical accounting of wargames in the

hope of producing a reimagining of wargaming's history through to the modern information era (Creveld, 2013, pp. 6-7). While all this good work on the origins and legacy of wargaming can be related to D&D, this limited examination of wargaming must, for practical purposes, follow the same reductionist perspective of wargames many game theorists take to make sense of them and their influence on human culture (Creveld, 2013, p. 6).

The first pre-modern mathematical model of simulating war was a modified version of chess called *The King's Game*, created in 1664 due to Prussian studies on the nature of war throughout the Enlightenment. In 1780, *War Game* was developed and played on a board of 1,666 spaces marked by terrain where pieces representing soldiers were moved according to rules, enriching the game's educational value to military officers. In 1811, the evolution of wargaming continued with the creation of a game called *Instructions for the Representation of Tactical Manoeuvres under the Guise of Wargame* (IRTMGW). This creation replaced the existing board with a map, specialized equipment, terrain, and military units' models. IRTMGW would also feature, for the first time, dice which were essential to determining the success of activities in the game, as well as requiring a neutral umpire to adjudicate outcomes. (Laycock, 2015, p. 33). Later, in 1876, IRTMGW would be revised once more and published with simplified rules while removing dice with the effect of empowering the neutral umpire who would make decisions based on their presumed experience at war (Laycock, 2015, p. 33).

In contrast to my description of D&D as escapism, Prussian wargames were understood to be a place of art and training. A place where real-world experience and lessons could be taught and the more realistic games were, the more capable those who trained would become, as evidenced by the Prussian defeat of Napoleon III and the French army at Sedan in 1870 (Laycock, 2015, pp. 33-34). In 1880, *Strategos* was developed in the U.S., and only ten years later, in 1890, wargames were introduced to U.S. army and naval curriculums, for the

first time deployed as educational tools for members of these military institutions and no longer solely for the military elite (Laycock, 2015, p. 34).

Ancient Games

War games can be traced back to Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, and even ancient Greece as far back as three millennium. Nelson discusses ancient Greek War Games named Ship-Battle and City-State as two different board games dating back to the 2nd and 5th century BC to eliminate or immobilize another player's tokens and control territory on the board (Nelson, 2020, p. 3, p. 37). Nelson attests that ancient accounts assert that soldiers first invented games with playing pieces and dice enroute to or at Troy. Alternatively, Socrates is said to have claimed that Thoth, an Egyptian god, invented both board games and dice games (Nelson, 2020, pp. 32-33). City-state has many divergent origin stories and symbolic meanings, including the suggestion that it was a literal representation of war between Greek city-states or that it emerged from Athenian democratic ideologies and represented the struggle between egalitarian and elitist sides of Greek aristocracy. Nelson, however, suggests that the City-state was a celebration of the birth of Athens and the union of diverse people (Nelson, 2020, pp. 35-36).

As another classic war game, chess is believed to have originated in India from the Chaturanga in the sixth century (Eagle, 2019, p. 10). Pre-Prussia wargames like chess differ from post-Prussia wargames in that pre-Prussia wargames were symbolic of war and allegory rather than simulations of war (Laycock, 2015, pp. 31-32; O'Sullivan, 2012, p. 212, p. 216). It is notable that chess exists apart from other board games and continues to retain a higher cultural status than other games. As early as the 13th century, King Shiram ordered the game of chess preserved in Indian temples as the best form of training for war, religion, and justice (O'Sullivan, 2012, pp. 17-18). While the connection, should it exist, between ancient Greek

wargames of the 2nd and 5th century BC and chess remain unclear, chess' connection educationally is more evident as chess has been observed to be more than harmless play but also a practicing field for education, wisdom adaptability, and symbolic of civic life including war (O'Sullivan, 2012, pp. 19-20, p. 200). Chess has inspired the creation of cultural artifacts for centuries and has been used to teach morality (O'Sullivan, 2012, pp. 20-21, p. 31, p.45). In 1780, when War Game was developed and played, the new game was significantly indebted to chess which was already being played in support of military officers in war. Both were played on boards where pieces representing soldiers were moved according to rules, enriching the game's educational value to military officers (Eagle, 2019, pp. 10-12).

The Hickman Revolution

Notably unmentioned in either Witwer's or Laycock's historical accounting of D&D is any explicit mention of the Hickman revolution and how it modernized D&D and fundamentally changed D&D and the wider RPG communities (Hart, 2021). Experientially, it is widely known within the community that several sub-subcultural groupings and communities consist of players who enjoy and identify with more specific editions of the game. Say, for example, that you prefer the 4th edition over the 5th edition, the present edition carries real-world social implications not unlike declaring one's loyalty to a sports team. By associating one's preference with a special edition, members of the D&D community can immediately make deductions based on a shared context and generalized understanding of each edition's structural appeal and thus how compatible their playstyle matches with yours.

This phenomenon can happen in all social contexts like in the sports above, politics, or even religion. Once an association is known with a preferred structure of rules, social ties are strengthened between groups who identify similarly (Vu, 2017, p. 284). Those who play D&D or Advanced D&D [2nd edition] generally play these early editions of the game due to

their preference for a wargaming-esque style structure, whereas the editions that followed increasingly shift away from wargaming and towards storytelling. Many enthusiasts of early editions use the term Hickman Revolution as an insulting term due to the impact the revolution has had on the game's evolution. Even though the immersive gaming experience isn't based on the structure but rather on the unique shared game world and narrative, the resulting social divisions and bonds take on a real-world identity shaping effect (Hart, 2021; Vu, 2017, p. 284; Gottschall, 2012, p. 124).

In 1982, the same year TSR had been named one of the 100 fastest-growing companies in the U.S., Laura and Tracy Hickman, the co-creators of the Dragonlance fantasy setting and novels, were writing an RPG adventure titled Pharaoh. Originally intended to be self-published, it included four pioneering gameplay principles in the manuscript's introduction. When the adventure was purchased and published by TSR, the published adventure did not include these original principles. Still, copies ultimately became available to the community and have since been blamed by often older fans of D&D in its post-war gaming form or lauded by newer fans of the hobby as the cause of D&D's present evolution. Even though they were excluded from TSR's official publishing of Pharaoh, the four pioneering principles would have a lasting impact on the game and have manufactured a generational schism within the RPG community. Ultimately known as the 'Hickman Manifesto,' these pillars would eventually reshape the game (Hart, 2021):

- 1) Players should have objectives more worthwhile than simply pillaging and killing.
- 2) There should be an intriguing story that is intricately woven into play itself.
- 3) Dungeons should make architectural sense.
- 4) An attainable and honourable end within one to two sessions playing time.

Earlier editions of D&D often had pillaging and killing as the only gaming goal. Engaging in violence or avoiding the accumulation of fictional wealth was the game's purpose. Similarly, wargames pitted one player against the other with violence and social reward at play. The advent of campaign-style games, which persisted from session to session, encouraged a break from the wargaming mentality and urged players to conjure up alternative goals and related possibilities as obtainable and, by implication, worthy of their attention and imagination. Second, Hickman insisted on the second principle that there should be an intriguing story that is intricately woven into play itself. While games like Arnston's *Blackmoor* had already introduced the idea of first-person narrative to D&D, the Hickmans realized that story had a measurable effect on fun and should be directly integrated into the game (Dragonhelm, 2021). Through the inclusion of story explaining the context and need for player action, goals could be understood to have served as a better motivator for players, improved the enjoyability of the game, and resulted in a more satisfying ending to the gaming experience.

The third principle of the Hickman Manifesto was that dungeons should make architectural sense. On the surface, such a principle seems comparatively out of touch. While early maps, often Dungeons, published with D&D adventures were a series of unsensible halls connecting seemingly randomized rooms, this had had little negative effect on gameplay. Hickman, however, included this third principle as a stopgap to the lack of realism and architecturally dissatisfying maps imposed on the gaming experience (Hart, 2021). These maps broke player immersion and ruined the believability of their shared fictional experience. By disrupting the appearance of being real, illogical dungeon architecture subtly removed the player from the shared story so that addressing this seemingly arbitrary aspect of the game contributes to the storied gaming experience.

Finally, and arguably the most salient of his principles, Hickman insisted that a game must have an attainable and honourable end within one to two sessions of playing time. The apparent simplicity of this statement beguiles the complex effect alternative nuanced interpretations of this principle continues to have. At large, this principle has been interpreted as meaning that player characters should be able to witness the end of a game's plot and story. Deduced from this principle, it includes an assumption that player characters shouldn't die to retain that player's satisfaction with the gaming experience. Hart (2021) proposes that the problem with this principle's legacy is not the fault of the principle but rather the failure of players and game designers alike. He asserts that principle four refers to one or two sessions of play as the term of an intriguing story or plotline, which Hickman himself later confirmed. The unfortunate misinterpretation of this principle I believe is couched in our human desire for a more satisfying utopian story, resulting in the expectation that player characters should survive the short adventure's plot and story and survive the campaign's satisfying ending.

Over the editions, game designers have made a series of compounding decisions that facilitate the erosion of mortal risk through game mechanics, it has become increasingly difficult to kill player characters resulting in players increasingly anticipating that they won't be killed (Hart, 2021). The Hickman Manifesto unintentionally manufactured the Hickman Revolution through erroneous interpretation of their never published contextually transposed principles. Players either love the direction the Hickman Manifesto has had on D&D or despise it. While there is a spectrum between love and hate, it is an experiential truth that younger players tend to love the evolving focus on story over game while older players prefer the latter. Hart asserts that novelists have replaced game masters (GMs) by equating the increasingly narrative focus of D&D at the expense of objective, challenging, open-ended gameplay. He asserts that D&D has moved away from player agency and choice towards

predetermined linear narratives inherent to novels, which Hickman is best known for (Hart, 2021).

I believe Hart is wrong to simplify D&D's stories as predefined and linear DM-driven experiences. While Hickman contributes a significant insight into the history of D&D lost in the literature written by those who do not identify as part of the RPG subculture, I believe Hart incorrectly applies those insights. While Hart and Hickman concur, that story was never meant to become the focus of the D&D gaming system, their associated conclusions that this unintentional diversion from gaming toward story is detrimental to the game fails to recognize the new creation the game has become (Dragonhelm, 2021). However, that debate will be set aside in this thesis in favour of highlighting D&D's emancipatory peace education capacity and how it has exposed multiple generations to critical experiential knowledge transformation in its current form. In this critically pioneering academic space where the intersectionality of my experiential and intellectual knowledge come together, I find my opportunity to contribute to PACS praxis and my community conjointly.

My Story of Stories

Understanding that D&D is a structured form of narrative play, exploring the structure's history alone can only presume to reveal so much of the game's story. When Vu defines D&D as something more than its parts, I understand this to point directly to the cumulative experiential production of ritualistically shared stories that the structure produces but could not functionally erect boundaries for (Vu, 2017, p. 232). Therefore, to have a sliver of insight into how D&D's structural history is tied to each player and each DM's history, I adopt Boulding's (1990) medium-term perspective of time, which she identifies as the "200-year present." Boulding (1990) defines the 200-year present as beginning 100 years ago today and ending on the 100th birthday of babies born today. It is therefore a continuous living

moment of the present that links us to the people whose lives either end or begin within those boundaries (Boulding 1990a, p. 4) By looking 100 years into the past and 100 years into the future, we can draw links between ourselves and this range's 5-generation radial boundaries through the people we are connected to. In this way, the 200-year present becomes a space where we have historical mobility by touching the lives of others, young and old, through shared memories used to materialize often fictionalized stories that form the basis of human constructs like religion, literature, dreams, and fantasy (Boulding, 1990, pp. 3-4; Gottschall, 2012, p. 18). John Mbiti noted how individuals achieve a degree of personal immortality through story as the “living-dead,” which he defined as a person who continues to persist through the memory of those who knew them (cited in Lederach, 2005, p. 131).

The idea that stories are generationally persistent and presently pervasive is not new. Kant's (2015) assertion about the omnipresent influence of stories in our lives supports the idea that everyone is a storyteller. “Man can only become man by education. He is merely what education makes of him. It is noticeable that man is only educated by man - that is, by men who have themselves been educated” (Introduction section, para. 14). In his blistering rebuke of standards-based teaching as a tool for encouraging replication rather than nurturing children with essential social skills, Pavie's (2020a) scholarly work connects the final strings between story, education, utopia, and our 200-year present historic mobility (p. 130).

Enter my 200-year present, which begins in 1922 allows me to explore my history as part of the historical accounting of D&D and facilitates an immediately understandable boundary for understanding the part D&D plays as part of our shared human utopian heritage. In 1993, I was a less than a stellar student and the second slowest runner during Terry Fox runs every year. As the tall skinny kid with big ears, and few friends, I had the dubious honour of being the dedicated outcast at school. I suffered from speech difficulties, had flat feet, and was regularly pulled from classes to attend one-on-one remedial sessions with my

public elementary school's counsellor. In easily visible ways, I was set apart from others in ways that are socially invisible because of my more observable privileges, but which nonetheless shaped much of my early childhood socially, emotionally, and educationally. These experiences retain a specific power over me to this day, and they compel me to feel embarrassed and devoutly critical of myself to the point of shame when making mistakes. Some of my oldest and clearest memories come from these shameful moments when I was routinely pulled from the classroom or informed that it was time for me to subtly leave by my teachers to go to the councillor's office. I remember regularly being singled out, the last picked during gym class, and I remember how angry, alone, and defeated these instances made me feel. I became known as the 'special' kid, and even more dauntingly, I grew to identify myself with that negative association. Every time I was pulled away from class, fell behind the class in gym or assignments, I felt ashamed, small, dumb, and deserving of these feelings.

At the age of nine, my brother required another player to join his group of friends on their D&D adventures. I immediately took the opportunity to hang out with my brother's 'cooler' older friends. Sitting around our family dinner table, I engaged with my elder brother and his friends, who were all 4 to 8 years my senior, while playing a game called Advanced Dungeons and Dragons. At the time, being included was an affirming event with immediate significance. While I was oblivious to it, I had just been inducted into an imaginative and material place of meaning-making and collaborative learning. For me, D&D was simultaneously a place and a game that cultivated my social and emotional intelligence and other peace capacity skills through imaginary and physical spaces (see Turk, 2015. p. 28; Gottschall, 2012, p. 41; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, p. 19). Vygotsky (1978), a theorist akin to Piaget, who I examine in more detail in the next chapter, names this liminal play space the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He describes the ZPD as a cognitive area where

learning and the development of higher mental functions take place through guided play with adults or more knowledgeable peers (McLeod, 2022, para. 2, zone of proximal development, paras 1-3).

Within the frame of my 200-year present, starting from that moment and looking back through my shared present offered by my brother, father, and Oma completes how I came to be involved with and then consumed by the utopian education and hope D&D offers players. Yet where did my brother's interest in D&D, so essential to my own story, come from? After a brief questioning, he revealed that his initial interest came from a pair of video games my Oma had collected for her Commodore 64 computer. As a source of endless fascination for my brother and myself growing up, we both looked forward to playing those games at my Oma's house and shared a similar interest in the fantasy genre even though I was four years younger. While considering my Oma's influence on us in this light, I believe it is worth mentioning her 'famous' closet of games. Through the haze of memory, I remember dozens of games she had there, including Bermuda Triangle, Pay Day, Full House, Risk, and more which I grew up playing with my siblings and mixed coterie of friends.

Throughout this same time, my father was teaching me a game that had a profound influence on my capacity to execute adaptive strategy and practice, 'beyonding' chess. Robert Bellah suggests that this is necessary for a person to be happy and escape their then-present unpleasant realities (Laycock, 2015, p. 181). Unfortunately, precise exploration of my 200-year's beginning all but ends here as my father can no longer recall why he had started showing me chess explicitly, nor am I able to articulate my initial interest in it. With my Oma's passing, access to her reasons for collecting board and video games, which ultimately led me to D&D, has been lost to time. Yet, simply acknowledging my Oma, father, and brother as the origins of my foundational gaming experiences affirms the relevance of taking an autoethnographic 200-year present perspective on my life and PACS.

Today, D&D continues to provide me with the means to explore new worlds and possibilities, expand and train my imagination, practice my problemsolving skills, and refine my social skill in liminal utopian settings absent real-world limitations. It took me nearly thirty years of playing D&D to understand what Gottschall (2012) captures in one sentence “fiction subtly shapes our beliefs, behaviours, [and] ethics... [and] powerfully modifies culture and history” (Preface section, p. XVII). I know that this insight mirrors my and likely countless others’ experiential knowledge gained within the D&D community. Further, as a father, I now reflect on the legacy the first half of my present has had on me and, consequently, what influence my second half will have on others, including my sons. Since my first days of playing D&D, when I created my player character (PC) Millil of Anelo, a Cleric of the All God, I have indulged in social fantasy fiction of his life and the life of innumerable other characters. I have experienced what it is like to be confident, strong, competent, and heroic. Through imagination, I began to see myself as worthy and achieved a sense of belonging. I want these things for my sons, who are now four years old and 6 months old respectively, and I am already in the process of sharing these educational insights in person and by choosing to place my older son into a play-based early learning daycare facility.

D&D is a structured exercise of playing limitless fantasy fiction that is more than just the sum of its parts to me. Through the unique combination of life simulating boundaries, a continuity of narrative, and the blurring between player and character through liminal and unpredictable utopian mythmaking, RPGs’ unique revolutionary capacity is its universally suited elusive aesthetic experience capable of training utopian worldbuilding experimentation between ever-shifting moments (Wolfendale & Franklin, 2012, pp. 209-216). D&D is not something I found; it is something that saw and reached out to me through my shared 200-

year present. My brother, father, and Oma are all connected to me through D&D, and D&D has and continues to have a foundational influence over who I am and what I can become.

Deborah Ann Woll, Vince Vaughan, Stephen Colbert, the late Robin Williams, and Van Diesel are five famous members of the D&D community of 50 million and growing who share similar experiences and collective understandings. Every time I play a game, I might meet new players, make new friends, expand that community, and collaboratively contribute to the emancipation of others through fictional story play with real-world consequences. The point I believe most pertinent to make here in this summary of my 200-year present is that who I am is more closely tied to the humanizing experiential learning I obtained while playing D&D than to my formal education. I have consistently found solace, friendship, affirmation, and meaning through D&D and have practiced skills including mathematics, diplomacy, problemsolving, and more without even realizing it. In this transcultural real-world community created by D&D's collaborative social experience, I implicitly learn from others while playing at and engaging essential new peace methods.

Modern Influence

D&D was created before me and continues to develop around me. D&D as a game continues to have its own identity and structure redefined with each new addition of published content and edition. This modularity has increasingly contributed to its economic and cultural success. While D&D has persisted since its creation, its modern influence has expanded far beyond the boundaries of the game itself. Because of D&D, computer roleplaying games (CRPG) like *Fallout*, *Baldur's Gate*, or *Dragon Age* were imagined and made possible (Voorhees & Whitlock, 2012, pp. 12-13) while live-action roleplaying has evolved as performative storytelling (Englund, 2015, p. 24; Gottschall, 2012, p. 188). As one

of the modern world's most effective forms of mass communication and storytelling, television has increasingly featured D&D in shows beginning with CBS' *Dungeons & Dragons* from 1983 to 1985. D&D's presence and influence on popular culture have been spread further through exposure on TV shows like the *Simpsons*, *Community*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and others. D&D has also played a significant role in inspiring entire series like *Stranger Things* or *Game of Thrones*, solidifying its place in popular culture (King & Borland, 2014, Prologue section, paras 12-14; Witwer, 2015, p. xvii).

D&D's influence reaches even further than this small selection of popular culture instances because the technologies of modern storytelling have enabled our ancestral heritage to nourish our imagination and teach moral behaviour to its players (Gottschall, 2012, p. 177, pp. 185-186). Countless alternative RPG systems have since taken off since D&D's inception, such as *Vampire the Masquerade*, *Pathfinder*, *Call of Cthulhu* and more continue to be published regularly, often fan-created and funded on websites like Kickstarter. D&D has also been featured on TV, in movies, or in entire RPG destination vacation packages like *D&D in a Castle* (D&D in a castle, n.d.). *Dungeons and Dragons* also shaped the basic game mechanics and primary meta-language of computer games (Dyson, J. 2011, para. 3). D&D has, both directly and through its growing sphere of influence, grounded itself into the very economic and social fabric of the real-world it helps players escape from. *Monumental Studios*, for example, is a subscription-based service that advertises itself as an all-in-one application service for one's cinema-grade music needs.

Roll 20 and Foundry are two tabletop simulation services that facilitate players access to games and community while also providing secondary markets for creators and consumers to meet (Roll 20, n.d.; Foundry Virtual Tabletop, n.d.). As a result of D&D, Vu (2017) notes that RPGs have reoriented culture toward worldbuilding and the fantastic as begun by fantasy literature (p. 273, p. 287). D&D continuously creates communities on Facebook, Reddit, and

private gaming discord channels and even inspires these communities to contribute to charities, such as Hart's (2022) involvement with Stackup. This charity brings veterans and civilians together through gaming. Similarly, the Critical Role Foundation's collaboration with Stephen Colbert has raised over \$188,000 to donate to children in need (L. Hart, personal communication, January 23, 2022; Critical Role Foundation, n.d.). These increasingly variable communities of players consist of people from all walks of life worldwide who, through self-reflexivity and experimentation, have become critically aware of themselves and the world around them (Robichaud & Irwin, 2014, p. 78). Each of these people shares an identity and relatable experiences that have become increasingly common. D&D has emerged as a new way to conduct therapy and stay connected to family and peers (Henrich & Worthington, 2021, para. 1).

D&D's Modern Professional Influence

D&D's specific form of roleplaying is a form of simulation gaming and is a respectable and legitimate form of formal and informal learning and training (Crookall, 2008, p. 161). Roleplaying is an established form of simulation, which has been used for decades to encourage reflexive thinking and critical knowledge production while empowering participants to become active learners and who are experientially central to the process (Ronning & Bjorkly, 2019, p. 416). D&D is a serious game with a formal academic utility firmly rooted in its informal everyday community building and peace culture learning. Due to the vastness of this roleplaying literature and its utility in many fields, the following overview is necessarily narrowed in focus to include RPGs and D&D through therapeutics, education, and criminal justice lenses.

Therapeutics

D&D has a significant historical link to mental health resulting from early disinformation and the resulting cultural construct known by the game's community as the “satanic panic” highlighted above. Zayas and Lewis (1986) and Rosselet and Stauffer (2013) note that role-play has been shown to facilitate attitudinal change, and this is especially valid for youth and individuals with intellectual and social disabilities in need by supporting the development of creative and cognitive problem-solving skills (as cited in Henrich & Worthington, 2021, p. 3). Role-play has also been measured as having a fortifying effect on people’s mental health, introspection, and decision-making (Adams, 2013, p. 71; Baker et al., 2022, p. 4; Henrich & Worthington, 2021, p. 10). Notably, there remains a distinct lack of empirical research on how RPGs and D&D can be used to support mental health and bridge the gap between implicit and explicit knowledge (Adams, 2013, p. 72; Baker, 2022, p. 7; Henrich & Worthington, 2021, p. 2; Ronning & Bjorkly, 2019, p. 416). Despite this deficiency, I've chosen this field as one of the fields critical to recognize today as a place where professionals are currently exploring RPGs and D&D as positive intervention and training tools.

Polkinghorne et al. (2021) and Ronning and Bjorkly (2019) specifically target D&D's structure as a group-based, active reflection and simulation space, creating structure as essential to the therapeutic creations and resiliency training provided by having participants play at collaboratively created storytelling experiences (as cited in Baker et al., 2022, p. 4; pp. 415-416). Concurrently, Causo and Quinlan (2021) established that D&D's ability to safely engage with mental health difficulties and symptoms was consistent with established psychological recovery models and processes (as cited in Baker et al., 2022, pp. 5-6). Moreover, Ben-Ezra et al. (2018) polled social workers and found that 34.6 percent viewed RPGs like D&D as contributing to psychopathology (as cited in Henrich & Worthington,

2021, p. 9). Role-play and D&D have also emerged as a way of conducting experiential therapy that benefits patients with psychosis and depression and offers support to children and adolescents in addressing social anxiety decreasing impulsivity and boundary issues (Henrich & Worthington, 2021, pp. 1-2; Ronning & Bjorkly, 2019, p. 416).

In contrast, Abyeta and Forest (1991) found a positive statistical inversion in psychoticism in those evaluated by their study, while Carter and Lester (1998) found no difference in player to non-player depression levels. Derenard and Kline (1990) also found that D&D players show higher rates of feeling alienated from status quo mainstream media but saliently found an inverse effect on their sense of purpose (as cited in Henrich & Worthington, 2021, p. 10). Moreover, Abbots et al. (2022) have shown that D&D can increase confidence and train one's ability to confront and cope with changing situations in the primary world (as cited in Baker et al., 2022, pp. 4-5; Henrich & Worthington, 2021, p. 1). Blackmon (1994) also noted that describing D&D experiences had a self-therapy-like effect on his case study client. This allowed his client to work through emotions and ideal behaviours in a safe space facilitated by the game, effectively reducing social anxiety (as cited in Henrich & Worthington, 2021, p. 2; Baker et al., 2022, p. 4).

Contrary to what some scholars noted, Kallam (1984) reported how D&D helped adolescents develop higher self-efficacy and capacity for creative and complex situations. While a host of other case studies by Enfield (2007), Rosselet and Stauffer (2013), Zayas and Lewis (1986), Hughes (1988), Chung (2013), and Rivers et. al. (2016) found D&D and other RPGs as effective therapy connected to psychologically beneficial traits such as creativity and empathy (as cited in Baker et al., 2022, p. 4; Henrich & Worthington, 2021, p. 10, Ronning & Bjorkly, 2019, pp. 415-416). As previously mentioned, Sargent (2014) 's qualitative study of D&D players suggests that D&D decreases social anxiety, helps

participants cope with stress and internal conflicts, and negotiates trauma in ways participants believed would not have been possible otherwise (as cited in Baker et al., 2022, pp. 5-6).

In this section, we probed a growing body of work supporting the use of RPGs and D&D as a tool and creative and collaborative method of providing much-needed therapeutic support to children, youth, and adults inclusively. When deployed as a simulation-based training, D&D has been shown to produce a significant inventory of positive therapeutic outcomes while demonstrating how roleplay is deployed as a therapeutic intervention with critical skill training and peace culture relevance for participants.

Education

Bertolo and Mariani (2013) assert that modern learning methods have entered a phase whereby learning by doing has become more critical in people's development. They also indicate that games have come to demonstrate an interdisciplinary capacity to involve users in an immersive experience and stimulate reflection grounded in real-world attitudes and habits (p. 1). Roleplaying games have also greatly influenced and impacted formal education praxis throughout recent decades. Educators, teachers, psychotherapists, and others deploy them to encourage social engagement, information gathering, creativity, and a host of other soft skills with positive problem-solving effects (Bertolo & Mariani, 2013, pp. 8-9; Spotorno et. al., 2020, p. 209). Alternatively, Veldhuis et. al. (2021) defined participant's soft skills using two broad categories. 1) storytelling expertise: which includes reading and writing, comprehension skills, and the capacity to create relatable and believable characters. 2) inter and intra-personal development, which includes the growth of creativity and empathy, problem-solving skills, collaborative skills, accuracy, critical thinking, perseverance, and decisiveness (p. 5).

That said, Carter (2011) conducted a study in her elementary classroom where she observed improving children's performance in mathematics, social studies, research skills, written and oral communication, artistic and creative development, social and emotional development after deploying D&D to integrate multidisciplinary curricula and skill training in the classroom (pp. 332-334). Throughout this study, Carter also noted that students who were generally disengaged with formal learning processes were seen to engage with the game's learning material more readily, even when writing formal assessments (Carter, 2011, p. 333). It was observed that student participants, especially those who struggled the most with formal education techniques and social environments, indicated that their learning "didn't feel like learning" and they showed sustained confidence and capabilities in the soft learning objectives (Carter, 2011, pp. 333-334). Students were also seen to willingly develop their storytelling, reading and writing skills, and even presentation skills as they studied and took notes, reflecting on their renewed motivation and interest in purposeful learning (Carter, 2011, p. 334). Carter observed that nearly all students demonstrated progress in language, math, strategic, and social-emotional skills throughout this experiment with real-world impact and relevance for everyday use and for developing reasonable conflict management solutions and successful, independently produced conflict coping strategies (Carter, 2011, pp. 334-335).

Alternatively, Sportono et. al. (2020) conducted an RPG experience for 9-12-year-old students during COVID-19 using online learning aids and appropriate age-based content (p. 207). This study aimed to promote citizens' well-being and health by training them in life skills, including decision-making, creative thinking and critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills, self-awareness and empathy, and the ability in coping with emotions and stress (Sportorno et. al., 2020, p. 207). Positive results were observed and reported as having positive effects from using RPGs for educational purposes. This study concluded that the

collaborative social benefits of RPGs included improvements to negotiation skills, relational skills, problem-solving, and a shift away from competition towards cooperation while simultaneously enhancing players' creativity and imagination (Spotorno et. al., 2020, pp. 215-216).

At the same time, however, Clarke et. al. (2019) highlights the importance of RPGs in educational setting today as tools for developing young people's soft skills such as critical thinking, participatory learning, skill development, and self-reflections (p. 101). Using the main principles of D&D, Clarke et. al. (2019) developed a game system that sought to make self-reflection more appealing and the primary function of learning within a university setting. This was achieved by implementing self-reflection tools such as character creation and group problem-solving simulations as core components of the 11-week study. Ultimately this study generated a persistent online learning tool named *Bothersome Beasties*, which is available to anyone online and empowers users to practice self-reflection (p. 103, pp. 105-106). This study showed that participants found D&D to be a valuable and engaging self-reflection tool with enduring motivational influence for players (Clarke et. al., 2019, p. 108). It also found that D&D facilitated the organization of thoughts and established that students were capable and receptive to learning through game-based study techniques (Clarke et. al., 2019, pp. 106-107).

In 2021 in the Hague University's Information Technology and Design faculty, Veldthuis et. al. (2021) conducted a study involving two groups of 64 university students who used D&D in two separate groups as a tool for formal and informal "soft skills" learning with the intent to evaluate their attitude towards requiring these skills and soft skill growth (p. 1, pp. 10-11). Students reported an improvement in their storytelling, creativity, writing, and future potential, as well as a positive attitude towards soft skills that are otherwise underappreciated in previous educational experiences. Taken together with the qualitative

data collected in the study, it provided a rare formal evaluation of D&D's potential as a mode of soft skill training (Veldthuis et. al., 2021, p. 12). Notably, a significant proportion of participants reported being overwhelmingly positive when asked if they enjoyed their time in class, and 80 percent responded that they intended to do more creative writing in the future (Veldthuis et. al., 2021, p. 11).

In this section, we discussed a growing body of work supporting the use of RPGs and D&D as a simulation-based educational method and means of foregrounding individual's exposure to training and the development of soft skills like social engagement, storytelling, creativity, empathy, problem-solving, collaboration, critical thinking, resilience, and decisiveness within the context of formal educational frameworks. This sampling of this literature is drawn from research from multiple nations and age groups while retaining the similar top line assessments of RPGs and D&D in the sense that they are valuable educational tools for developing youth's critical soft skills.

Criminal Justice

It has been said that prison has three primary purposes: segregation, deterrence, and rehabilitation (Williams, 2019, p. 136). In contrast, Pranis et. al. (2003) highlighted peacemaking circles with the dominant criminal justice paradigm by illuminating four basic shifts they facilitate to achieve healing and in creating social order (p.20). Peacemaking circles are storytelling spaces that invite participants to build positive connections and develop vital, healthy relationships. They shift from coercion to healing, from individual to collective accountability, and from reliance on the state to greater self-reliance within a community. Taken together, peacemaking circles endeavour to shift justice from just justice to getting well. They are a method of cultivating healthy relationships to prevent future harm,

a sentiment Richie (2017) shared about in D&D too (para. 13; Pranis et. al., 2003, p. 15, pp. 20-21, p. 23).

In addition, Richie (2017) notes that the segregation of prisoners from society by the justice system models and ingrains in inmates an often-violent secondary segregation culture enforced by prisoners along racial, gender, geographic origin, and gang lines (de Kleer, 2017, Richie, 2017, para. 1, para. 3; Hicks, 2020). Given that most incarcerated people are ultimately released, it is in the interest of society to overcome the self-harming social effects of segregation as he and others do through D&D (Richie, 2017, para 2-3). In prisons across the United States, D&D is regarded by inmates as an acceptable multicultural social activity while creating spaces that allow participants to build connections, healthy social rehabilitation, and relationship building without fear of violent retaliation (Hicks, 2020; Richie, 2017, para. 3).

Despite D&D's mature following amongst the incarcerated and significant research and professional support for D&D and other RPGs unique communicative and empathetic soft skill benefits, RPGs have been restricted or outright banned in vast swaths of the U.S. (Williams, 2019, p. 130, p. 132, p. 141). Prevailing federal carceral wisdom is failing to take advantage of these games' capacity for collaboration, teamwork, and problem-solving that set them apart from other board games and federal agencies have deferred to the institutions themselves to decide on using these games in their institutions (Williams, 2019, pp. 141-142). Many institutions, such as Idaho State Correctional Institutions, explicitly prohibit D&D (de Kleer, 2017, para. 4). I was unable to locate academic research on RPGs in prison from international sources either so that there is a devastating gap in justice studies knowledge confirmed by Williams (2019), and de Kleer's (2017).

While I could not locate a single data-based study, there is still experiential knowledge available and capable of affirming the applicability of D&D's established

inventory of soft skills to life in and post-prison. Williams (2019), de Kleer (2017), Richie (2017), and Hicks (2020) have advanced instructional insights in this area using experientially grounded stories of resilience despite the massive structural hurdles in a way that draws connections to existing multidisciplinary research and to peace circles.

That said, Joe from Massachusetts, Pariahdog119 from Ohio, and Gabriel from Pennsylvania all share their experience and pride in the creative and resourceful strategies they developed that are necessary to play D&D in prisons (de Kleer, 2017, para p. 8, p. 10, pp. 12-14). Each of these inmates shows their motivation in developing their capacity to deploy a series of soft skills in the real world with the sole intention and desire of facilitating D&D's collaborative play. For example, Micah shares that they had "...never ran or played in a game where the PCs had to escape from jail or prison..." and that "...we tended to avoid the trope of being in a dungeon filled with monsters as we were already in a dungeon filled with monsters" (de Kleer, 2017, para. 34). This experientially refutes one of the many fears cited in anti-D&D court rulings which literally interpret escapism as a physical escape from prison.

These examples, and my own experience demonstrate how D&D also combats segregation by facilitating different perspectives of others, including, and not limited to race, by making diversity key to success in challenges that often require different skills to succeed (Hicks, 2020; Richie, 2017, paras. 5-6, paras. 8-9). D&D's structure requires that players choose their character's fantasy race, class, and a series of other traits that are chosen or invented by players. These decisions can contribute to the potential for fictional biases, unique characteristics, and perspectives that affect in-game results and player choices within the collaborative gameplay frame (Hicks, 2020; Richie, 2017, paras. 5-6). Differences that segregate people, especially those in prison, are fundamental to D&D, and finding a way to deal with diversity is implicitly mandatory for each player to participate in the game (Richie,

2017, para. 12). In this way, D&D activates tools that promote players' social growth and develop bonds crucial to social rehabilitation. D&D's basic elements can be interpreted as cooperation and community, which couches its implicit potential as a peace tool within its explicit goal of creating a fun storytelling play space (Richie, 2017, para. 13, para. 17).

For example, Richie (2017) shares an encouraging story of a fellow inmate who was likely involved with race-based violence and was asked to join their D&D group. Richie was hesitant as a person of colour, but ultimately, the resulting experience led Richie and the other San Luis Obispo inmate to become good friends. Throughout this friendship, the pair had conversations about the effects of segregation in prison and even engaged in voluntary role reversal simulations to better understand the others' perspectives and experiences (Richie, 2017, paras. 9-10). As a result of this experience, Richie's new friend gave up on his old racist ways and made many friends of other races before his health worsened. Even though he knew he was dying, he chose to spend his remaining time playing D&D as much as possible (Richie, 2017, para. 11).

One former inmate from Colorado addressed the rehabilitative capacity of D&D [the changing of criminal or deviant behaviours] (Williams, 2019, p. 136) directly when he stated that "rehabilitation... is structured in a way that gives no alternatives. Not everybody is built the same. Dungeons & Dragons is my rehabilitation that I can deal with to escape into my own reality to solve my own problems" (Williams, 2019, p. 137). Another explains that D&D is their way of mentally escaping the prison's walls and barbed wire fences (Hicks, 2020). Bryan Richie explicitly shares how Dungeons & Dragons was a life-changing experience for him and that inmates often regarded D&D as an acceptable multicultural social activity capable of altering real-world attitudes in prison (Richie, 2017, para. 3).

In contrast, Adams (2013) identifies 4 themes that emerge dynamically from his D&D qualitative case study. These four themes describe the players' real-world needs being met

through fictional play: 1) democratic ideologies, 2) friendship maintenance, 3) extraordinary experiences, and 4) good versus evil (Adams, 2013, pp. 76-81). In this section, we explored the academic potential of D&D's use in the criminal justice system with these themes in mind. In the shadow of the United States' judicial system's extraordinary deference to prison staff, D&D has been outright banned and actively oppressed in many states nationwide. The resulting suppression of academic knowledge exploration and creation necessitates exploratory assessments of D&D in prisons using available ethnographic experiential knowledge to show D&D's active ability to train players with soft skills that is compatible with Adams' (2013) essential themes.

Community engagement

Beyond academic interest and study, there is a growing non-academic awareness and activism mobilizing RPGs and D&D as positive peace and soft skill training. Community-oriented organizations like The Bodhana Group, Game to Grow, Mount Tamalpais College, and the Critical Role Foundation among others are working towards improving the lives of others by effectuating academic roleplay and gaming knowledge in their communities using D&D and other RPGs.

For example, the Bodhana Group is a non-profit organization that advocates and facilitates using tabletop RPGs as a therapeutic intervention that can benefit personal growth with a social-educational effect. The organization believes playing games can enhance people's social and educational benefits such as math, literacy, socialization, and emotional expression, making us better able to cope with adversity as individuals and families (The Bodhana Group, n.d.). Their explicit belief is that the inherent soft skill benefits of gaming can be used to improve the whole person. In addition to their client and training services

which include event support, team building workshops, game development, continuing education programming, and therapy group services, Bodhana uses tabletop games and roleplaying games to facilitate therapeutic play spaces for children, teens, adults, contracted gaming services, program training, and research (The Bodhana Group, n.d.; Save Against Fear, 2022). The Bodhana Group has also hosted an annual fundraising convention since 2010 that highlights the use of tabletop gaming as directed therapeutic and clinical practice (Save Against Fear, 2022).

Game to Grow is another non-profit organization that uses games for therapeutic, educational, and community growth through on-the-ground intervention and workshop training programs using RPGs and D&D (Game to Grow, 2022). This organization provides targeted gaming groups and trains facilitators to use game-based interventions across diverse communities and age groups. It promotes awareness of the life-enriching potential of games worldwide through training, academic conferences, and individual consultation (Game to Grow, 2022). Game to Grow has produced its own educational RPG called Critical Core, designed by therapists, educators, and psychologists as an alternative to traditional social skill training programs. Critical Core invites children to participate in shared fantasy problem-solving to build confidence, emotional resilience, empathy, and collaborative skills to empower and help them grow (Critical Core, 2022).

In addition, the non-profit organization called the Prison University Project, now named Mount Tamalpais College (MTC), uses D&D within its post-release rehabilitation program and received the National Humanities Medal in recognition of its impact and educational leadership by former President Barack Obama in 2015 (Mount Tamalpais College, 2022; Williams, 2021, p. 140). With over 25 years of liberal arts education experience, nearly four thousand students, and 60 courses each year, MTC has effectuated academic support for RPGs and D&D through active, purposeful use of soft skills like critical

thinking, curiosity, and communicative problem solving for post-prison rehabilitation training (Mount Tamalpais College, 2022).

However, not all uses of D&D for positive social change derive from academic origins. A group of voice actors has been broadcasting their game of D&D known as Critical Role online since March 2015. They have created a worldwide community of fans who collectively identify as Critters and have continuously mobilized through The Critical Role Foundation with positive social and community effects. The Critical Role Foundation fundraises as a grassroots non-profit for multiple charitable causes ranging from creative education, military veterans and families, eradicating childhood poverty, 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, equity for Indigenous peoples of America, and efforts to break cycles of generational poverty in India (Critical role foundation, 2022). More recently, in collaboration with Stephen Colbert, one of the foundation's most familiar events raised an additional \$194,000 from fans in support of Red Nose Day in April of 2022 to fight child poverty (Critical role foundation, 2022; Critical role foundation, n.d.). Critical Role, at the time of writing, has 1.13 million followers on Twitch, a streaming website where their game is streamed weekly. Since June 7, 2018, the show has streamed over 1,690 hours of content and has a live audience peak of 212,816 viewers with an average live viewership of 21,961 per episode (Twitch tracker, 2022). Critical Role functionally demonstrates the far-reaching capacity of Dungeons and Dragons to create a digitally connected compassionate and empathetic community with positive material effect on communities worldwide.

Herein we reviewed several academic, professional, and community-based ways RPGs and D&D disseminate academically supported soft skill potential, effectively placing these games as active peace culture tools with real-world impact. While the available literature describes roleplay as one of the most established forms of simulation, the growing body of research on RPGs and D&D continues to lag behind the effective everyday impact

they presently have as a means of soft skill training and peace culture expression. The following literature review chapter links multidisciplinary support for D&D as an educational tool and everyday RPG-based community building and activism with PACS literature to support RPGs and D&D as effective peace training.

Conclusion

When introducing D&D to those who have not played the game or observed the experience first-hand, my explanation of what D&D is can necessarily be simplified and reduced to ‘a board game with acting.’ Retrospectively, the overly summarized definition I often assign to the game is so lazy it contributes to the persistent misunderstanding of D&D. The purpose of this chapter was to delve deeper into the history of the game by summarizing existing literary attempts to catalogue its structural components and chronological history while also introducing some key concepts essential to the discussion unfolding in the remainder of this thesis.

Having investigated the evolution of D&D as far back as its ancient wargaming roots, an understanding of what D&D is can only partially be revealed. D&D can be more than the sum of its parts and is retraining players with utopian ideals through the training of their imagination (Vu, 2017, p. 232). By introducing my early D&D history, I hope to have added a compelling reason to read on and set the stage for Chapter 5’s autoethnographic investigation of this game. D&D is a complex interaction between the imagination, people, and playing at fictional stories that can allow us to practice and empower ourselves towards communal development. As shown by my example, D&D could be a driving force for millions of people in their exploration of critical peace skills within a collaboratively utopian culture and community.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

In what ways does D&D relate to the PACS literature, and in what manner could it become relevant to PACS praxis? In the preceding context chapter, we defined D&D and explored the centuries-old history from which it draws its pre-modern cultural war-simulating gaming inspiration and roots as well as some of its influences on contemporary societies. Additionally, we explored some of D&D's modern-day cultural influences and its present-day professional deployment as a therapeutic and educational intervention and method. We reviewed the distinct justice system facilitated absence of sanctioned D&D programming in U.S. prisons, and the creative problemsolving and first-hand peacemaking and training D&D has facilitated there despite status quo sustaining systemic opposition carceral and judicial authorities.

Bridging the gap between PACS and D&D is a process that we began with demystifying what D&D is as was outlined in Chapter 2. It continues by exploring how D&D relates to present-day PACS theory and praxis. For example, Brynen (2014) explicitly connects board games to peace operations training that are essential to establishing legitimate pre-existing support for addressing violent conflict through simulation training (p. 535). The exploration of D&D in Chapter 2 highlighted that two core features of the game have precedence in PACS and warrant attention: 1) the connection of D&D and storytelling, and that 2) D&D is a creative simulation space like PACS. The following section illustrates some of the connections between PACS praxis and core D&D features explicitly.

Chapter three sets the stage to explore the PACS literature and future research by bridging the gap between PACS and D&D. This chapter set's a foundation upon which the experiential knowledge presented in Chapter five will be grounded. Chapter three divides the

literature discussion into five key sections: Bridging PACS and D&D, education, culture, play, and identity.

D&D and storytelling

Within the growing body of PACS storytelling research, there is an ever-growing body of work that both theorizes and implements stories strengths, including building mutual understanding, sharing experiences, promoting self-awareness, self-empowerment, and healing (Senehi, 2021, p. 1152). Storytelling establishes stories as vehicles of knowledge production that socialize and often inform our identity formation. They have emotional and moral implications and have existed for over 20,000 years. Since storytelling is low-tech and easily accessible, it is often an intimate and shared experience of co-creation and elicitive teaching (Senehi, 2015, p. 208, p. 210). Stories are neither innately good nor bad and can be used towards inclusion, exclusion, knowledge creation, and positive peace training (Senehi, 2015, pp. 202-210). The storytelling method is cultural, highly open-ended, informal, and often takes a conversational approach to research. It is an approach that positions the researcher as writing with, rather than about, people (Senehi, 2020a, pp. 49-50).

Since the Hickman revolution, D&D has increasingly evolved into a structured support system for facilitating constructive storytelling experiences. Because participants have exclusive agency over their contributions and stories, players establish an equality in status that promotes trust and reflection through shared stories (see Senehi 2021, pp. 13-14). Stories, fictional and otherwise, are functions of language that shape and influence us through community building and actively constructed shared narratives of culture and identity (Senehi, 2021, p. 2, p. 11). In this way, morality, emotion, power, history, utopian visions, and education are all influenced by story (Senehi, 2002, p. 43). Story is innately accessible to nearly everyone without special training or experience required and can manufacture safe

social spaces for people to be collaboratively grounded and become influential meaning-makers (Senehi, 2002, p.44; Senehi & Byrne, 2006, p. 248; Senehi, 2020a, p. 46).

Stories can establish relationships based on respect and shared narrative experience (Senehi & Byrne, 2006, p. 249). Stories can also serve as rationales for utopian “transcultural” action that shifts knowledge-making power from hegemonic structures toward those collaboratively participating in the experiential construction of meaning (Senehi, 2002, p.44). As the domain of the human mind remains the last refuge of agency even under the most oppressive of conditions, story remains in perpetuity as a bastion of resistance for critical cultural engagement with knowledge, identity, socialization, emotion, morality, and spaces as examined below (Senehi, 2002, p. 44, pp. 47-56; Senehi, 2021, p. 3, p. 6, p. 11).

Addressing large-scale conflicts requires broad networks of cooperating and collaborative people with enough social awareness and capacity to advocate for change (Senehi, 2021, p. 2). Increasingly, the critical transcultural influence of utopian stories generated by modern D&D storytellers extends beyond their core cultural audiences as they are increasingly represented in popular culture. D&D and D&D-inspired stories contribute to millions of people's empowerment through primary and secondary exposure and the collaborative creation of popular culture (see Senehi, 2021, p. 11). Stories that nurture an educated hope narrative become instructive and strengthen an individual's power to adopt positive peace values and hope while the complex interdependent facets of story's influence nurture people's capacity to transform social conflict and make positive peace and social justice transformation possible. Stories offer agency and meaning-making power to participants. While PACS calls for the exploration of cultural storytelling spaces to further understand the myriad of transformative community-building potential even for those who have experienced violence and tragedy (see Senehi, 2002, pp. 42-43, p. 57; Senehi, 2021, p.

3, p. 6, p. 11), certain modern forms of story such as D&D and RPGs at large, remain under explored as legitimate experiential knowledge producing methods.

Central to the relationship between story and community is elicitive dialogue (Senehi, 2021, p. 9). While stories can manifest in many ways, they often serve as powerful means of establishing values that build upon individuals and communities existing strengths (Senehi, 2021, p. 14). Since storytelling is an act of co-creation and relies on the element of shared control, storytelling can be a form of general education or social transformation that is noncoercive. Rather than solving issues, they invite participants, both storytellers and listeners alike, to confront complex topics themselves (Senehi & Byrne, 2006, pp. 250-251). Using constructive interactive storytelling to approach complex issues like emotion, mortality, inequality, oppression, and problemsolving can create a milieu that enables one's identity to be removed from traumas and replaced with new ones. This development facilitates a form of social practice to emerge that is capable of sharing knowledge and provides discursive resources for people coping with trauma while strengthening their resistance and resilience in the face of hardship (Senehi, 2021, pp. 15-16).

In negative peace scenarios, storytelling can be a process that facilitates community-oriented inclusiveness. It can repair social damage done at the grassroots level in a participatory and elicitive manner rather than the prescriptive means of international diplomacy (Senehi & Byrne, 2006, p. 252). In this thesis, D&D further expands on the methodological horizons of storytelling. As a basis for art, storytelling can expose participants and storytellers to the power of storytelling through elicitive teaching and by demonstrating the power of expressive culture, symbolism, and open-ended participatory, collaborative storytelling that is neither indigenous nor colonial (Senehi, 2020a, pp. 46-47). Further, storytelling includes adults and youth at the forefront of a story's evolution (Gottschall, 2012, p. 189; Senehi, 2002, p. 51; Senehi & Byrne, 2006, pp. 235-237). In this

way, storytelling can act as an important bridge between PACS empirical, and theoretical literature and D&D.

As a result of its imagination-based storytelling essence, D&D's potential peace-oriented training capacity utilizes the liminal play space permitted by society to actively practice peace training and critical skill development through imaginative deconstructions of real-world scenarios while reconstructing them as imagined alternatives. It is worth noting that D&D has an effective global reach, unlike many other past storytelling support structures.

D&D as a storytelling mechanism and as a game is a form of structured play with explicit and implicit knowledge production effects (Upton, 2015, p. 189). Explicitly, it is designed to create an enjoyable experience for all participants grounded by codified and accessible rules. Implicitly, it engages constantly with a host of critical skills such as collaborative problemsolving, worldbuilding, literacy, and socialization through active, experiential training (see Senehi, 2021, p. 1160). In this way, D&D could be viewed as a functional prescriptive structure of support for self-guided imaginative storytelling-based elicitive problemsolving as well as the use of simulations as core to participants' experiential learning.

D&D as a creative simulation space

The results of a 2012-2013 United Nations (U.N.) comprehensive Training Needs Assessment found a need to address mission-critical gaps in the knowledge, skills, and abilities of staff throughout the organization and called for significant investment in training (as cited in Gelot, 2019, p. 195). Similarly, in 2010 the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) identified a gap between the needs of employers in the peace and conflict resolution field and the professional knowledge, skills, and abilities provided by postgraduate education.

It was suggested in the same report that the cause of this gap was the tendency for some university curricula to exclusively focus on theories while potential employers like the U.N. look to hire candidates with field experience and professional skills (Gelot, 2019, pp. 195-196). Consequently, Goon (2011) suggests that the professional skills needed to bridge the gap between university curriculum and the needs of employers can be achieved through simulated problem-based experiential learning, while Katz et. al. (2019) noted that online training simulations help build mediation capacity (Gelot, 2019, p. 196; Katz, et. al., 2019, p. 368).

The educational validity of game theory-based simulation techniques is already well established and recognized in international relations, conflict analysis, political science, management, intercultural training, negotiation, as well as conflict processes and politics (Brynen, 2014, p. 533; Fischer, 2011, p. 768; Gelot, 2019, p. 201; Levent et. al., 2006, p. 537). Modern examples such as the model U.N., model African Unity, and model European Union are all functional models of social system-based adaptations of simulation that explore alternative possibilities and address uncertainty inherent in conflict by encouraging critical reflection and practice skills in safe environments (Fischer, 2011, p. 768, p. 774; Levent et. al., 2006, pp. 536-537).

Learning through problem-based simulation is a central component of D&D's wargaming past and present-day experiential soft skill training capacity and draws its contextual authority from PACS experts like Abu-Nimer, Boulding, Freire, Lederach, and Burton. Burton asserts that persistent conflict results from hyper-individualized interests and that the existing education systems fail to teach critical skills necessary to achieve basic human needs and ritualized collaboration (Burton, 1990, pp. 276-277; Burton, 1998, p. 6). Moreover, Friere (2018) is critical of prescriptive teaching and instead advocates for problemsolving education techniques based upon collaborative trust and creativity to

undermine oppressive systems and advance the cause of individuals' liberation (p. 75). In contrast, Gelot (2019) notes that the existing literature on problem-based learning has mixed conclusions and confidence. The examples he cited and the minimal exploration of D&D and other RPGs in therapy, education, and criminal justice serve to bolster the need to seek more substantial evidence of both experiential and quantifiable research in the PACS context (p. 196).

In addition, Lederach (1996) introspectively explores his experiential knowledge of role-plays and describes them as a significant part of conflict resolution training (p. 101). He identifies role-play as an appropriate model for dealing with conflict as it facilitates encounters between knowledge and creativity to address peoples' needs (Lederach, 1996, pp. 106-107). While these role-plays serve as examples of Lederach's prescriptive and elicitive peace training and implicit and explicit learning, they are simultaneously exercises of patient hope through the imposition of prescribed structural anti-utopian social, economic, and political limitations to the creative process. Lederach's role-plays often explicitly inhibit the creative horizon of intent through the imposition of practicalities upon revolutionary possibilities (Upton, 2015, p.p. 47-49).

That said, traditional teaching methods can often constrain exploration and discovery by focusing on prescriptive learning and banking education. Through rational deductive reasoning the possibility for the new creative discovery of new information is reduced due to the lack of evidence for alternative functions or possible solutions (Bonawitz et. al., 2011, p. 328). Educated hope, the desire to nurture utopian seeds by imagining other worlds, is at the structural core of D&D and unleashes our desires to imagine other worlds and liberates our creative faculties from the practicalities of the real world and its anti-utopian systems (Kawitzky, 2020, pp. 131-132). This can have the effect of facilitating participant's elicitive trained experientially implicit knowledge and in their developing soft critical utopian and

peace skills using a protected problemsolving play space for players as well as a collaborative approach to learning.

At the same time, however, Katz and Lawyer (1993) define conflict resolution as a communication process for managing conflict and negotiating a solution to problems. It involves the diffusion of strong emotions and the reduction of hostile attitudes followed by collaborative problemsolving towards an outcome that resolves the underlining elements that led to conflict or violence (p. 27). For example, the Carana simulation delivered as part of the Peace and Development Studies Program at Linne University in Sweden simulates this process.

Simultaneously, Gelot (2019) also explores the use of problem-based simulation techniques and experiential learning solutions like games and role-plays to fill in the postgraduate experiential gaps in peace studies priorities and professional needs outside of the academic environment (pp. 197-198). The Carana simulation is a fictional simulation of a country in conflict. Students take up the roles of individuals involved in the short-term handling of conflict and the longer-term restoration of peace and the creation of a peace infrastructure (Gelot, 2019, p. 201). Grounded in realism but using a fictional country and crisis as context, students complete necessary tasks like drafting policy documents, attending workshops, and practicing professional skills. Teamwork, meeting planning, negotiation, and others are prescriptively practiced while steeped in a narrative fiction framed to facilitate creative inquiry and implicit collaborative problem solving (Gelot, 2019, p. 202).

Ultimately, the Carana simulation found that participating future professional peacemakers reported a significant development of their professionally desirable skills and engagement in the process. This training method was evaluated as being superior to traditional prescriptive training (Gelot, 2019, p. 210). This simulation facilitated the exploration of fictional complex roots behind the pedagogical and professional peace skill

gap while enabling participants to practice critical awareness. (Gelot, 2019, p. 210). Complex simulations such as the World Bank's adaptation to the Carana model have facilitated the avoidance or resolution of adaptive and flexible conflict-affected real-world situations (Brynen, 2014, p. 533; Levent et al., 2006, p. 539, pp. 550-551). While grounded in computer science, Levent et. al., (2006) explicitly advocates for expanding powerful abstractions tools such as agent-based and exploratory models as the basis of complex conflict resolution (p. 552).

In this section, I have illustrated some of the connections between PACS and D&D. D&D is a storytelling game comprised of both formal and informal constraints imposed by the narrative context and the player characters themselves (Upton, 2015, p. 18). D&D marries storytelling, an emancipatory method, with elicitive critical peace education and critical knowledge production and expands role-play's simulation potential in a way that is grounded in PACS praxis. D&D can be used to deprioritize prescriptive peace training and explicit knowledge replication by using play spaces to simulate complex conflicts and facilitate players elicitive training and implicit knowledge production.

Liberating player's cognitive creativity from the limitations of prescriptive status quo role-play techniques can free up their creativity facilitating the implicit and collaborative generation and action upon shared values in an imagined secondary world. As a novel form of collaborative narrative simulation, D&D becomes an opportunity to practice future imagining through simulation that often takes transformative utopian peace skill training from the theoretical level to an action level. Thus, the future can only be achieved from the present (Boulding, 2000, p. 257). As part of today's society, D&D retains the capacity to allow players to resolve conflict and determine narrative outcomes by trusting them with the creative power of learning and overcoming hierarchy while having fun together as part of

freedom and liberation from the mundane (Freire, 2018, pp. 79-80; Upton, 2015, pp. 189-192).

Education

Burton specifies the fundamental nature of one's personal development is to better understand the social nature and destructive influence of conflict (Burton, 1990, p. 95; Rubenstein, 2001, para. 5). In Basic Human Needs theory, Burton addresses the insufficient capacity of existing education systems to teach people core critical skills to achieve their needs. He calls for a new transformative paradigm to replace existing dysfunctional systems (Burton, 1990, pp. 276-277). Today, an expansive cohort of researchers and pracademics in education has already begun investigating D&D as a transformative educational method. For example, Clarke et al. (2019) notes that there is evidence to suggest that D&D serves as a self-reflection tool and is more engaging than standard education methods in teaching one self-reflection (p. 107). D&D can be an intrinsically motivating activity because it is more entertaining and exciting. It can be more effective than uninspiring knowledge reproducing banking teaching methods widely used today in training, retraining, and retaining produced knowledge (Clarke et al., 2019, p. 103; Wright et al., 2020, p. 104). In one study, 81 percent of the 230 university students who partook in exploratory learning through D&D indicated that they would choose to learn through RPGs again if they were able to do so (Clarke et al., 2019, p. 102).

RPGs are used digitally and in classrooms and in other educational settings for some time, yet they remain unexamined by PACS (Darvasi, 2018, para. 1; Neglia, 2018, para. 9; Tito, G., Mazzanoble, S., 2015). D&D is being used to engage students, boost learning success, and stimulate curiosity, intellectual growth, problemsolving, and provide young people with a host of other critical skills (Carter, 2011, p. 344; Clarke et al., 2019, p. 102;

Darvasi, 2018, para. 5, para. 27). For example, Turk (2015) underscores the point that education's foundational and often forgotten purpose should always be to encourage children to investigate, wonder, and be curious about things (pp. 2-3). D&D can practically facilitate this purpose by promoting the practice of advanced socialization skills while acting as a rules-based mediator for both personal and group-based knowledge creation. D&D can also encourage training and skill mastery through practice and the in-game simulation of character growth through experience points. These imbedded experience points reward players successful problemsolving through narrative play while facilitating their advancement of real-world social skills and continued in-game progress as they are empowered by the sense of worth intrinsically created by this reflexively inductive system (Clarke et al., 2019, p. 102; Garcia, 2017, p. 232; Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130).

This section on education explores the contributions of three critical imaginative peace educators, Elise Boulding, Paulo Freire, and Lev Vygotsky necessary to comprehend the D&D peace method this thesis later presents. Then the section explores the importance and role of morality and critical thinking as critical peace skills and their contribution to social education and educated hope.

Critical and Imaginative Peace Educators

Vygotsky's 1962 social-cultural theory introduces an emphasis on social and cultural influences on young people's cognitive development in our understanding of education. Vygotsky (1978) established that play with others facilitates physical and social learning in an unending process that informs individual and group development and contributes to children essential needs maintenance (Minhua et al., 2011, p. 310; Turk, 2015, pp. 24-25). He noted that children learn higher thinking and cognitive function methods like problemsolving strategies through social interactions with more knowledgeable members of society in liminal

cognitive areas that he named the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (McLeod, 2022, zone of proximal development, paras. 1-3). Paulo Freire also identifies two different types of education crucial to the discussion of D&D and its possible use as a peace method. Banking education minimizes critical dialogue favouring objectifying goal-oriented knowledge that frames critical consciousness as anarchic and breeds fear of freedom (Freire, 2021, p. 12, p. 32; Freire, 2018, p. 35). While most training situations maintain elements of both prescriptive and elicitive teaching qualities, it is possible for educational approaches to exist in variable locations along Lederach's (1995) continuum of training methods (as cited in d'Estrée & Parsons, 2018, p. 17).

The second type is problem-posing education which challenges students to think critically with the effect of deconstructing assumed truths and recognizing that they are ever-evolving (Freire, 2021, p. 39; Freire, 2018, p. 84). In addition, Boulding (1990a) qualifies peacemaking as being composed of teachable skills and learned behaviour she identifies as peaceableness. Peaceableness is both an example and practice of Vygotsky's theories of social-cultural learning and Freire's problem-posing education (Boulding, 1990a, p. 158; Boulding, 2000, p. 1). Peaceableness and peace learning change throughout a learner's life and has profound cognitive, affective, spiritual, and cultural consequences. As a result, it becomes an ideal means to empower oppressors and the oppressed to challenge the normatively violent systems that oppress and act upon our human oneness and desire for liberation (Boulding, 2017, p. 60, pp. 63-64; Boulding 2000, p.84, p. 261). Vygotsky, Freire, and Boulding simultaneously present the need for transformative social-cultural change and outline the mean by which it could be attempted. In the following sections, the academic contributions of these three critical, imaginative peace educators to the PACS literature are outlined.

Oppression

Banking education discretely reinforces the fear of freedom. It systemically reproduces this effect through selectively reproducing supportive knowledge for students to internalize, which ensures the persistent conformity of the oppressed by making those who consider struggling for freedom as threats to both their oppressors and other oppressed people (Freire, 2018, p. 47, p. 72). This educational paradigm treats students as objects needing assistance, inhibits their creativity, and is part of a vast technologically modernized illusion of choice that domesticates the agency of people to imagine or achieve transformative change (Freire, 2018, p. 51; Freire, 2021, p. 30). Banking education slows forces of innovation by stunting people's creativity and reducing their active interest in developing new knowledge (Freire, 2018, p. 83).

Humans produce the very social reality that simultaneously oppresses the oppressed and oppressors, reinterpreting Kant's earlier revelation that man only teaches man (Freire, 2018, p. 50; Kant, 2015, Introduction section, para. 14). By diminishing people's innate critical consciousness and discouraging the natural critical discourse that persists as spectacle, the impotence of what critical discourse remains becomes little more than non-action critiques of neoliberal hegemony that continue to perpetuate the status-quo (Freire, 2021, p. 39; Freire, 2018, p. 207).

Imagining Peace

Kant wrote, "Man can only become man by education. He is merely what education makes of him. It is noticeable that man is only educated by man - that is, by men who have themselves been educated" (Kant, 2015 Introduction section, para. 14). Moreover, Friere observes that institutional education systems continue to replicate rather than innovate the

status quo, sustaining knowledge processes by truncating the learner's curiosity and capacity for creative thought as early as primary and preschool age. This observation is reinforced by Turk's reason for establishing an early childhood education centred on play (Freire, 2018, p. 29; Turk, 2015, p. 2, p. 28; Pavie, 2020a, p. 130). In addition, Boulding's (2000) contribution to PACS praxis promotes peaceable diversity, beliefs, and values and advocates for changes toward a more perfect, mutually caring equality for all that are features she attributes to developing a peace culture (p. 1). Boulding (1990a) identifies that producing a peaceableness minded global civic order is dependent on addressing underdeveloped areas of peace education she calls craft skills. These five skills include coping with stress, problemsolving competence, confidence in our integrity, respect for others, and the use of our imagination, which she urges should be applied at the grassroots level in transborder training as they are essential for collective liberation (pp. 75-76).

Presently, because there is a lack of social channels within formal educational systems to teach utopian images of the present, the utopian idealism of pre-WWII peace education has been discarded as naïve and ineffective. In contrast, political realism is increasingly associated with worst-case scenarios like violence or nuclear war. While the passion for Utopia is not new, being essential in our histories, faiths, hearts, and everyday lives, peace praxis, and culture thrive on imagining a better future and indeed require it as one cannot act on something unimagined (Boulding, 1990a, p. 158; Boulding, 2000, p. 29, p. 64). Since peoples' active fear of nuclear consequences first arose (accentuated by the recent Russo-Ukrainian war), peace education has become a shrine of fear rather than educated hope to take the necessary actions to ban nuclear weapons. When conventional education banking systems deny children, critical skills required to imagine new utopian local to global linkages, the need for alternative peace education becomes difficult to imagine but even more essential to deploy. In the absence of dreamers, activists, and educators operating in these areas of

critical peace education, Boulding asserts that the world is sleepwalking towards negative imaging of an increasingly violent future that threatens to diminish peaceableness and opportunities for people's liberation further (Boulding, 2017, pp. 63-64).

Education for Liberation

Problem-posing education challenges students to think critically with the effect of deconstructing assumed truths and recognizing that they are ever-evolving as there are a plurality of heterogenous stories. Truth regards dialogue as crucial to reorganizing reality while resisting systemic domestication influences (Freire, 2021, p. 39; Freire, 2018, p. 84). At its core, problem-posing education encourages creativity, simulates authentic, reflexive praxis, and affirms people as an evolving sum of experience and knowledge. In the collective training of critical awareness of oppression, problem-based educational spaces encourage the confrontation of oppression and the pursuit of human liberation from oppression not as the final product of education but as a requisite beginning (Freire, 2018, pp. 83-84).

Consequently, Vygotsky's focus on learning with others is that they inevitably share and produce cultural values while doing education instead of individually reproducing values from our teachers (Turk, 2015, p. 219). It can be said that this disparate approach to collaborative learning is central to the present-day reimagining of liberation-minded education and the development of Boulding's (1990a) five essential peace development skills. The theoretical origins of education through play praxis illuminates the social-cultural influence of play on advanced skill development in peacebuilding, problemsolving, and social-emotional intelligence as supported by a wide range of literature in education praxis (Turk, 2015, pp. 22-30; Carter, 2011, p. 344; Clarke et al., 2019, p. 102; Darvasi, 2018, para. 5, para. 27; Gottschall, 2012, p. 41).

Vygotsky 1962 identifies make-believe play as an essential part of ZPD which he describes as the distance between actual developmental level as determined by independent problemsolving and the level of potential development determined through problemsolving under adult guidance or collaboration with more capable peers (cited in Turk, 2015, p. 27). In collaboration with more capable participants, problemsolving enables children to engage in a social activity independently and collaboratively at a higher level (Turk, 2015, pp. 26-27). Through play as a socially acceptable and natural limonoid physical and cognitive activity, Boulding's (2000) utopian imaginings can move individuals and groups towards a positive peace culture as they can be nourished in an adaptive tool bound only by imagination and socio-cultural limitations (p. 55 cited in Turk, 2015, p. 27). As a liminal space of meaning-making and collaborative learning, play cultivates the social and emotional intelligence and other natural peace capacity skills in imaginary and physical spaces (Turk, 2015, p. 28; Gottschall, 2012, p. 41; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, p. 19).

Education is understood to contribute to the effective growth of individuals, and it is a primary tool for intellectual development (Freire, 2018, p. 29; Turk, 2015, p. 2, p. 23, p. 28; Pavie, 2020, p. 130). Vygotsky's (1978) Social Cultural Theory (SCT) posits that learning is a facilitated social process where children adopt cultural values, beliefs, and problemsolving strategies through interaction with others (McLeod, 2022, para. 2). This theory advances play and is an ideal place in supplementing existing reproductive knowledge education systems with innovative natural human quality education to supplement goal-oriented academic instruction as the second of two collaborative halves to education (Turk, 2015, pp. 23-24).

Boulding states that learning cannot be separated from action and culture creation (Boulding, 1990a, p. 158; Boulding, 2017, p. 65). Thus, with the increasing modern focus on competitiveness, the implicit consequence of a global culture and society lacking fundamental peace capacities become apparent. Boulding warns that a balance between

separateness and togetherness is necessary; however, such a balance is not a reality as Turk observes in her capacity as an educational practitioner (Boulding, 2000, p. 2; Turk, 2015, p. 2). To this end, Lederach (2005) calls for the creation of a school of moral imagination (pp. 175-177). At the same time, Boulding underscores the importance of historical and future utopian imaging to engage with her multiple dimensions of global order and critically awaken repressed capacities to imagine something better, namely a utopian future (Boulding, 2017, p. 62, p. 138; Lederach, 1999, pp. 191-197; Sidhu & Carter, 2021, pp. 13-14; Stephenson, 2012, p. 124).

Morality

D&D embeds morality into players' actions in their shared collaborative beyonding experience by enabling them to confront morally relevant scenarios that they are unlikely to encounter in their real-world lives (Wright et al., 2020, p. 102). D&D as a structured collaborative fictional storytelling process is an appealing, memorable, and transformative gaming experience inclusive of both positive and negative knowledge-making, which Sidhu and Carter (2021) name pivotal play (p. 2, p. 15). Imaginative roleplay can function as a practical moral training ground while engaging players in collective discussion and moral decision making (Wright et al., 2020, p. 99, p. 119). D&D, therefore, presents to PACS an opportunity to understand morality in two ways, first by encouraging, facilitating, and rewarding cooperation between players and second by requiring collective discussion and negotiation of social and moral norms within the context of the game that can have a real-world impact on player's moral development (Wright et al., 2020, pp. 101-102).

D&D requires a player to create and maintain a fictional character identity while co-creating a meaningful and dynamic group identity so that this experience serves as implicit practice for the players in mature moral functioning (Wright et al., 2020, p. 104). Recent

research on moral development has investigated personal life narratives to identify moral values and found that self-interest often dominates the interests of others in the real world (Wright et al., 2020, p. 103). Still, mature moral functioning is achieved by simultaneously pursuing individual and group interests (Wright et al., 2020, p. 103). Allowing players to live out moral decisions in the game from the perspective of their alternate identity collaborating with others empowers them to experience the consequences, positive and negative, of those decisions. Doing so can cause shifts in university aged students' perspective and comprehension in affecting morally relevant output production, moral growth, and a shift away from self-interest towards shared norms and values in those who had not played the game before (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130; Wright et al., 2020, p. 103, pp. 108-109, pp. 116-118).

Critical Thinking

John Dewey (1997) defined self-reflection as active, persistent, and careful consideration of knowledge and its conclusions, and he proposed that it was essential to a learner's development in critical thinking, self-led learning, and personal or professional development (cited in Clarke et al., 2019, pp. 101-102). While alternate definitions exist, many agree that critical analysis is needed to achieve a deeper understanding to regulate one's behaviour. The reflexive process can often preclude the learner from leading related educational activities as leading such activities often detracts from the leader's time and functional capacity to learn. However, both autobiography and D&D can empower participants to co-construct shared social and moral knowledge, meaning making, and understanding while leading the gaming process. Collaborative negotiation of social rules through shared self-reflection can facilitate players in accessing a primary and essential part of community meaning making through emotion and ritual (Clarke et al., 2019, pp. 101-102; Wright et al., 2020, p. 101; Laycock, 2015, p. 182).

Gentile et al. (2019) study on games and critical thinking reports that games are a tool that can empower students to recall learning by involving them in tasks and activities that engage knowledge production and improvement (pp. 3-4). While Gentile et al. (2019) disclose that little is known about how games affect the development of children's higher-level cognitive skills, they endeavoured to reduce that deficit by engaging 92 12th grade students in a highly structured, quantitative study focused on their fictional businesses rather than critical social skills (Gentile et al., 2019, p. 3, pp. 10-11, p. 13). Consequently, Gentile et al. (2019) defines critical thinking as a pervasive human feature and found that those with a higher disposition towards critical thinking tended to investigate options and play more so that greater attention to the game also reflects overall performance (p. 7, p. 13). This knowledge suggests that reflective reasoning processes and critical analysis skills like problemsolving and critical thinking in the game's activities lead to self-regulated learners (Clarke et al., 2019, p. 102; Gentile et al., 2019, p. 4). That said, Kawitzky (2020) does not define training as a technical skill but rather as performative social language noting that in this way, fictional worlds collaboratively created facilitate utopia (p. 129). D&D's transformative experiences can be produced or enhanced with audio-visual input that often requires players to make philosophical, religious, and moral decisions that reinforce assumptions or question them in ways other games do not (Borecky, 2021, p. 51; Laycock, 2015, p. 185, p. 187).

The paratextual knowledge-making discourse D&D facilitates in and out of character often displaces the importance of core text and structure, resulting in a co-created utopian collective effervescent state (Vu, 2017, pp. 284-286). In so doing, D&D as fantasy-fiction often acts as a deconstructionist influence on players and culture, capable of exposing real-world injustices and adjusting players attitudes toward prosocial language and shared experience (Vu, 2017, pp. 287-288; Wright et al., 2020, p. 99). D&D has not yet been played

or accurately replicated by artificial intelligence (AI) and requires humans' adaptability, flexibility, intuition, and creativity to play (Ellis, Hendler, 2017, p. 32). Where Gentile et al. (2019) explores the role of reflective reasoning, critical thinking, and explicit and implicit knowledge, Ellis and Hendler note the limits of AI, namely that AI is stuck doing what it's designed for. Games like GO which are reliant on deterministic linear problem-solving, are no longer at the forefront of AI research; in contrast, D&D is. While GO and other AI-managed games and tasks are deterministic, sequential, two-player, and operate with perfect information, zero-sum games D&D is not (Ellis & Hendler, 2017, pp. 31-32). D&D is played within the context of complex rules, randomness, determinism, discovery, knowledge-making, cooperation, and competition all simultaneously and, as a result, poses the next challenge for AI (Ellis & Hendler, 2017, p. 32).

Current events call for the introduction of novel educational practices in our schools by encouraging foundationally different approaches to existing education systems and praxis by teaching positive social-emotional experiences to children, which Aristotle first suggested in antiquity (Hymel & Darwich, 2018, pp. 352-353). Encouraging educators and academics to reconsider the importance of children and youth's natural critical skill development must urgently become a priority within PACS praxis (Jackson, 2012, Dewey's Parting Words section, para. 3; Lederach, 2005, pp. 176-177). In summary, academic education exclusively appears to have a salient banking influence on children that might frustrate their innovation and peaceableness. However, the social implications of these goal-oriented knowledge reproductive learning systems are not exclusive to children or childhood. Vygotsky, Dewey and others suggest, learning is a continuous and never-ending social process. In conjunction with the insights of Rousseau, Kant, Pavie, Friere, Lederach, Boulding, and Indigenous elders, Vygotsky's ZPD facilitates discussion on how D&D and the broader RPG culture can

contribute to the natural social education of both children and adults in critical skills and educated hope.

Culture

Rather than conducting a thorough examination of existing definitions of culture, a suitable definition is selected beginning with the work of Elise Boulding to facilitate a salient discourse. Boulding (1990a) defines civic culture as the structure by which society is shared between members; it is how common understanding, space, resources, opportunity, and interdependence are managed even if members never meet or interact (p. xix). In contrast, Friedman (1975) defines culture as customs, opinion, and ways of doing and thinking (as cited in Cotterrell, 2017, p. 83). Culture creates specialized divisions between social groups and relations by reproducing perspectives and knowledge that build and reinforce artificial dichotomies and systems, including those responsible for the academic writing conventions and traditions oppressively formatting this very thesis (Freire, 2021, p. 27). Culture systemically determines how knowledge production is structured and how learning is conducted (Foucault & Sheridan, 1995, p. 29). In this section, we explore cultural components essential to peace practice within the contexts of knowledge and meaning-making, power and agency, violence and mortality, and inclusion and accessibility not arbitrarily but because these themes highlight the essence of a genuinely transformative peace culture in modern society (Garcia, 2017, pp. 232-233).

Knowledge and Meaning Making

To understand the evolution of culture, it is necessary to consider social life, technology, and imaginative culture inclusively (Carroll, 2017, p. viii). Carrol defines

imaginative culture with a wide range of art and storytelling examples and asserts that they are all styles of expressing social identity. Further, he claims that imaginative culture reflects innate human motives, emotions, and forms of social organization (2017, p. viii). These assertions are supported by a range of academics, including Gottschall (2012), who attests that story retains the capacity to alter human thinking on sex, race, class, gender, violence, and ethics (p. 152). Stories are believed to have a nourishing effect on elementary and higher-order functions such as our imaginations, moral behaviour, problemsolving, conflict analysis, decision-making, and social skills; and ultimately real-world societies, which Boulding explicitly catalogues in a historical overview of utopianism (Boulding, 2000, pp. 40-52; also see Gottschall, 2012, p. 177; Turk, 2015, p. 26; McLeod, 2022, para. 4).

Durkheim (1995) identifies two states of being, namely the state where one is addressing daily life necessities and “collective effervescence.” Collective effervescence is achieved through a shared ritual where feelings of excitement and euphoria are produced through shared meaning attributed to symbols identified as sacred. Modern examples include flags, cultural relics, or logos like D&D’s (as cited in Laycock, 2015, p. 182). Durkheim (1995) noted that the processes of collective meaning-making are the origin of religion and all social facts, values, cultural norms, and social structures that are bigger than the individual (as cited in Laycock, 2015, p. 182).

Social facts and structured biases shape society's systems by creating ingroups and others based on these shared and replicating collective meaning-making experiences. Walker (2018) asserts that developing mental spaces where reconciling cultural differences and perspectives are at the core of the work conflict resolvers do (cited in d’Estrée & Parsons, 2018, p. 279). D&D is a gaming system that may create space for cultural knowledge production insulated from the rest of the world. Garcia describes this phenomenon as “the magic circle,” a special place in time and space created by the game that is culturally

productive and builds on itself. In contrast, Laycock describes this type of cultural analysis through unlimited creative recombination as liminality (Garcia, 2017, p. 232, pp. 234-235; Laycock, 2015, p. 183).

D&D can be a toolset for collective effervescence and thus the production of cultural artifacts, narratives, and expressions of agency (Garcia, 2017, p. 232). As a result, D&D's cultural significance reaches beyond the game and shapes the cultural landscape around it, as invasively evidenced by the introduction of concepts like "hitpoints" and "leveling up," and its reflection in popular media like World of Warcraft, Game of Thrones, and its success and influence on modern novelists (Garcia, 2017, pp. 232-233). Vu (2017) asserts that D&D has continually eroded the boundaries between impossible fiction and everyday experience. (p. 286). At the same time, inherent player biases and player experiences are facilitated by the structurally adaptive arbiter of rules and customized communally. These human-built foundations within a system may both shape and be re-shaped through collective effervescence as a tool for creative, collaborative, and fun storytelling (Garcia, 2017, p. 243).

D&D is collective and "set apart and forbidden" in that it must be ritually conducted so that it creates a liminal space where standard restraints are suspended (Laycock, 2015, p. 184). During collective liminal states where the rule systems dictate constraints and ideologies for meaning-making, symbols are rearranged and acquire new meaning (Garcia, 2017, p. 232; Laycock, 2015, p. 185). These same systems may replicate, and model lived experiences while separating play from non-gaming activity in ways that allow players to reinforce their assumptions and biases or question them as their in-game experiences alter how they approach future play (Garcia, 2017, p. 234; Laycock, 2015, p. 187; Sidhu & Carter, 2021 p. 14).

Play, art, theatre, and D&D can change the way people interpret the world by stoking and provoking self-reflective experience and meaning making (Borecky, 2021, p. 50; Vu,

2017, p. 287). Arai (2018) asserts that theatrical settings created by artists and participants alike also retain this capacity to break silence, give agency to those without it, and traverse boundaries otherwise difficult to traverse enabling the binding of disparate groups and individuals together (as cited in Cohen, et al., 2011, p. 238). The imagination and reality become porous, enabling people's experiences, knowledge, and understandings to be practiced and developed and to routinely traverse these boundaries (Laycock, 2015, p. 195; Wright et al., 2020, p. 118). D&D can enable people to experience new transgressive and challenging content and empower communal social interactions at such scales that it becomes influential to media platforms and entertainment worldwide. As a result, D&D may empower players to reshape systems to reflect changing ideas of identity and culture (Garcia, 2017, pp. 243-244; Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p. 4; Wright et al., 2020, p. 102; Vu, 2017, p. 288). D&D also empowers players to live moral decisions without binding consequences while encouraging critical self-reflexivity salient to the real world. Agency-driven action-oriented exploration of alternative worlds and cultures further enables shifts in cultural perspective and comprehension (Laycock, 2015, p. 183; Vu, 2017, p. 274; Wright et al., 2020, para. 6).

As an intrinsically motivating activity, D&D has been shown to be more effective at training players to retain knowledge through profound communal experience they produce than experiencing uninspiring teaching methods (Borecky, 2021, p. 50; Wright et al., 2020, p. 104). D&D's special positionality between game, fiction, and fantasy is based on medieval folklore and romance cultural artifacts and lore. It reproduces these stories through modern fantasy, which was once on the fringe of society and has now grown to determine the popular narrative through multichannel means as a world-building cultural phenomenon (Vu, 2017, p. 281, p. 285, p. 288).

Power and Agency

D&D simultaneously frames the limits of play space through codified rules, including the need for one participant to take on the role of Dungeon Master (DM), who serves as the central creative force behind the game (Garcia, 2017, p. 242). While early editions initially gave the DM punitive and prescriptive dictatorial power and had even outlined how players should conduct themselves, they also note that this rules-based authority has diminished in favour of player agency and social interaction (Garcia, 2017, p. 242; Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130; Vu, 2017, p. 282). At the most cynical analysis of the game, D&D stems from power fantasies derived from exerting control and demonstrating excellence that includes others, either fictional or real, mediated only by the agreed-upon certainty of rules and the randomness of dice (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130; Vu, 2017, p. 282).

As a game, D&D is shaped by intent filtering external constraints such as rules and internal constraints like a person's mental state and the choices the person makes (Upton, 2015, pp. 26-27). As a game that facilitates movement within a play space, that movement becomes political because it involves shifting power dynamics and affords players variable degrees of self-determination (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 131; Upton, 2015, p. 25). D&D can have the persistent capacity to magnify negative intersections of power and challenge them through critical communal and self-reflexivity. Through action-oriented exploration of alternative worlds, shifts in players cultural perspectives and comprehension are collaboratively made possible in ways that can shape cultural practice and function as positive disruptions to persons holding negative stereotypes while enriching learning in a way that goes deeper than just leisure time and having fun (Garcia, 2017, p. 232, pp. 234-235, p. 242, p. 244; Kawitzky, 2020, p. 131; Laycock, 2015, p. 183; Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p.1; Vu, 2017, p. 274; Wright et al., 2020, p. 103).

Having evolved from a wargame into a toolset for group production of utopian cultural artifacts, narratives, personal agency, community value integration, and moral development promoting social spaces, D&D occupies a position as an action-based participatory knowledge-producing activity ideally placed to promote individual agency and community value integration into moral development (Garcia, 2017, p. 232; Wright et al., 2020, p. 104; Boulding, 2000, p. 211). Within the context of the activity, real personal responsibilities for the goals and commitments of the group are collaboratively forged alongside in-game ethical debate and dialogue that facilitate shifts from personal interest to more principled decision making. D&D can allow players to live moral decisions from their character's perspective and experience the consequences of those decisions, which can shift perspectives and comprehension within that shared fiction and real social spaces (Wright et al., 2020, pp. 102-103). In this way, through collaboration, D&D's formal structure acts as a porous and adaptive frame for equitable experiential knowledge creation. While external social constraints can facilitate initial meaning-making and world-building, players who experience flow can often be subsumed by collective effervescence.

Rules which initially serve to qualify success or failure fairly and consistently as an agreed-upon structure of the fictional reality can swiftly be transformed into a system whose purpose becomes shaping creative, collaborative, fun, and storytelling (Garcia, 2017, p. 232; Vu, 2017, pp. 283-284). Games of D&D are generative, anti-hierarchical, experimental, and process-based spaces that privilege player agency and emergent collaboration over predetermined outcomes or products (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 129). They can allow players to create and participate in worlds where marginalized people do not need to wait for representation. They may enable a person's personal agency to develop in ways that mainstream society's institutional hegemony interprets as resistance to moral colonialism and

as a threat to the security and validity of the existing cultural tradition (Kawitzky, 2020, pp. 129-131; Laycock, 2015, pp. 214-215, p. 221).

Life, Death, and Violence

Since the Victorian era, tangible resources have often been advanced as having value. Capitalism, religion, and the reigning global hegemonic culture not only deemphasize play, fiction, and the imagination but casts them as hurdles to young people becoming productive adults (Laycock, 2015, pp. 228-229). This cultural colonialism is now losing ground somewhat to the natural human tendency toward the imagination and play and therefore manufactures moral crises to frame challenging knowledge production as contemptuous to maintain the status quo (Laycock, 2015, p. 229). Clearly, the imagination doesn't pose a direct threat to systems and institutions. Yet the more imagination flourishes, the more precarious the hegemonic hold of those status quo interests becomes, especially among children, women, adolescents, and other marginalized communities like newcomers, disabled people, and 2SLGBTQIA* people (Laycock, 2015, p. 215). As keepers of hegemony, moral entrepreneurs are threatened by RPGs and sometimes seek wild claims to justify their principled yet often counter-intuitive stance against them (Laycock, 2015, p. 239).

Older studies on D&D often indicate that D&D has a negative influence on morality through the encouragement of deviant behaviour (Wright et al., 2020, p. 101). Others have also concluded that violent video games cause increased violent behaviour yet are increasingly countermanded by a growing list of studies that fail to show a relationship between violent games and increased hostility, reduced empathy, antisocial behaviour, or severe violence in game (Wright et al., 2020, p. 101). If anything, there was a decrease in serious violence in society because of growing popularity of violent video and RPGs like D&D (Wright et al., 2020, pp. 100-101). In contrast, digital and non-digital research has been

done on how D&D's meaningful play coalesces into pivotal play and creates "positive negative experiences" (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p. 5).

Pivotal play is play that includes both positive and negative knowledge-making, which Sidhu and Carter (2021) name pivotal play (p. 2, p. 15). In divergence to the public fear that D&D encourages violence in youth and threatens the very fabric of a peaceful society, D&D can enable players to grow and become aware of their differences and similarities (Richie, 2017, para 8, 13; Turney, 2020, para. 4). By investigating these similarities and differences through fiction, innovators and dreamers learn about their agency and identity communally while practicing critical peace skills with real-world relevance, especially in the harshest of social environments (Pavie, 2020b, p.143; Richie, 2017, para 12; Turney, 2020, para. 5).

Violent and nonviolent means of exploring virtues and vices can be prosocial practice for players even when their actions are antisocial. Some modern theologians now conclude that mimicking evil is acceptable for educational purposes (Laycock, 2015, p. 218). Violence can be interpreted in D&D as prosocial when protecting innocent fictional lives or fighting to reclaim resources or pre-empting violence (Wright et al., 2020, p. 103). The presence of violence and intergroup conflict is not always a negative thing as it can affect prosocial decision making and moral dilemma resolutions and move players towards moral growth (Wright et al., 2020, p. 118). While D&D inherited attributes of violence, sexism, and competitiveness from its wargaming and fantasy roots, intentional use of challenging media or content can induce a positive impact on players (Laycock, 2015, pp. 191-192; Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p. 1; Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130).

When players perform evil acts in a game, they and the other players are presented with the opportunity to reflect on their monstrosity and immoral behaviour (Laycock, 2015, p. 195). In this way, negative behaviours can be expressed in any number of ways while

playing D&D, which can make D&D an outlet that is both enjoyable, cathartic, and shared with others while muting what could be very negative consequences in the real world. D&D is fun not because it permits the rehearsal of violence but because actions in-game have consequences that make imaginative play a lab for analyzing violence and the consequences of violent behaviour. These rich fantasy lives can even prepare children for dealing with frustration and considering the consequences of their actions. Children with an active imagination are more likely to be aware of the implications of violence and thus less likely to act out as they reflect more fear, sadness, and shame which D&D often amplifies (Laycock, 2015, pp. 193-194).

As a creator of D&D, Gygax noted that the fear of death is one of the most exciting parts of the game. This is a view Vu (2017) validates by recognizing that mortality comes up for renegotiation in games of D&D (p. 283). Death in D&D is also an example of a positive-negative experience that can be as transient as a removed marker of success or failure as it can also be emotionally, morally, or socially transformative outside of the game itself (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p. 11). Scholars have explored how death is constructed and how death experienced inside game spaces affects players' real-life grieving both in-game and externally through shared social and communal experiences (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p. 5). For example, Sidhu and Carter (2021) investigated the influence of positive negative experiences in play, and found that death was cited by 85 percent of participants as part of their most meaningful experiences in D&D. These experiences were meaningful for variable reasons and in different ways both in and outside of the game. Still, pivotal play is shown to be helpful for understanding inter-meaningful play (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, pp. 8-9).

Inclusion and Accessibility

D&D continues to have structural and cultural opportunities to expand its diversification of representation in published content and to improve the diversity of its wider community of more than 50 million players. One of these opportunities, Garcia (2017) notes that nearly all heroic characters are depicted in D&D content as thin and able-bodied (p. 240). Similarly, Kawitzky notes that D&D has traditionally been firmly in the arms of privileged white, cis heteronormative men and boys based on his assessment of 2010 data. As a result of the groups' social, political, and economic conditions, these games have been marketed too; even learning the mechanics of the game can sometimes act as gatekeeping (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130). However, D&D is a play system rife with possibilities for revision, facilitative dialogue, and cultural production that is presently tackling those systemic hurdles and opening the gaming community to a diverse group of people.

Presently, real-world prejudices persist around and within the community of players, which demand continued vigilance and attention to the lingering influence of harmful external cultural artifacts (Garcia, 2017, p. 244). Yet examples such as the *Limitless Heroics: Better Worlds via Dice and Disabilities* Kickstarter by Dale Critchley and Overisles, an inventive new TTRPG system that teaches British and American sign language as a core component of the game, are presently being funded on Kickstarter and are both representations of D&D's capacity to systemically facilitate an inclusionary influence on more comprehensive cultural knowledge production, and accessibility in this new game.

Accepting that people inhabit alternative lives within the fictional worlds D&D creates, it is incumbent upon D&D's creators to examine the culturally informed rules of the gaming system itself. D&D frames co-constructed meaning-making and transgressive social play in conjunction with the negotiation of imposed social restrictions. D&D is presently undergoing structural reformations and a self-critical examination in the form of the

transformation of core concepts like alignment, race, ableism, and gender. Even spatial considerations like official imagery and podcasts are undergoing significant structural and cultural change (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p. 9; Garcia, 2017, pp. 233-235; Borecky, 2021, p. 56).

Pretend play can develop positive emotional expression and regulation, positive social interactions, increased social competence, prosocial behaviour, and fosters a community commitment to achieving, protecting, and maintaining values and commitments (Wright et al., 2020, p. 101, p. 117). Both fictional and real groups are formed through this method of practice which includes “them” as “us,” and these relationships bind groups together. Through these new relationships, people’s awareness of their interdependence is formed and bind each other together in ways that tend to reduce intergroup violence (Fry. 2007, p. 215, p. 218). D&D, therefore, can be ideally placed to promote personal agency and community value integration into moral development through deeply personalized and emotionally memorable moments experienced throughout a shared collective effervescent experience (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, pp. 9-11). These shared stories result from the liminal space D&D creates between fiction and reality, allowing players to develop safe communities to explore identity and other salient themes. Fan-made knowledge-making contributions like the Kickstarters mentioned above additionally create learning spaces that train players explicitly with inclusive language skills while implicitly showing how to treat others with respect, care, modesty, courtesy, and reciprocity through therapeutic roleplay. In this way D&D can be, emotional, meaningful, and enduring in and outside of the game experience (Borecky, 2021, pp. 50-51, p. 54; Sidhu & Carter, 2021, pp. 10-11, Wright et al., 2020, p. 104).

Pivotal play is a mechanism through which human beings construct new frames of meaning (Laycock, 2015, p. 286). In the long run, the emergence of new cultural forms from play is a natural, cultural process; however, creative play is frequently regarded as corrupt

and under suspicion by modern societal structures. While research within traditional academic structures frequently fail to explore the depth of D&D's role as a viable new peace method within PACS, exploratory work in related fields is slowly creating research inroads supporting the future use of D&D as simulated peace training.

This section has explored inclusion and accessibility, violence and morality, power and agency, and knowledge and meaning making as core aspects of culture and its reformation or replication in D&D. Members of the D&D community increasingly come from various diverse backgrounds, yet they often share the same roleplaying experience. Non transactional personal connections formed between players in D&D sessions can model how real hegemonic institutions might be challenged through normative narrative while inspiring the sharing of collaboratively imagined, created, and experienced transformative utopian experiences and mutual wellbeing. In this way D&D continues to mobilize story and collective effervescence to promote critical skill development and cultural evolution through flexible design mechanics designed to empower players through active participation in grounded, educated hope knowledge making (Borecky, 2021, p. 51, p. 54; Boulding, 2000, p. 1; Boulding, 2017, p. 138; Sidhu & Carter, 2021, pp. 13-14; Upton, 2015, p. 25).

Play

This section introduces the interplay between the imagination, games, story, emotion, and utopia as functions of play at large through a discussion of the PACS interdisciplinary literature. Ultimately this section seeks to establish a basis from which D&D, a form of structured play that is both engaging and self-reflecting, can be presented as a school of the moral imagination (Clarke et al., 2019, p. 107). Upton and Boulding call upon people to “walk in the other’s moccasins” (Boulding, 1990a, p. 146; Upton, 2015, pp. 186-197), which the “imagination at play” allows us to achieve. Structured play like D&D facilitates players

learning critical peace skills like cooperation, logic, and the reshaping of anti-utopian pragmatic patient hope into educated hope through the active aesthetic experience of play (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 129, p. 132; Wolfendale & Franklin, 2012, pp. 214-215). The inclusion of active playing at storytelling, allows our imaginations, through active knowledge production, are trained and expanded to consider new possibilities (Gottschall, 2012, pp. 58-59).

Imagination

Peter Berger (1969) has asserted that the imagination is indeed a mandatory act of creation, while acclaimed writer John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1948) describes the imagination as noble and ingenious as there must be a world to escape to (as cited in Laycock, 2015, pp. 180-181). Cognitive scientists have found that imagination does not weaken children's grasp on the real world but is, in fact, a means of making sense of it by developing positive emotional expression, regulation, and competence through social interaction and prosocial behaviour (as cited in Turk, 2015, p. 10). To pretend to be someone or something is essential not to imagine who you are but as a way to act in a way consistent with the alternative identity (Upton, 2015, pp. 186-187).

Many, however, remain unconvinced. Capitalism, religion, and the Victorian era cultural legacy assume that only tangible resources have value, and that make-believe is only a hurdle to becoming productive adults (Laycock, 2015, p. 229). Others are fearful that imaginative play can lead to violence or threaten the social order and must be controlled (Laycock, 2015, p. 212, pp. 239-240; Wright et al., 2020, p. 101). According to Laycock, these critics of the imagination are the ones who are struggling to negotiate reality versus fiction. Such a revelation suggests that those behind the culturally induced moral panics

began with the Protestant reformation, the Enlightenment, and religious fundamentalism that some consider to be an actual danger to society.

The contempt for fiction has endured for centuries and has moulded social and academic evolution for so long that peoples' imagination is often feared and systemically repressed (Freire, 2021, p. 12, p. 32, Freire, 2018, p.35, p. 51; Laycock, 2015, p. 213, p. 222, p. 227). While people's imagination doesn't directly threaten systems and institutions, the more imagination flourishes, the more precarious the hegemonic hold on society of those with status quo interests becomes because they can topple that status quo (Freire, 2018, p. 83; Laycock, 2015, p. 215). Suppose our ability to create new worlds is abandoned. In that case, other capacities for art, reason, and abstract thought could suffer as they all begin with an imaginative step outside of what is real today. This is what Lederach fears the most when he speaks of the extinction of the dreamer (Lederach, 1999, pp.191-197; also see Laycock, 2015, pp. 214-215, p. 240).

Innovative systems have been effectively used as interventions for at-risk youth and adult inmates by supplementing the real world with imaginary worlds and their positive consequences (Laycock, 2015, p. 222; Richie, 2017, para. 11; Wright et al., 2020, p. 118). Fantasy, the genre least rooted in epistemological concerns that inform traditional postmodern theory, is limited only by the imagination and gaming system constraints imposed upon it (Garcia, 2017, p. 235; Laycock, 2015, p. 187, p. 213; Vu, 2017, p. 274; Wright et al., 2020, p. 119, p. 220). Fantasy has been described as ludic, hegemonic, anti-institutional, combinatorial, adaptable, enchanting, reflective of the real world, and accessible to everyone (Upton, 2015, p. 184). D&D's potential threat to the established sacred orders becomes clearer when one considers that fantasy worlds are ultimately derivatives of the real-world. Player knowledge and experience could therefore be used in theory and practice to transform society (Laycock, 2015, p. 180, p. 186, p. 213; Vu, 2017, p. 274, p. 280).

Through heavy emphasis on character and identity as a constant process of enactment and engagement, the imagination is capable of rearranging social structures and their limitations (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 129; Wolfendale & Franklin, 2012, p. 219). The imagination acts as a space where players can create a character and then embody it in co-constructed play while collaboratively expanding their minds and experiences. This process can evoke our capacity to bring diverse inputs together and see how they fit together to create a single picture of a secondary world (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 131; Wolfendale & Franklin, 2012, p. 222).

Imagining is less about being than about doing while mediating the tension between worlds (Upton, 2015, p. 189). The imagination is an active form of play that evolves in the present (Upton, 2015, p. 185); and the imagination naturally moves one from diminished critical consciousness and non-action critique to a state of active critical discourse (Freire, 2018, p. 207; Freire, 2021, p. 39; Laycock, 2015, p. 198).

Games

Tekinbaş and Zimmerman (2004) define a game as a system in which players engage in artificial conflict, limited by rules that results in a quantifiable outcome (p. 81). Garcia (2017) asserts that gaming systems create space for cultural production insulated from the rest of the world as a special place in time and space created by the game embedded with discriminatory biases within the system (p. 234). Games are limonoid fun activities, voluntary, and a specific manifestation of play that allows the players to escape from the confining structures of reality that often provide win conditions for players to achieve. (Laycock, 2015, p. 184; Upton, 2015, p. 11). Games have also been labelled as social technologies that order logic and are updated to reflect contemporary society, just like modern electronic technology, while the ideological assumptions essentially do not (Garcia, 2017, p. 235). In general, games can be developmentally instructive and capable of teaching

new paradigms of thought, logic, and cooperation, especially childhood make-believe and RPGs, because imaginative gaming is ideal for introducing different perspectives (Upton, 2015, p. 183; Wright et al., 2020, pp. 102-104).

While a play-based theoretical framework may explain knowledge production, games specifically allow players to escape the real world, reformulate, and return with new experiences that influence their perception of the world around them, having experienced new relationships, identities and meaning making practice that often includes making mistakes and comprehending complex environments (Brynen & Milante, 2013, p. 28). The keys to this process are play and the imagination grounded by implicit models of reality as a means of replicating relationships, conflict, and conflict resolution dynamics (Brynen & Milante, 2013, p. 28; Laycock, 2015, p. 180, p. 185). While the meaning of playing a game will change depending on cultural context, Upton (2015) notes that a game's mechanics can be best understood cross-culturally because a particular deep structure with universal conditions to play transcends cultural boundaries. These are the meta-rules for creating play space and other types of games (Upton, 2015, p. 10).

When playing games, opportunities for social play is limited only by the participants' imaginations and the gaming system's constraints effectively permitting the exposure to and exploration of consequences for the social group that might otherwise be inaccessible (Garcia, 2017, p. 235). Garcia (2017) warns that to better understand the cultural production and influence within the systemic design of cultural artifacts like music, pictures, and stories, then the biases and beliefs of those who construct these systems must be recognized as they influence cultural production (p. 243). For a game to become a successful play experience, it requires consistency and the belief that the game is logical even without realism (Laycock, 2015, p. 196). Game rules should, therefore, make sense of the world, as games are an exercise in an active exchange between players, the rule system, and the primary and

secondary worlds we inhabit. With film, literature, and theatre, information flows one way, while with games, the transfer is reciprocal (Upton, 2015, p. 23).

A game is made from a system of constraints and a movement pattern within the playing field defined by those constraints. Constraints are filters on intent, either structurally outlined or internal and self-imposed (Upton, 2015, pp. 25-28). They operate in a hybrid space of external components and internal mental states where players must make decisions that result in movement within the game's play space. Games can exist partially or entirely inside players' minds, as can the constraints in the game (Upton, 2015, p. 27). Active constraints and potential constraints exist in each game as not all constraints impact all movement or states of play. Yet while games have meaningful variable constraints at any given state of play, they often have real-world expectations of players, such as the desire to win or to rescue the princess at the end of the level that is deeply ingrained and incorporated into the play space (Upton, 2015, p. 25, p. 32).

To understand a game, it is necessary to look at what the rules allow and what the player can create from what the rules allow. The invented strategies and related experiences all combine to make up the essence of the game equally (Upton, 2015, p. 33). A game's real and fictional environments are constraints too, as sounds, music, and other things can profoundly influence player action (Upton, 2015, p. 37). Upton also identifies several structural components crucial to understanding games as possible peace praxis. The first component is predictability. For a play space to function correctly, its actions should be connected to consequences in a clear cause-and-effect way (Upton, 2015, p. 62). By behaving predictably, a play space enables the creation of horizons of intent or the range of actions a player can take. When players can work through a logical chain of events to determine possible outcomes toward their goals, they self-regulate potentially advantageous actions from the broader range of possible choices, the horizon of action. Without predictability,

consequences cannot be predicted, and choice becomes meaningless, causing the game to fail (Upton, 2015, p. 64).

Second, while predictability is essential, so too is the mechanism of uncertainty (Upton, 2015, p. 64). Uncertainty can be introduced by other players or systemically by agents of chance like dice in D&D. When outcomes are entirely predictable; there is no difference between the horizon of intent and the horizon of action, or the sum availability of decisions permitted resulting in decisions becoming meaningless (Upton, 2015, pp. 65-66). Long-term uncertainty about future horizons is a fundamental feature of most play outcomes that can have financial, status, or emotional ramifications outside of the game (Upton, 2015, p. 67). Finally, anticipation is the application of your knowledge and capabilities of your colleagues and opponents towards imagining how the game will unfold. When we do so, we can move freely within a system of constraints that can be both satisfactory and frustrating yet yields in-game experiences that simultaneously satisfy or frustrate play (Upton, 2015, p. 75, p. 194). The interplay of established rules, internal constraints, and active anticipatory play work together to facilitate critical, imaginative, and revolutionary play underdeveloped by traditional education (Freire, 2018, p. 51; Freire, 2021, p. 30; Kawitzky, 2020, p. 134; Upton, 2015, p. 77).

Brynen and Milante (2013) noted that in the same way that games have historically simulated war, they too can be used to simulate peace (p. 28). Their use of the term peacebuilding games signals both the universalist language of game as method, but also game's capacity for examining relationships, conflict dynamics, interactions, resource management and even debate and negotiation from a nonviolent perspective (Brynen & Milante, 2012, p. 29).

Story

Stories mark the beginning of human recorded history and motivate social change multi-generationally, not because they are technologically advanced or materially valuable, but because they are the natural manifestation of our most fundamental nature as social beings (Gottschall, 2012, p. 15; Reimer et al., 2015, p. 143). The Sulawesi cave stories and the oral histories of the Guditjmara people are believed to be the earliest known manifestations of human storytelling and social development (Barras, 2020, p. 2; Callaway, 2019, p. 1). Stories shape our values, opinions, morals, and imaginations, mark the oldest roots of language, community, knowledge, and art, and are variably experienced (Gottschall, 2012, p. 18, p. 153). As the centre of universal social features shared by all people, story serves as the glue of human social life worldwide (Gottschall, 2012, p. 177, p. 186; Laycock, 2015, p. 185). All people are innately familiar with story because it simultaneously shapes and is shaped by our imagination. As such, story is capable of emancipating people even within authoritarian societies as it challenges the dominant discourse, stereotypes, and marginalized identities (Garcia, 2017, p. 243; Gottschall, 2012, p. 11, p. 15, p. 48, p. 56; Laycock, 2015, p. 185; Senehi, 2015, pp. 202-204; Senehi, 2020a, p. 45). Cormier (2018) asserts that peace research must consider storytelling methodologies to avoid cognitive imperialism or ontological violence (p. 163).

Storytelling theory is a constantly evolving multidisciplinary peacebuilding method that combines indigenous, feminist, and art-based methodologies to illuminate storytelling's role as a transformative sociocultural force (Senehi, 2020a, p. 54). "Transcultural storytellers" become critical grassroots influencers and tellers in the collaborative product of peace capacity building and knowledge generation (Senehi, 2020a, p. 54, p. 203). Storytelling can be defined as someone telling someone else that something happened, and it is a globally and cross-culturally inclusive vehicle of emancipatory communication, knowledge-making,

and community-building (Senehi, 2015, p. 202; Senehi, 2020a, p. 54). Moreover, Gottschall (2012, p. 138) paraphrased story's relevance as "...the counterforce to social disorder..." while Senehi (2015) describes storytelling as a critical tool in sustaining peace and social evolution (p. 206).

While storytelling can be a straightforward yet vital interactive social process of passing on knowledge and creating sociocultural power for the disempowered, it can also entertain and influence people while advocating for their basic human needs (Senehi, 2015, pp. 203-208). Storytelling is a social interaction capable of challenging existing stereotypes and cultural identities while promoting mutual recognition through collaborative cultural recombination and production (Garcia, 2017, p. 243; Senehi, 2015, p. 204; Senehi, 2020a, p. 48).

Storytelling is neither inherently good nor bad, but it can be used in the service of peace or destruction (Senehi, 2015, p. 203). By transmitting knowledge and meaning, stories make it possible to address fundamental need deficiencies by teaching people pro-social behaviour when dealing with conflict or by facilitating cooperation to resolve problems, and address relationship building based on empathy and respect (Burton, 1998, para. 6; Gottschall, 2012, p. 15, p. 197; Hymel & Darwich, 2018, p. 347; Senehi, 2015, p. 204; Senehi, 2020b, p. 22; Turk, 2015, p. 14).

Boulding's (1990a) observation of the significance of utopian manifestations in both pre-modern and present-day culture suggests that an innately emancipated utopian civic culture can be achieved by playing at story (pp. 7-15). Leading academics such as Cormier (2018) examines the destructive and violent capacity story has as a tool of cultural imperialism, while others such as Senehi and Thiessen, link storytelling and problemsolving skills, which are ultimately critical in influencing a positive PACS methodology to contribute

to nurturing a peaceable global culture (Cormier, 2018, p. 166; Senehi, 2020a, p. 46; Senehi, 2020b, p. 22; Thiessen, 2011, p. 124).

Emotion

Games can be continuously reinvented and reimagined to remain impactful so that players have emotional positive negative play experiences (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p. 1). For example, Jo Salas' (2011) improvisational and interactively personal storytelling program called Playback Theatre is a powerful example of how stories can invoke dialogue, create empathy, and develop the moral imagination (as cited in Cohen et. al., 2011 p. 95). These play experiences are challenging in content and are often distressing but create opportunities for D&D players to reward self and group reflection (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p. 4). Research exploring the range of human emotion evoked by deep player connections in digital games are increasingly supported by ideas like immersion causing reciprocal bleed between players and characters (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, pp. 4-5).

Bowman (2018) identified six types of immersion, three of which are character, narrative, and "bleed." Character immersion refers to the connection between player and character derived from the character's embodiment (as cited in Borecky, 2021, p. 52). Bleed is players' feelings, thoughts, relationships, and physical state as affected by the character or vice-versa, causing emotional immersion when players become attached to fictional events around their characters (Borecky, 2021, p. 52, p. 58). Phillips (2014) noted that immersion is an active experience where the participant is fully engrossed in gameplay consequences. Flow is a state of being in happiness derived from enjoying the task rather than the result (as cited in Borecky, 2021, pp. 48-49; Laycock, 2015, p. 184). When experienced in combination, bleed and flow generate a critical utopian collective effervescent state where anti-hierarchal peace learning can occur.

Utopia

John Burton (1998) compares the functions of ancient societies that ritualized collaboration and social organization to the modern day. This comparison between dominant paradigms of yesterday's community-focused cultures and today's ritualized competition is a productive display of beyonding using the moral imagination. He suggests that one possible source of persistent conflict today is the hyper-individualized interests of modern society, which frustrates the basic human needs of the majority in favour of a minority collecting advantage (Burton, 1998, p. 6). Burton then compares two fundamentally distinct societies to challenge the modern narrative that conflict is motivated by the acquisition of material gain and posits that conflict is, in fact, social in origin and ultimately correctable by addressing unmet human needs collaboratively. Burton effectively critiques the modern interventionist and crisis management styles of peacebuilding by calling for revolutionary change in society that could be related to what Sir Thomas Moore imagined in 1516 when he wrote *Utopia* (Burton, 1998, p. 6). To practical effect, Burton advances the collaborative sociocultural traditions of our ancient ancestors as a viable resource to address the frustrated basic human needs that inspire conflict today.

Katherine Cross (2012) proposes that D&D is a means through which one can directly engage in anti-hierarchical, experimental, and process-based utopian training, which she defined not as a technical skill but as performative social language. As a result, collaborative fictional world-building facilitates the construction of spaces where an aesthetically sound recombination of players experience and meaning can manifest culturally utopian performance and identity (as cited in Kawitzky, 2020, p. 129). D&D can magnify negative intersections of power, but it can also be used to challenge them by creating a space where no revolution is too bold (Kawitzky, 2020, pp. 131-132). Play-based cultural recombination relieves players from real-world limitations and provides insight into real-world systems and

oppressive structures (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 132). By serving as a liminal space between fiction and the real world, utopian seeds of hope facilitated by players' experimentation in anticipatory play can grow (Kawitzky, 2020, pp. 131-132).

Kawitzky (2020) attempts to do so by defining patient hope and educated hope (see thesis glossary). Patient hope is most often witnessed in various negative peace (the absence of conflict) forms in the real world while educated hope remains more elusive. Educated hope is a method of optimistically and pro-actively looking into the possible shapes of potential futures, alternatively described as “future imagining” by Boulding, or “critical consciousness” by Freire, or “moral imagination” by Lederach (Boulding, 2017, p. 138; Freire, 2021, p.48; Laycock, 2015, p. 181; Lederach, 2005, p. 29, pp. 176-177). In addition, Douglas Fry (2007) asserts that the smallest spark of hope is essential to motivating individuals to bring about social change and that social change, even on a large scale towards peace is possible as evidenced in our own histories and our present (pp. 231-232). Darwin (1871) observed that murder, violence, and other crime within social groups are self-destructive and not the natural state of smaller tribes (cited in Fry, 2007, pp. 231-232).

Educated hope impulses are heavily woven into D&D and engage players in a collaborative world and scenario building experience, while they talk and explore alternate realities. These experiences often occur in dystopian worlds where utopian resistance becomes an intrinsic theme of unity between players due to their variably experienced marginalization (Kawitzky, 2020, pp. 129-132). Uniquely human, fictional worlds act simultaneously as models of reality in that they reflect the real-world and attempt to make sense of it but are also models for the real-world due to their intertransposability (Laycock, 2015, pp. 186-187; Vu, 2017, pp. 284-285). It could be asserted that the liminality of collaborative fictional play resists the players diminishing of innate critical consciousness and emboldens future thinking. As an action-based critique of neoliberal hegemony and the

perpetuation of capitalism, D&D's capacity for critical discourse is driven by educated hope, secondary world-building, and creative problemsolving that actively expands game culture in ways that other cultural practices cannot (Freire, 2021, p. 39; Freire, 2018, p. 207; Kawitzky, 2020, p. 132; Wolfendale & Franklin, 2012, pp. 216-218).

This section explored the concept of play as more than just an exercise in fun experienced by children, but also as an open avenue for adults to promoting social transformation throughout society. D&D is already a global gaming phenomenon that is grounded in the fictional fantasy genre of storytelling, the game enables players to import their real-world experience and knowledge into their roles and interactions in the game and at the game table. Through a sense of flow induced by aesthetic experiences, it can develop players' critical peace skills that are often ignored by traditional knowledge systems. D&D structurally puts players into a position to make decisions and actively choose their identities and behaviours rather than being assigned them or instructed about what should be done in the game. It encourages their imaginations to dream up new, challenging ways to think and consider how things can be done differently in the game. The experience and knowledge gained through play carries forward into the real-world enabling players to become dreamers capable of imagining better futures for themselves and those around them that are grounded in real-world inducing new real-world possibilities.

Identity

This section examines existing literature on D&D's connection to its structural and social influence on identity through race, gender, and religion. John Burton identified intersectional identity as crucial to understanding destructive social conflict and critical needs theory (Burton, 1990b, p. 95; Rubenstein, 2001, para. 5). Burton's basic human needs theory addresses the complexities of people's needs and the necessity to teach children and young

people essential critical thinking skills. He similarly posits that PACS must work for a new transformative paradigm to replace existing dominant systems (Burton, 1990, pp. 276-277).

Ed Simbalist (1979) noted that “We are all playwrights and actors and audience rolled into one. If it is a good performance, we are highly gratified and... we make plans to meet for the next foray into ‘Our World’” (as cited in Fine, 1983, p. 206). Aside from being fun, RPGs can help us weather the shifting cultural environment by restoring our childish ability to vary our roles as we play in ‘real’ life. RPGs can prepare us to face new challenges and search for truth (as cited in Laycock, 2015, pp. 234-235). The foundations of the game shapes the fictional and real-world context of players' identities and actions within fictional worlds while empowering players to identify alternatively as their characters rather than themselves (Borecky, 2021, pp. 47-48; Garcia, 2017, p. 236). By empowering players to inhabit their fiction, personal and community identity construction free up their views and agency in ways, they may otherwise not have been able to express in the real-world (Laycock, 2015, p. 187; Vu, 2017, p. 282).

Race

Imaginative roleplaying games can function as engaging and interactive “moral training grounds” (Wright et al., 2020, p. 99). Garcia (2017), for example, conducted a study that emphasizes understanding the depictions of race, gender, and power in non-digital gaming systems and the implicit biases of these systems (p. 233). While D&D can teach cultural lessons grounded in race and racism, it is complicated as race becomes more than just a physical concept in D&D. It becomes cultural in influencing players moves and, in so doing, highlighting fictional and real-world interactions and cultures while reinforcing players identities both in and out of the game (Garcia, 2017, pp. 240-241). While diversity breeds choice, the fifth edition of D&D has structurally embedded racialized culture and

socialization within the game. In early editions, humans were depicted as a single racial entity. Only in the most recent edition can humans' material culture change from region to region (Garcia, 2017, pp. 240-241).

Racism and race bias has been structurally and socially built into the D&D system and adventure modules. While fictitious, racial differences are often used to explain evil intent and determine who is good or evil or who can do what. Early editions suggested that there was a genetic determinism of what a member of each race could be like (Garcia, 2017, p. 240). Race selection comes with mechanical augmentations and beliefs that are fixed. While previous studies in the 1970s and 1980 depict D&D as a culture dominated by white men and their often-sexist, racist, homophobic, and ableist enthusiasm, these older editions of the game and community are out of step with the modern D&D game (Garcia, 2017, p. 243). Even the most recent editions of D&D retain intrinsic bigotry and oppression in the form of imagination stifling, socially and culturally regressive systemic holdovers such as the alignment system or universal racial traits and features. Recent content increasingly seeks to address these in-game structural opportunities that shape the context of players' identities and actions within the worlds and groups they play (Hart, 2021; Garcia, 2017, p. 236, p. 241).

Character creation, the first step for any player to play D&D, explores escapism, character identity, storytelling, and community development within the context of the gaming system (Borecky, 2021, p. 54). One of the first choices a player must make structurally and imaginatively is choosing their character's race and gender. Since stereotypes and cultural identities follow players into the game, there is no surprise that a game historically dominated by white men has fantasy stereotypes and structural reinforcements that reflect those early fantasy race and gender tropes. In this way, racism has acted both as input and structurally reinforced cultural reproduction throughout D&D's history, which accounts for much of the violence and misogyny prevalent in all editions of the game (Garcia, 2017, p. 243).

However, Laycock (2015) notes that these same games allow players the opportunity to express themselves in ways the player can't otherwise do (p. 187). Characters can be true to life in terms of one's character's gender, sexuality, social class, religion, disability, race, profession, age, familial relationships, origin, or all these things can be adapted differently than they are in real life and are indeed more frequently done in this way in each game (Wezerek, 2017, para. 2-3). Histories and backstories are developed to flesh out who the character is and to set up a story for players to explore utopian perspectives of human potential through their characters. In contrast to implicit disparities and stereotypes that exist in the real-world, players often inhabit alternative identities that shed these imposed real-world identities and enables them to adopt utopian beyonding in the development of their characters identities (Borecky, 2021, p. 54; Garcia, 2017, p. 240).

In her study of race and D&D, Garcia (2017) notes that the study does not consider the vast number of non-core books that expand players' cultural and modern-day racial options (p. 241). A pair of examples are the popular fan-made books titled *An Elf and an Orc Had a Little Baby* and *An Elf and an Orc Had a Little Baby 2*, which introduce over 1,500 different race-based character options for players to select from (Di, 2022). Depictions of gender and race are not exclusively influenced by the D&D system as they are also shaped by the broader social reality of the time in which that system exists (Garcia, 2017, p. 243). Today, D&D and the larger RPG genre of games have seen their forms, genres, popularity, and player base shifting steadily over time (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130). Wizards of the Coast (WotC), the company that owns D&D today, is actively transforming the game to adapt to a changing player base including a transition from the term race to species.

Wholesale optional rules revisions on race released in August 2020 and ultimately again in an anticipated set of pro-social reforms expected in 2024 are expected to support that trend (Hart, 2021; Wizards of the Coast, 2020). WotC is also considering content creation

that is evidenced by their new product, *Journeys Through the Radiant Citadel*, which is authored entirely by BIPOC persons (Hall, 2022, para. 1). As a game that remains innately violent and filled with traumatic stories, D&D includes wholesome values and beliefs from within and without the game structure that are related to race (Garcia, 2017, p. 241). D&D is capable of empowering players to teach each other while they in turn facilitate their active communal empowerment through their personal agency (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 131). While there can be no doubt that the game's history could inform future 'hangovers' concerning race and gender, it is increasingly apparent that D&D functions as an engaging and interactive "moral training ground." As a result, D&D may be able to help to shift and transform players personal and cultural beliefs and understandings of identity and race (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130; Wright et al., 2020, p. 99).

Gender

Garcia's (2017) historical exploration of older editions of D&D provides a valuable culturally historic insight into the placement of gender within D&D's system and social spaces as she explored the game's depictions of race, gender, and power in non-digital gaming systems and the implicit biases of these systems (Garcia, 2017, p. 233). The limitations of this study include as Garcia (2017) noted that it did not consider the progress being made towards equity and inclusivity in the fifth edition (p. 233). Imaginative roleplaying games can function as engaging and interactive "moral training grounds," yet, as Garcia (2017) asserts, the male gaze continues to guide cultural distinctions of feminine performance within D&D fictional play (p. 237; Wright et al., 2020, p. 99).

Structurally, male, female, body sizes and weights were assigned a range of acceptable forms by the system, and male pronouns have continuously been used throughout most editions. One of the three original release books was titled *Men and Magic* and only

used male pronouns, while the second edition of D&D acknowledged women yet did so in rather limited and troubling ways (Garcia, 2017, p. 238). These books depictions of gender and race are not the creation of the D&D system, even though its core rulebooks have systemically and intentionally codified limitations for female characters. They are instead shaped by the broader social reality and stereotypes of the time in which that system existed (Garcia, 2017, p. 243). Garcia's study counted the number of female characters depicted in core books, the number of images that include women in earlier editions, and the characterization of those women. She found that official D&D art is often hyper-sexualized or stereotyped where women were placed in positions of weakness in need of rescue most of the time, which could have a formative socialization effect on players in the cultural replication of their identity through narrative (Garcia, 2017, p. 239, p. 243).

D&D's form, genre, popularity, and player base have been shifting steadily over time (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130). Where once D&D was dominated by white men and boys and their rules and systems, D&D has shifted over its editions to actively include female and 2SLGBTQIA* players despite its toxic masculinity origins and history (Garcia, 2017, p. 237, p. 239). Innovation is known to come from the drive to fulfil unmet needs through experimentation and the need for alternatives (d'Estrée, & Parsons, 2018, p. 18). In 2009, Pathfinder, a closely related RPG system, started focusing on iconic characters for the first time and openly used female pronouns and even included an iconic character who identified as part of the 2SLGBTQIA* community (Garcia, 2017, p. 238). More recently, D&D fifth edition has increased the number of images of women and reduced their sexualization and powerlessness (Garcia, 2017, p. 240). While working to encourage a closer balance of participants, the images used in the books are still cast around the traditional Western notion of beauty and privileging whiteness.

It should be noted that structural representation does not equate to equal representation in quantity, power, or respect in or out of the game (Garcia, 2017, p. 239, p. 240). The history of the game offers us a clear view of where we once were as a society and it has begun to inform us about how to avoid future ‘hangovers’ concerning race and gender (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130). While not historically known for including feminist environments, D&D can serve as ‘off-label’ sites for gender experimentation and alternative identity expression through critical game structural processes like character creation (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 131). D&D allows players to produce and participation within worlds where marginalized people can make their own unique characters using their own personal agency and decision-making process to do so (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 131).

Religion

Robert Bellah (2011) suggests that the ability to see reality through imagining a secondary world is necessary to be happy and is precisely the method religion, poetry, and science operate within. There must be a world to run to to escape present realities. Durkheim (1995) noted that processes of collective meaning-making are the origin of religion and all social facts like values, cultural norms, and social structures that are bigger than the individual (cited in Laycock, 2015, pp. 181-182). Given that collective effervescence is achieved through collective ritual, the feelings of excitement and euphoria generated by collective effervescence can collaboratively constructed sacred symbols (Laycock, 2015, p. 182). During these collective liminal states, symbols are rearranged and can acquire new meaning (Laycock, 2015, p. 185). Eliade (1969) and Durkheim (1995) assert that religion requires that the real-world be profane to the collective sacred world built on virtue (Laycock, 2015, p. 182). Religion doesn’t describe the social order but shapes it, and any attempt to articulate a world model affects how we view the world (Laycock, 2015, p. 196). In this way,

D&D functions like religion as a modern form of ritual and sacred mythmaking using the same basic faculties of meaning production (Laycock, 2015, p. 185).

People require social worlds to function as they interpret experience as understandable and shield us from a chaotic existence. Most constructed D&D worlds appear as realistic. However, some situations can challenge the meaningfulness of the world. Berger (1969) describes these situations as “marginal situations” that commonly occur in dreams and fantasy. Marginal situations challenge existing realities and reveal the innate precariousness of all social worlds (Berger, 1969 as cited in Laycock, 2015, pp. 233-234). Since RPGs are an exercise of collective effervescence, the more players who play, the more blurred the lines between game and reality become. RPGs deconstruct social facts to recreate imaginary new ones. Entire cultures and societies can be deconstructed and remade. The D&D game can become a mystical, all-consuming, and addictive experience that could be dangerous to status quo institutions and those who closely identify or depend upon them as D&D players learn to challenge the officially validated status quo reality, making social constructs no more or less valid than their own manufactured social facts (Vu, 2017, p. 285). D&D can become a game with real-world consequences by revealing the arbitrariness of real systems and meta plots (Laycock, 2015, pp. 234-235).

The vestigial components of some sectors of society’s moral panic and related fear that D&D corrupts players with Satanic worship are not unlike the concerns levelled by various forms of popular media during the 18th century (Vu, 2017). The Christian critics' fear of RPGs was motivated by their repressed fear that the world doesn’t operate as they believed and that they're unwilling to face that possibility (Laycock, 2015, p. 236, p. 238). This notion of self-deception facilitated the belief that individuals are not free to imagine or do what they want fuelling the desire to constrain their individual freedoms as well as those of the people around them. In this way, attacks on D&D reveal both discomforts with intellectual freedom

and an attempt to deny the existence of freedom (Laycock, 2015, p. 237). Fundamentalist Christianity is an enduring example of this perverse thinking as it seeks to preserve Christian hegemony in the face of challenges from various secondary worlds, science, novels, or fantasy. These forms of beyonding have been subjected to the organized ire of those “moral entrepreneurs” seeking to preserve their world order (Laycock, 2015, p. 238). These hegemonic gatekeepers or moral entrepreneurs are threatened by RPGs and sometimes leak wild claims about them to justify their principled yet often counter-intuitive position by attacking RPG’s autonomy that also includes D&D. Moral entrepreneurs have contended that D&D leads to occultism or devil worship because it facilitates freedom of the imagination from the established and imposed hegemonic religious systems (Laycock, 2015, p. 199, p. 235, p.239).

Player’s imaginations that can create endlessly adaptable secondary utopian worlds challenge established religions by providing visions of a universe devoid of angels and demons. Many Christians find RPGs intolerable among those with a literalist epistemology of their faith (Laycock, 2015, p. 233). These intolerances were directly tested despite specific objections from members of the status quo social and faith systems like Leithart, Grant, and Pullings when the clerical class and various deities were added to D&D, as Pullings unintentionally highlights when she appeared to equate the dangerous similarities between religion, and fantasy (Laycock, 2015, p. 236). Clerics remain one of the most powerful character stereotypes in the D&D game today. They can use magic to conduct any number of fantastic fictional feats, including resurrection, healing, and speaking to deities of any number of fictional faiths. Due to their existential threat to orthodox conservative moral entrepreneur Christians, the acceptance of imaginary worlds where such things can happen poses a direct challenge to them as they refuse to acknowledge the value of D&D’s secondary worlds and

as these critics protect themselves from the similarities between their faith and the fantasy RPG realm (Laycock, 2015, p. 238).

Conversely, other Christians preserve mythos by regarding fantasy and imagination as valuable and even sacred, including Tolkien (1983), who wrote that, “Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult reason” (p. 144, as cited in Laycock, 2015, p. 231). Tolkien and others have said that imagination was an act of sub-creation as an earthly reflection of God while moral entrepreneurs have become predisposed to interpret fantasy as a pathology, propaganda, or demonic (Laycock, 2015, pp. 231-232). While D&D has functions in common with religion, it is not proselytizing that it is a true religion. Rather it invites its players to engage and interact in new “moral training grounds” (Laycock, 2015, p. 179; Wright et al., 2020, p. 99). Meaning and world-building is a D&D process with religious foundations so that religion creates a general order of existence in which players can create and maintain multiple worlds at once. William James (2007) asserts that multiple worlds can exist simultaneously as sub-universes and finite provinces of meaning that lapse with attention and can be constructed by our children as soon as they can talk about things that are real and that are possible (cited in Laycock, 2015, p. 180).

Conclusion

Emile Durkheim (2007) and Victor Turner (1974) describes how humans create a “general order of existence” differently so that in each model, new meaning is always a collective process produced in spaces of suspended social norms (cited in Laycock, 2015, p. 181). The models presented by the authors above attempt to explain the genesis of culture, religion, and ritual and apply to alternate realities and stories as they do to our real-world (Laycock, 2015, p. 181). Alternate worlds imagined may have consequences for how people

interpret the real world (Laycock, 2015, p. 179, p. 183, p. 222, p. 240; Richie, 2017, para. 11; Vu, 2017, p. 274; Wright et al., 2020, para. 6, p. 118).

Upton (2015) noted, for example, that people who pretend to be someone or something do not imagine themselves as that thing but instead are acting in a way consistent with their understanding of that identity. The chosen identity then presents constraints to players actions that render social construction through imagination, story, and identity as a constant cultural enactment and engagement (Borecky, 2021, p. 48, Kawitzky, 2020, p. 129, Upton, 2015, p. 186-187). These insights ultimately support Laycock's assertion that gamers often look beyond the surface of reality and identify the flaws of inherent structures resulting from pleasurable reflexive liminality (Laycock, 2015, p. 234). Defined by their alternate identity apart from themselves, these people experience shifts in perspectives and comprehension of their real-life narratives (Upton, 2015, p. 187; Wright et al., 2020, p. 103). By linking these critical peace skills to collective effervescent aesthetic experience-based fun, play appears to open a space for training in and towards educated hope and utopian future imagining (Borecky, 2021, p. 61; Garcia, 2017, pp. 234-235; Kawitzky, 2020, p. 129, p. 131; Sidhu & Carter, 2021 p. 2).

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter explores the autoethnographic method selected to frame this thesis. By linking my experiential knowledge through an autoethnographic approach, I facilitate the genuine sharing of my experience and knowledge with my readers about D&D and its potential use as a new peace method. Autoethnography is increasingly used to challenge the knowledge-making monopoly of academia's traditional scientific and utilitarian knowledge-making methods (Adams et al., 2015, p. 8). In this capacity, it empowers me as the author to simultaneously introduce new knowledge, to contribute to the ever-evolving body of PACS literature, and to do so with an emancipatory methodology. In the same way that the imagination enables each one of us to construct entire fictional worlds and narratives, autoethnography enables us to share their stories without sacrificing knowledge-making agency. I chose autoethnography so that I can pair a potential new critical utopian peace method with an emancipatory research methodology to inspire future PACS pracademics to explore this transformative utopian education tool more fully and to share my experience and insights and insider knowledge of a community of over 50 million people worldwide.

Autoethnographical method

Autoethnography is a method that actively contests the hegemonic culture of scholarly inquiry to which the western world has adapted, just as D&D has challenged cultural norms (Bochner & Ellis, 2016b, p. 213; Vu, 2017, p. 285). Gannon (2006) describes autoethnography as a "... corrective movement against colonizing ethnographic practices that erased the subjectivity of the researcher..." (cited in Yazan et al., 2020, p. 4).

Autoethnography is described as a provocative weaving of story and theory that first emerged

in 1975 (one year after D&D's original publication) (Bochner & Ellis, 2016a, p. 46; Bochner & Ellis, 2016b, p. 208; Spry, 2001, p. 713). It seeks the good and challenges interpretations of the world by imagining what the world could be like and how we could do things differently (Bochner & Ellis, 2016b, p. 213).

By 1979 autoethnography emerged as the idea that an author could also possess insider status as a member of the subject community or culture their work was researching (Bochner & Ellis, 2016b, p. 208). Such a revolutionary change from the expectation that researchers should remain neutral and removed would permit exploring their personal experiences with political, cultural, spiritual, and social contexts and meaning (Bochner & Ellis, 2016b, p. 208). Autoethnography decolonizes social inquiry through self-narrative and can explore critical cultural issues in which the author is situated (Yazan et al., 2020, pp. 3-4). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the authenticity of this self-reflective process had yet to coalesce as autoethnography.

Being challenged from within and without, small groups of autoethnographers struggled for legitimacy in isolated academic silos. Through shared beliefs and experiences of enduring relentless pressure from traditionalist peers and institutions to abandon their heretical research ways, these pioneers slowly developed a shared, inclusive identity (Bochner & Ellis, 2016b, p. 212). They fostered the desire for a formally diverse community of transdisciplinary researchers with whom they could safely collaborate (Bochner & Ellis, 2016b, pp. 212-213). By the late 1990s, autoethnography established itself as a divergent qualitative research method that focuses on the interaction between self, others, and contexts of ethnographic research. Intending to decolonize social inquiry, autoethnographers came to use a self-narration style to facilitate the analysis and sharing of their own experiences with the effect of challenging existing empirical tradition (Yazan et al., 2020, pp. 3-4).

Autoethnography is capable of decolonizing dominant cultural practices and tackling the way that cultural and political productions maintain the status quo through critical reflection of lived experience, and ultimately by increasing self-reflexivity (Spry, 2001, pp. 710-711; Yazan, 2020, p. 5). Autoethnography necessitates “looking inward towards our identities, thoughts, feeling and experiences” as well as “looking outward into our relationships, communities and cultures” (Adams et al., 2015, as cited in Yazan et al., 2020, pp. 3-4). The International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI) was founded as a community of like-minded autoethnographers with a shared value for helping others in 2005. Matters of subjectivity, emotionality, spirituality, and performativity through shared vulnerable observation in research were established as a common element of all autoethnography Ellis (2004) in Yazan, 2020, p. 111). The explicit purpose of facilitating open, culturally diverse dialogue and research while advancing social justice and imagination is its priority (Bochner & Ellis, 2016b, pp. 212-214). By shedding the stifling methodological limitations of traditional academic expectations, more authors can regain access to ancient creative means of knowledge production and, in turn, are encouraged in increasing numbers to contribute their lived experiences through autoethnographic stories of their own (Bochner & Ellis, 2016b, pp. 213-214).

Autoethnography as a research and knowledge production method has a nearly 50-year critical-orientated history of challenging social injustice and systemic asymmetrical power over relationships that arose due to discredited methodological directives (Yazan, 2020, p. 4). By breaking from the status quo colonial academic tradition, autoethnography holds authors to a standard of vulnerability throughout their work and can redefine what knowledge is and break the institutionalized monopoly on knowledge production (Bochner & Ellis, 2016b, p. 211; Yazan, 2020, p. 4).

Further, autoethnography is the act of merging the author and the research subjects. It's a conversation not only with others but with oneself as an author and others while exposing vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices, and values while striving towards transformative social justice (Adams et al., 2015, pp. 1-2, p. 8; Yazan et al., 2020, p. 4). This kind of work seeks to express the complex, multi-layered existence of the author in an imperfect ethical story and actively places the author as a legitimate contributor of knowledge within their work using introspective writing that challenges ideas of identity and exposes thoughts, feelings, and experiences, as it has done for me throughout this thesis process (Bochner & Ellis, 2016a, p. 71; Yazan et al., 2020, p. 4).

Crucially, autoethnographic narratives have no predetermined format or method and are as unique as their creators (Adams et al., 2015, pp. 70-71; Gannon, 2017, p. 4). In many ways, autoethnography is little more than an acknowledgment that researchers exist in the world and that the questions of mortality, loss, belonging, loneliness, love, adversity, violence, racism, discrimination, and emotion they face are essential to understand in the context of their research (Bochner & Ellis, 2016a, p. 50). Through self-reflection and engaging storytelling, autoethnographers' connect their experiential knowledge and truth with others to share their knowledge and allow others to feel it authentically (Adams et al., 2015, pp. 48-49). To encourage this authentic method of engagement, Adams et al. (2015) advance six core principles essential to autoethnographic literature:

1. Foreground personal experience in research and writing,
2. Illustrate sense-making processes,
3. Use and show reflexivity,
4. Illustrate insider knowledge of culture/experience,
5. Describe and critique cultural norms, experiences, and practices, and
6. Seek responses from audiences (p. 26).

Story's capacity to facilitate these principles and push a reader into critical reflection and the liminal space of the imagination naturally engages them in the humanist dialogue about the

author's story, and it is the culturally salient manifestations created by story and autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015, pp. 90-91; Bochner & Ellis, 2016a, p. 52, p. 72).

Positionality

Autoethnography is not just a methodology; it is also my positionality as well because it requires that I, the author, contribute my unique experiences and emotions as a member of the studied group in a way that is both vulnerable and authentic. While I chose this method intentionally to contribute to the growing body of pioneering unique PACS research, it should be noted that I write this thesis with a predetermined bias toward D&D as a grassroots school of the moral imagination. I genuinely believe D&D has the potential to change peace power paradigms through educated hope play (see Wright et al., 2020, p. 99).

As a D&D player for nearly 30 years, it had not once dawned on me that D&D could be used to resolve real-world conflict even as I was learning from the game myself how to address multiple and diverse conflicts. As a member of the D&D community now suddenly critically awakened to the possibilities of using D&D as a significant peace tool, I cannot keep an objective perspective on the game. I have decades of experientially obtained knowledge and so I chose autoethnography as a method to facilitate the sharing of that knowledge and to contribute to the emancipation of experiential knowledge production agency from hegemonic systems of knowledge replication (see Foucault, 1995).

Significance of the study

As I write this section, for the first time since 1945, war has come to Ukraine and Europe. NATO forces are being scrambled across Eastern Europe. Russia invaded a sovereign nation in what seems like a twisted revision of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea

and, indeed, Hitler and Stalin's occupation of Poland and Czechoslovakia proceeding WWII. Peace at both the global and societal scales have for generations been in the hands of the state and especially those with the power to control them. Freire (2018) reminds us that when recalcitrant and selfish leaders do not act dialogically, they begin imposing their will upon others and become oppressors who, by their self-serving nature, do not concern themselves with the community (p. 58, p. 134). As natural as it is for someone such as myself to condemn President Vladimir Putin for the invasion of Ukraine and the violence and suffering this criminal act is already producing, it would be naïve of me to imagine Putin as the main problem. Putin was born, raised, educated, and conditioned to operate in a way that structurally reproduces our present.

The saying 'history repeats itself' is not by chance because it is by social design. Freire (2018) points out a potential cause of this cyclical phenomena as the institutional reproduction of imposed knowledge to the detriment of creative effort and alternative knowledge production (Freire, 2018, p. 29). Edwards and Chomsky (2002) also draw attention to the pervasive power within one of our most important cultural communication systems as the mass media serves the dominant elite, especially in nations where major media outlets are owned by monopolies (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 1). While Russia is easily identifiable as an authoritarian state ruled by a dominant elite cadre who has strict control over the media, it is far from the only nation that can be identified in that way.

The emergence of alt right nationalist politicians in Britain, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Canada, Brazil, and the U.S. have impacted populist politics. For example, the United States, the beacon of freedom and democracy in the free world, operates under a similarly elite-dominated media landscape. Rather than being controlled by the government and the people, in this case, vast media corporations are instead owned by dominant elite families like the Murdochs, Sulzbergers, and others (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p 9). These elites

simultaneously obtain shadowy influence through campaign donations to government officials thereby perpetuating anti-democratic and self-advantageous oppressive behaviour from those they have purchased loyalty from (see Freire, 2018, p.134). It is important to critically note that this top-down oppression is not exclusive to the media as it is present in all social systems. It then becomes possible to understand how the ideas surrounding states' social contract with their citizens can manifest as a single nefarious system of ruling class privilege and status quo maintenance.

For example, Peggy Chinn (2013) proposes that to achieve peace, people must shed habits of war and instead learn to practice peace (p. 10). John Paul Lederach (2005) also dreams of a place where the moral imagination can be known (p. 29, pp. 176-177) while John Burton (1998) advances the idea that the collaborative sociocultural traditions of our ancient ancestors are a workable resource to address people's frustrated basic human needs that inspire conflict today (p. 6). In addition, Elise Boulding (1990) calls for the need to retain the imagination needed to "walk in the other's moccasins" (p. 146) while Gottschall (2012) asserts that nature designed us to enjoy stories so that we would benefit from the training imagining problems like those we face in the real world (pp. 58-59). Finally, Paulo Friere (2018) noted that liberation and the achievement of freedom can only be achieved by perceiving the oppression and a way to transform it (p.49). I believe D&D is a liberation acquiring transformative tool because it brings together all these existing calls to action into one storytelling game that's both accessible and transformative as it shifts knowledge-making paradigms away from hegemonic systems to the imaginations of 50 million people worldwide. Wars, conflict, violence, and crime persist not despite the global order's hegemony on peace power but because of it, fortunately, an entire generation of dreamers could very well be being trained in intrinsically emancipated peacebuilding skills through

aesthetic fictional storytelling and moral imagination even now of whom this thesis hopes to draw attention too.

Limitations of the study

This autoethnographic study is both written from my perspective as the author as well as a culturally embedded subject. By virtue of this method the research within this exploratory study does not collect external or replicable data but instead looks inwards toward my identities, thoughts, feelings, and experiences within the context of my relationships, communities, and culture. As a result, it should be noted that a limitation of this research is that not all D&D players engage at the same level or in the same way as I have done playing the game. The reflexive process undertaken in this research is not an explicit result of the game and indeed many who play D&D presently may not be critically aware of the implicit influences and learning they are undergoing. Additionally, each person can experience something uniquely. This study only reflects my perspective and reflexive experience and resulting knowledge.

D&D operates spontaneously outside traditional educational systems to generate flow, a state of collaborative process-oriented enjoyment and happiness where the players no longer disassociate their actions from their sense of self (Borecky, 2021, p. 52; Laycock, 2015, p. 184). There are also limits imposed upon this thesis in the form of qualitative research traditionalists that often ignore or oppose the use of autoethnography as a research tool.

Conclusion

In the face of a growing and persistent apathy towards transformative change, perhaps the same apathy Lederach and Burton worry about, Swanger (2015) advances the concept of individuals resisting PACS's embedded Western colonial tendencies towards support for liberal peacebuilding convention. She proposes that this individual resistance is central to re-imagining peacebuilding through personal empowerment. Swanger (2015) noted that global negative peace structures, including higher education institutions, are incapable of this genuinely transformative change and, at large, disallow it (pp. 10-11). Burton's critique of modern education systems as insufficient for teaching critical peace skills echo's this view that PACS must seek inspiration for transformative change from without rather than within. Frustratingly, even as Swanger (2015) calls for a fundamental transformation of PACS grounded in critical emancipatory theory, she suggests that these transformations begin within the same colonial education systems (p. 12). She demonstrates the generationally compounded problem that institutional systems continue to replicate, a status quo sustaining truncation of educated hope necessary for achieving truly transformative change (Freire, 2018, p. 29).

To genuinely train a new generation of Dreamers, the current generation of peace studies must look beyond attractive labels to emancipate PACS from itself and other colonial systems (Swanger, 2015, p. 13). I intend to present my favourite game D&D, to PACS praxis as a school of the moral imagination and a new peace method capable of stimulating transformative agency through the deliberate use of our most fundamental trait as a species of storytellers, our imagination. Unbeknownst to Lederach (2005), Burton (1998), and other PACS pracademics, I believe the Dreamer has been sustained and trained by D&D since

1974. I look forward to showcasing my experientially formed conviction that D&D is a means to achieve transformative change by educating hope and decolonizing knowledge-making through storytelling.

Chapter 5

To Dream, Perchance to Dream: Mummies, Dragons, and Arrows – Stories That Liberate the Mind and Inform Action

Introduction

As established in Chapter 4, autoethnography innately resists conformity in form and method in its quest to enable the authentic reflection of the subject-researcher. Nonetheless, it is my inclination that some structural framework is necessary to appropriately shape the contours of the discussion. I have settled on a foundation that combines elements of Adams et al.'s (2015) six core principles of autoethnography, Ganz's (2015) 3 level narrative method, and Haven's (2015) core story components into a structure for this three-section chapter (California Teachers Association, 2015; Stanford, 2015).

Each section begins with Ganz's (2015) Story of Self that recounts lived moments of narrative and presents the vital values actively engaged. This section foregrounds personal experience in research and writing, describes and illustrates insider knowledge of culture and experience, and seeks to promote residual emotional interaction between my experience and the reader. This second-hand shared experience will be a launching point for the following Story of Us. These stories are written where possible using Haven's (2015) essential story component guidance that is to include characters with compelling traits, goals and motives who encounter problems or conflicts that evoke a sense of risk and danger. These problems should be resolved in detail and in such a fashion that the emotional effect persists beyond the end of the conflict; this is named residual resolution (Stanford, 2015).

The Story of Us explores my experience of shared knowledge production and critical skill training as a process of liberation and critical consciousness growth.

Autoethnographically, these stories illustrate sense-making processes while using and showing reflexivity and provoking authentic responses from readers. Each section concludes with a Story of Now, which connects my experiential insights and experiential knowledge about how D&D could function as an accessible and action-based training method to how it could be activated as real-world peace education in action. These stories establish D&D as capable of implicitly critiquing and challenging cultural norms, experiences, and practices while supporting critical skill training and inspiring meaningful support or action for change from the audience.

Millil and the Case of Mummy Rot - *Story of Self*

The tunnel turned one last time, ending a few feet later at a robust stone doorway sealed for what seemed to them based on the preponderance of evidence thus far... millennia. Millil, a holy warrior and healer known as a cleric, stepped up from behind and stood beside his companion as he scanned the door's extravagant carvings, presumably in a long-lost language.

"I suppose this is the place then..." Millil states matter of factly, exhaustion evident in the way his voice carries in these cramped earthen passageways.

"Mhmm" responds Achilles in his confident baritone as he adjusts his stance in preparation for what they both knew he would do next.

Having travelled together as long as they had, Millil simply nods as if he is responding to something unspoken yet communicated. He steps back, drawing his illuminated shield before him and detaching his blessed mace from his side. As Millil settled, Achilles picked up his knee and kicked his leg forward. With herculean strength, his mighty

foot struck the solid stone door and smashed it into a dozen jagged blocks flying into the room as if the door had been made of a thin sheet of ice.

As the ambient dust settled and the briefly echoing sound of the otherwise impossible feat of strength died out, the pair of heroes peered into the room beyond. Illuminated by a source-less sickly green-yellow light, six ancient cryptid-coloured columns appeared as if untouched by the ravages of time stood in two evenly spaced rows leading away from the broken door towards a single standing sarcophagus at the far end of the room. Decorated with jewels and gold and lined with immaculately painted greens and regal yellows, the sarcophagus was a beautiful treasure, but for its unsettling and unassisted self-opening.

As the lid was pushed off, smashing into pieces when it slammed into the floor alongside the door's remnants, the two heroes immediately recognized the occupant as an ancient mummy. A haunting moan from the corpse wrapped in ancient yellow bandages with eyeless pits as black as tar for eyes instinctually struck fear in both men and tested their wills. As the mummy descended from its sarcophagus, it immediately began to make its way towards the two intruders, with a decrepit stench of decay as it propelled itself forward at an incredible speed such that lesser people would be paralyzed with fear before their imminent doom.

As Millil drew in a fortifying breath, he noted that Achilles was already gone, fleeing down the hallway in terror, having failed in this unsettling instance to resist the palpable aura of fear that emerged about the tomb's ghastly guardian. Unfazed by the horror, Millil stood his ground and received the undead menace's feral strikes upon armour and shield. While Millil considered a retreat, doing so could effectively expose the nearby village to this creature's wrath that they had unknowingly released. This was unacceptable, so Millil stood

his ground as the mummy clawed with rotted flesh and gnawed with decaying teeth at his defense.

Sometime later, Millil emerges from the earthen tunnels of the ancient tomb and into the day's early morning sunlight. His eyes were unfocused and dazed by an unhealthy paleness and cold sweat upon his brow. He smiles in the direction of the rising sun and thanks his deity for the strength of perseverance.

"It's worth it..." he murmurs under his breath.

As Achilles approaches from the direction of the nearby camp, Millil waves off the offer of support and stumbles as he holds out the sack containing the orb of power they had come to retrieve.

"It's done... we got it...." Millil grimaces as his weight shifts. The abnormal display drew Achilles' attention to Millil's hastily bandaged leg wound where the mummy had bitten him and, unknown to the two men, had infected the cleric with a disease already spreading with mortal implications.

Story of Us

As I reread the above story, I note that it is and has created a complex emotional experience for me. It transports me from the present to the distant past in an instant. On the one hand, as I read it, I lament the failure of my own words to share the emotional and social impact that this isolated D&D encounter had on me at that moment. Simultaneously, transported back in time, I reexperience this memory and its' impactful effect on me personally as if it were yesterday. When I sat down to write this story of me from nearly 30 years ago, I found myself facing an unexpected revelation; I didn't remember the story, all I

remembered was the experience. My recollection of the in-game events from this particular session of D&D was limited to broad strokes, including that we encountered a monster and that all of my companions fled, having failed to resist the monster's aura of fear. I stared at the computer screen and acknowledged that I didn't remember the story that informs this thesis work. I panicked, and the persistent self-doubt and imposter syndrome that has been plaguing me throughout this writing process came right back.

I reached out to family, my brother, who was the DM for that campaign, and checked to see if he remembered the scene where Millil stood against the terrifying creature alone after the other heroes had fled. He immediately did, but as he shared his recollection of the story, it was immediately apparent that we had massively conflicting memories of the story. This revelation reminded me that people can perceive events differently that often causes conflict, and the narrative details of any specific D&D campaign are not what's essential to PACS; what is significant are the participants' elicitive training and the resulting implicit culturally grounded knowledge they gained through the story. This simulation empowered me to rediscover my personal agency and provided me with an accessible pathway toward inclusion as I experienced peace culture through constructive engagement with the concepts of life, violence, and death.

I remember how excited I was to be the only player at the table capable of confronting and defeating the terrible creature. I recall how much joy it gave me to finally be needed by my team for the unique in-game abilities Millil possessed. I will not forget how wonderful yet terrifying it felt to finally step out from the shadow of Achilles, the mighty warrior, and my older peers at the table to prove just how capable Millil and I, through him, could be. The experience was a fun and collaborative storytelling process. Still, the roleplay that facilitated my agency to simulate my emotional utopian imagining and successful critical skill practice lingers in my memory as most impactful. As a cooperative game, D&D's rules embed the

necessity for players' interpersonal communication and cooperation while facilitating their critical skills in an insulated social space with mitigated consequences.

This roleplay incident was my first concrete opportunity to lead the collaborative storytelling process among older partners, focusing on Millil's heroic capacity. It made me feel accomplished and vital as I participated as an equal even though I wasn't behaving equitably with those at the table. I looked up to my brother and his friends and therefore I had imported my inferiority complex into the game in the same way I had done in other social circumstances. I didn't want to make waves and I avoided the limelight to be spared the embarrassment of what I believed would be my inevitable failure. I was content to be lucky enough to be tolerated and allowed to sit at the playing table with my older brother and his friends. However, at this moment, through the magic of playing through storytelling, the power of a simulated crisis empowered both Millil and I to be equal in a manner I felt wasn't the case in any other circumstance. My fear of making decisive decisions and taking actions that influenced this narrative crisis and exposed me to real-world judgment by others had become an afterthought as I eagerly engaged with the opportunity to creatively contribute to the story. In that pre-teen moment, I certainly wasn't thinking about why commanding this simulated crisis towards resolution wasn't as terrifying as it would have been in a classroom setting. Nor was I thinking about how it might be training me with critical skills. Instead, I was intrinsically aware that it was an empowering opportunity, and I was exclusively hungry to participate in it.

While recognizing the positive influence and experiential knowledge that gaining narrative power and agency at this moment facilitated for me, I must share my realization that my choices were not agency equitable. I relished that at the time. It is in places such as these where D&D's most potent opportunities for critical training crop up and the affect persists for decades. At this time of my life, I felt as if I didn't belong anywhere and that I was unworthy,

as evidenced by my struggles at school and my legacy of difficulty making friends and fitting in. I remember today how this story implicitly demonstrated that I was not Millil as much as I roleplayed him and, as a result, that a better version, maybe even a heroic version was possible

While I had felt joy not just from taking on a central role at playing the game but also from the fact that the game and my choices had restricted another player's agency, I intuitively recognized that Millil was, at least in this way, a better person than I, he would not have experienced joy at his friend's expense. Coming to this realization is a humbling experience. While the long-term emotional investment in my fictional character helped raise me up and out of my crippling self-doubt, it also inspired a renaissance in me of elective reading and writing. It provided me with an avenue to express myself in ways I had previously lacked. This included an uncomfortable introduction to self-reflexivity as I reconciled my behaviour with the utopian imagining of Millil's example. As I reflect on it almost 30 years later, playing D&D as Millil was both a fun and emotionally healing play experience. It cultivated my love for D&D and seeded my imagination so that every RPG story I've enjoyed has been emotionally and critically beneficial to me.

Story of Now

As established in Chapters 2 and 3, D&D exists as an elicitive storytelling process within a prescriptive system of rules and regulations with the explicit intent to facilitate fun for its players. All players choose to play the game together to have fun; it is not about winning or losing it's about the shared experiences and stories that are imagined and created. In moments like the Millil story shared above, a host of experiential learning occurs naturally and simultaneously for me, without me even being aware of what is happening as I focus on

the story. More generally, players often unknowingly engage in active critical training skills like problem-solving, self-reflection, storytelling, decisiveness, resilience, social engagement, collaboration, and empathy by focusing on the goal of having fun.

In a formative time of my life when my social and educational situations were bleak and could easily have worsened, D&D provided a refuge for me through utopian fiction while facilitating my education in these critical skills through roleplay. We know that this experience is not unique to me as D&D is already associated with critical skill development in professional fields such as therapeutics and education, as well as having significant benefits for carceral and post-carceral populations. By creating a secondary world insulated from real-world consequences, D&D enables the players' creative reimagining of fictional worlds, relationships, people, and events as a substitute for the real world's brutal facts. D&D became a transformative pathway for me as it has for many others to imagine through positive-negative play and by exploring the consequences and value of life, death, and violence so that a better, even heroic version of myself could emerge from which I can learn. It has inspired me and encouraged me to be better, and to be hopeful on behalf of those characters and myself as I practice critical skills through simulated actions safely.

D&D has facilitated for me the co-construction of shared places, relationships, rules, identities, active training, collaboration, and development of a shared value-based peace culture. D&D engages me wholly in participatory democracy even before I could vote in a way that liberates my active problem-solving and decision-making from real-world limitations while remaining grounded in the real world. I was actively practicing empathy because of D&D through acts of mercy even while in the real world I felt wholly incapable of doing so. D&D enabled me to live by a community-shared idolized form of chivalry in ways I aspired to do elsewhere but had no modern example to follow or community to turn to in support. By my assessment, a doubt, D&D nurtured in me the seedbed of critical

consciousness and self-reflexivity through the active experimentation of values and skills with formative influence over the man I have since become. D&D is a game of fictional narrative storytelling bound only by a group's imaginations. Here I was able to side-step the hurtful social and educational influences in my life once a week and instead existed in a place born of collective imagination where the best parts of me were free to explore and be creative as I identified as the utopian dreamer Millil instead of the struggling child Darryl.

To say that this story is a plot moment in my life would be an understatement of criminal proportions. While I know my pre-teen self didn't recognize it at the time, being caught up in the empowering and inspiring secondary-world events Millil was experiencing created a special moment that continues to educate me through self-reflection today. Elevated from participant-observer to principal hero and decision-maker as I was, this situation continues to tectonically shift my perception of myself then and now as my evolving critical consciousness continuously re-examines the reach of Millil's decisions that day. This story reimagines a moment of personal empowerment, agency, and inclusion as a successful learning experience emerging from Millil. At the same time, my experience also acknowledges my retroactive personal dissatisfaction with my actions and the experiential legacy resulting from this story. Today, I recognize that the significance of this experience is fundamental to my liberation and the decolonization of my own status quo attitudes towards gaming, storytelling, and even my own persistent vulnerability as I continue to struggle with imposter syndrome in this process.

Finally, while the desire to be included, have fun, and maybe even annoy my brother may have been my original motivations for playing D&D, things have changed. D&D's accessible and transformative educational capacity to develop my critical liberation skills while remaining grounded in today's cultural reality has been my golden ticket to turning my life around, and I am not alone as I discussed in Chapter 2. Roleplay, D&D, and other RPGs

share similar simulation structures and, in various contexts, have been shown to provide players with salient critical skill training encouraging a peaceful cultural influence on people from various diverse backgrounds, identities, communities, and circumstances.

Unlike the other two stories I share throughout this chapter, this particular story occurred nearly thirty years ago and required my creative flexibility in order to present it as a complete story. While this likely resulted in the narrative above diverging from all of the actual experience, it simultaneously underscores the power of narrative's capacity to influence people profoundly over time, even if the story itself has been altered or reimagined. Millil's success gave me agency and power over events in the story. It gave me access to an inclusive space where each week I found my voice and place while engaging implicitly with topics like life, death, and violence in the form of active and experiential training. Still, it also contrasted my own less-than-ideal traits with that of the imagined hero I had created in the process of a whole self-critical consciousness engagement. The ugly truth is that I enjoyed Millil's success more than I was concerned with Achilles' player's displeasure. After nearly 30 years, I am thankful for having had the opportunity to safely make those decisions, even if my learning came at the expense of another fictional character and real player in the game. This story enabled me to acknowledge my persistent and enduring self-reflective experiential problem-solving journey towards a version of myself that is more like Millil than what I am today.

A Family Tragedy - *Story of Self*

Looking over the remote crash site, Brooke could see their scaly dragon-like pet Smuckers, a wyvern, was still breathing as her scaled underbelly heaved with a gurgling intake of each breath. Having just now crash-landed together, Smucker's continued breaths

and Brooke's very survival were a testament to Smucker's fortitude and protectiveness. Brooke scanned over her pet's broken body including two large clawed rear legs, a sinewy tail, and two leathery wings capable of flying Brooke and Abigail vast distances. Still, Brooke could not see from her own prone position the location of Abigail, her daughter.

Even as Brooke slowly pushed herself off the ground, the dust and dirt loosened by their crash landing were stirred up into a cloud of debris by the great wings of their pursuer's dragon as it landed.

The landing dragon's great wings buffeted the earth nearby as its claws land two at a time, its wings continue to agitate the remote frontier environment as it roars directly in Brooke's direction. Brooke's hands, one covered in blood from a fresh wound along her arm, trembled as they covered her ears. As the 16-foot-tall creature projects its power upon her and all of nature in the area, the aroma of rotting vegetation infuses her senses as foul draconic spittle sprays her in an acrid cloud. As the spirit-crushing roar of the massive beast subsided and the two riders slid off the side of their bestial steed, a shaky voice called out.

"Mama?! Is Smuckers ok? Where are you?"

Brooke knew that voice to be that of her daughter Abigail and hearing it now brought its own emotional impact. Brooke was immediately relieved that Abigail was alright and not screaming out in the type of pain you know is mortal. Yet her dread was grounded in something Brooke had not experienced before, fear for her daughter's life. AS that reality started to come into focus, she started assessing her options. Brooke was confident in her ability and knew that between her martial capabilities and her innate magical powers, she had a good chance of defeating a single dragon in combat if she was in good health and prepared as she had done before. As injured as she was, this instance was not that scenario. Her left leg was aching, her arm cut and bleeding out, her face riddled with its own injuries including one

of her eyes that was soon-to-be bruised over. Considering the impossible distance between them and help, these wounds, and the presence of what she had learned moments ago to be two powerful dragon riders led Brooke to one overriding function.... She had to protect her child, her little garden girl.

“I’m over here garden girl! Are you ok?” Brooke calls out behind her as she hobbles to a spot between her daughter’s voice and the now-approaching dragon riders.

“Yes, Mama.” she replies with a short audible gasp of effort as she pulls herself out from beneath something concealed behind Smucker’s broken body.

As Brooke assumed a middling position between Abigail’s audibly determined position and their pursuers, she drew her sword from its sheath. The familiar bright light of the Sunsword burst forward like a warm welcome of a close friend that had seen her through countless death-defying situations. As the sword’s light illuminated an area of 30 feet and beyond with unflickering torch light, the damage to Brooke’s body became apparent to everyone but herself, driven by adrenalin as she was. She was in no condition to fight this fight.

“Abigail?” Brooke called out over her shoulder.

“Yes, Mama?” Abigail replies with a grunt of effort and a brief squawk of success that uplifts Brooke’s heart in the way she had only known a parent could experience after adopting her wonderful daughter.

The two riders stopped a short distance away, and the larger, male-looking rider spoke first and plainly from beneath his concealing helm and with his own weapon.

“Give us the girl.”

Brooke takes a single step forward, facing the two heavily armed and armoured riders; she brings the sword to the ready and prepared to engage in combat with their pursuers. With a stoic determination that shone through her swelling eye and weakened condition, Brooke replied, coming to terms with the knowledge that this would likely be the last thing she'd ever say to her daughter.

“Run Abigail. Run and hide. Go!”

The second rider shrugs her shoulders with indifference.

“Alright... I guess we'll do this the hard way.”

In the moments of combat that ensued, Brooke would learn that Smuckers, too, was willing to sacrifice her life for Abigail. Struck down by a brutal series of strikes, Smuckers perished defending her family. Abigail refused to run and came to her mother's aid despite Brooke's repeated orders to run. By the time the battle had ended... Two riders and their captive departed, launched into the air on the dragon's back, leaving Brooke and Smuckers sprawled upon the earth where they had tried and failed to protect the thing they loved most in life, Abigail.

Story of Us

This story's simulated experiential impact is based on Brooke's actions but grounded in the fundamental values that guided the decision-making process behind those actions. This story is my perspective of an interactive and unscripted storytelling roleplay experience from an ongoing multi-year campaign that had a culturally salient and subtle influence on me while at play. In this story, I role-played Brooke and addressed significant cultural peace themes such as family, life, death, violence, and morality through the active simulation of conflict.

Because D&D's narrative simulation is fictional, my exploration of these themes and associated values enabled me to confront complex themes removed from their expected real-world consequences. Through play, the requisite activation of my critical skills to collaboratively address challenging content and moments assists in training players and myself with skills that often go underdeveloped by prescriptive banking education practices. Preceding this story, a group of 5 player characters had concluded that Abigail should be preemptively extracted from an unrelated situation to a safe place where she would wait until it was safe to retrieve her. While traveling to the safe location, they were set upon by villains looking to stop the group from interrupting their master's evil deeds and that were using intimidation and violence to achieve that goal.

One reason this particular scene is of great significance to me is that I was directly engaging with themes of parenthood and family through roleplaying Brooke. As a father, I intrinsically know that if I were put in a position where my son and I were in danger, my priority would be to get him to safety, no matter the cost. D&D's simulation of this scenario allowed me to act upon this unspoken truth through fictional roleplay and to actively explore the least desirable situation I imagine a parent could ever be in in a low consequence simulated space. As the conflict progressed, I realized that Brooke and Abigail were outmatched, fighting against an enemy who wanted nothing less than their elimination. I felt the simulated but genuine emotional impact of the realization that Brooke and Abigail could die, and I desperately struggled to find a way to protect my daughter as I would hope to do in real life.

My response was automatic as I began working within the boundaries of the game and Brooke's capacities to find a way to protect Abigail, no matter the cost. Removed from real world consequences and bound only by the fictional and narrative boundaries of the simulation, I collaboratively confronted the transgressive limits of the imagination with the

other players in service of my dearly held beliefs with a relatable and powerful emotional impact. Through facilitative fiction, a consequential facsimile of the consequences of deadly conflict was made to be personal in a way I hope never to experience in the real world. It allowed me to imagine the heroic response to a crisis and simulate it in a fun rather than terrifying way. Without having to endure real-world threats, I was actively using and learning critical skills, including coping with stress, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, decisiveness, and empathy.

Additionally, this story demonstrates D&D's authentic engagement with profoundly spiritual and often taboo topics such as violence and death. Despite my personal aversion to violence and my fear of death, both are prevalent parts of this story and the game at large due to its inherited wargaming roots. The thought of death terrifies me in the real world, while that terror is reduced to reluctance through simulation. While the unavoidable fact that I will one day die scares me so much that I avoid thinking about it, through D&D I am provided the opportunity to simulate and experience that fundamental truth of life collaboratively with other players with significant social and emotional effects.

While I remain unwilling to contemplate my own mortality, when I was playing Brooke in this scene, I was narratively required to reflect on themes of death, violence, love, and sacrifice and how they would ultimately affect my decisions as Brooke. As a game of simulated heroics, D&D can often facilitate the expression of an ideal version of oneself as it did in this story. I had already superficially determined that simulated violence was acceptable when deployed for a just cause – protecting Brooke's daughter Abigail. Indeed, this determination is functionally a necessary assumption of the game. I had to contemplate how much my character's life and the years of investment in her well-being meant to me, knowing that if she died, I'd lose her forever. Did I value her life more than the life of her daughter?

It would be dishonest of me to suggest that these were active considerations when making decisions, but they were passively at the core of the decisions. At the expense of my self-respect, there is one significant revelation that is important to share. When one play's a character as I did in the case of Brooke regardless of who that character is, they are yours, but they are shared with others through storytelling. You expose elements of yourself in honest ways as they represent, in my experience, pieces of oneself blended with creativity, imagination, and whichever genre one is playing in. As much as these themes of family, life, death, mortality, and others came to the surface during this experience for contemplation and examination, it was the chief vice of selfishness and exceptionalism that guided my experience.

Just as I can say Brooke sacrificed herself to save Abigail, I can also say that I didn't want to. Sacrificing Brooke, who means more to me than the other player's character, was not an optimal fun choice, and I reluctantly made it. This shameful revelation, however damning and self-recriminating as it is, also gets to the core of D&D's cultural peace importance. Despite not wanting to sacrifice my characters to whom I had grown attached over the years, I chose to do so because it is what Brooke would do, as informed by my own parental inclinations and morals as a father. By nature of D&D's structure and our campaign's story, Brooke was a hero, and heroes are willing to make even the most difficult of decisions up to death to do what is right. In this way, Brooke mobilized through simulation my implicit peace cultural beliefs, morality, and values. As I imagined her doing heroic things for her family, I experienced those same decisions and consequences along with her through D&D's participatory storytelling simulation that had emotional and knowledge production relevance for myself and the other players in that game.

Story of Now

Reflexively I have become aware that I was engaging with a host of themes in this story that I had had minimal official practice with through the official banking education system that I encountered in school or in other experiential learning that I had participated in. In this collaborative narrative moment, I was empowered and required to address relevant peace-culture concepts such as family, life, death, morality, and violence by deploying my critical skills to address the situation. Through the imaginative deployment of my critical thinking, cooperation, problem-solving, self-reflection, social engagement, decisiveness, creativity, and empathy skills, I was able to resolve an emotional and consequential simulation in a collectively satisfactory narrative manner. Notably, the influence of D&D on my life has derived from its ability to generate experiential learning opportunities for me even when I'm unaware of the learning taking place at that particular moment in time.

While D&D's fundamental nature as a game provides a prescriptive and essential universal game structure and language upon which different stories can be grounded, one of the most essential rules included within that structure has persistently been that all rules should be subject to the "rule of cool." That is to say that rules should not limit the creativity or fun of the players; breaking the rules is permissible if it induces the fun of the players involved in the game. D&D's elicitive nature derives from its fictional storytelling roots so that each story is collaboratively told while encouraging the players' imaginations to do what they do naturally from a very young age, play. In this way, my stories become elicitive problem-solving training examples that allows each game's experiential potential to thrive as each game inspires all those who play in it.

D&D's collaborative storytelling nature is how I've developed my implicit knowledge production capacities despite the oppressive and prescriptive social and educational

conditions I've experienced in school since I was a child while it actively engages me in the quest of collaborative and collective liberation. As a DM and storyteller, I am an active facilitator of each game's players liberation, and I am also liberated through these shared imaginative utopian excursions of the imagination. While remaining grounded in my real-world values and beliefs, I am facilitating creative experimentation. This empowers players to imagine what is possible and what could be by dynamically challenging others to choose how to respond to pathways of action and locate the requisite sources of hope to inspire them to heroic action. While D&D can exist variably on Lederach's (1996) spectrum of prescriptive and elicitive training, its precise placement is calibrated and adapted by each group of players and their story to fit their purposes, enabling each story to exist simultaneously as a form of education and entertainment.

Brooke's story above and my personal experiences and self-reflections illustrate the essence of D&D's impact on my life. It has provided me with opportunities to practice problem-solving, creativity, cooperation, empathy skills, and others that are essential for addressing underdeveloped peace education opportunities. D&D has personally enabled me, in protected play spaces, to imagine and act upon utopian imaginings of heroism despite the actual dominant status quo oppressive influences in my life. It empowers me to experience collaborative trust in others as we learned experientially together as equals. It encourages me to reflect on real world issues and actively explore simulated transformative action. Reflexively today, D&D even affords me the awareness that I am still growing as a facilitator and trainer of imaginative story that in turn develops my critical consciousness and experiential knowledge.

Through Brooke's story, my long-term emotional investment in it, and by the nature of heroic roleplay, I was engaged in imagining her experience, feelings, and consideration of her own pending mortality. Through the magic of play's unlimited space, I was experiencing

death without dying and was facing it head-on while having fun rather than being terrified and running away from it. I was imagining how violence, used to defend someone I love, could facilitate a positive outcome, even at a significant cost. I not only had to evaluate how Brooke, the heroic persona I created, would respond but also contemplate her willingness to use violence and, in a truncated fashion, imagine what the larger implications of that choice would be for Brooke. This story was incredibly impactful for me as a father in that moment. Brooke's experience had a profound, relatable, and outrageous consequence for me, as it allowed me to practice and experience a real-life event through play. Thanks to D&D, I've experientially tested on this occasion and in countless others the effective boundaries of my real-world values and beliefs that were taken to their utopian and creative limits through roleplay.

Finally, this story illustrates how D&D can empower players to explore their own and other players' morality through everyday decisions through play. Brooke's decision to protect Abigail at the expense of her own life and my decision that an aesthetic, realistic simulation was worth the termination of my character Brooke was grounded in my agency to make that difficult decision. While D&D's community-building influence was not directly addressed in this story, it is a constant consideration in a game. The game only functions when participants acknowledge the implicit agreement that all are there to have fun together. As a result, decisions and the resulting experiences act as a form of team building and shared emotional experience.

D&D naturally facilitates the exploration of decisions that essentialize this understanding even when the choice is not heroic or optimized. It allows for adaptive consequences, positive or negative, to be experienced when actions are taken through its joint narrative structure while limiting the risks associated with choosing certain paths in everyday life that society at large might not expect a person to make. In this way, D&D can facilitate

the players' active and collaborative exploration of divergent and often critical reimagining of issues of mortality and morality with cultural effect. This exploration isn't limited to play, however, as evidenced by the recent structural revisions of newly published D&D lore and print materials that have been collectively identified by the fan base as narratively injecting destructive themes into the game and that need immediate revision (Jackson, 2022, para. 10).

While it is abundantly clear that most players do not pursue D&D as a means of peace education, Brooke's story illustrates how D&D can draw out important peace-culture moments for players as positive-negative play with consequence. We are, as Freire (2018) puts it, both oppressed and the oppressor. D&D allows us not only to consider and experience critical consciousness-raising pedagogy at play, but it empowers us to do so in a place where existing social and educational paradigms have, post satanic panic, increasingly allowed it to happen. D&D has enabled me to explore negative content in a safe play space with positive experiential outcomes, including but not limited to the explicit interrogation of my actions and beliefs and the resulting social engagement and collaboration learning while playing.

In this case, Brooke's use of violence in defense of her daughter facilitated a critical exploration of violence without real-world consequences based on her moral and value-based choices we share. Narratively, she could have chosen differently, which would have produced different story results and alternative social consequences both in and out of the game. As a result of the roleplay that facilitated my liberation to choose, I have been actively reconstructing and reimagining elements of my real-world as utopian alternatives and future thinking. While simultaneously concealing its educational function beneath the explicit goal of having fun playing a game, D&D has constantly enabled me to collaboratively explore with other players in-game consequences and processes free from real-world implications while encouraging learning through action-based experiential training. The objective of D&D

is to have fun, and it has done so while empowering my ongoing elicitive problem-solving and educational training.

Of Elven Arrows and BATNA - *Story of Self*

Nausicaa watched from atop her trusty steed Running Leaf as the village 224 feet away, measured by her keen Elven eyes, was being savaged by the rabid giant. Her traveling companions were engaged in melee combat with it and were counting on her to help. Her other keen senses were tracking a lingering gust of chilled northern wind as it passed between her and her target while simultaneously aware of the early autumn hints in the air and the absence of land-living fauna in the region.

"It won't be long now, Running Leaf..." she pats her horse's neck reassuringly. As an elven ranger, she was not only a skilled archer and huntswoman but also highly attuned to her natural ancestral intuition. As a result, she knew Running Leaf was growing impatient, waiting for Nausicaa and friends to slay this particular giant. At that moment, the offending gust of wind passed, and the conditions for Nausicaa's ranged strike again arrived. After brushing her brown bangs from her eye, she draws an arrow from her quiver. She places the arrow and pulls back her bow. A few moments later, she lets loose her shot, then another, and a third in a swift display of elven dexterity and training before she...

"Um, actually, Darryl. You can't do that without taking disadvantage. You're in melee combat." Confidently states the DM.

"Huh?" I ask, torn from the immersion of the story being told and the actions I was taking within it.

"Well, you all went to the village and are fighting the giant together." The DM clarifies

"What? No... Nausicaa's an archer, and I said I was staying hundreds of feet away because I have the sharpshooter feat that enables me to shoot up to 800ft away without worrying about any obstructions!" I retort, growing quickly frustrated over this confrontation. It hadn't been the first time the DM had imposed their 'out of the game' will on both Nausicaa and me 'in the game,' effectively countermanding my choices specifically.

"Listen. You're playing a team game Darryl; you need to be taking damage with your team too!"

"What, why?! Nausicaa is not just a bag of hit points, DM. I am playing a character who's an expert archer and is using that to help the team while staying safe!" I reiterate the same fundamental essence and routine that is core to Nausicaa's character as I had done several times before.

"You're in melee combat Darryl; you can't shoot your bow without suffering disadvantage," DM firmly dictates.

"No! I specifically said Nausicaa was staying out of range, mounted on Running Leaf, and doing what she does best, shooting her bow from as far away as the situation allows. There's no reason she wouldn't or couldn't do what I want her to. I chose her skills as the rules permit to do this!" I reply exasperated, fearing that my ability to tolerate the DM's intrusive agency.

Story of Us

Even as I contribute to these stories, I can't help but note the increasing acceptance of D&D into mainstream Western culture as social, creative, and experientially asserted therapeutic team building (More, M., 2022, paras. 3, 11-12). But what happens when D&D creates conflict but fails to resolve it? Experiencing moments of interpersonal conflict like the

one above has positively and negatively affected the development of my critical consciousness and liberation training. This story demonstrates how real-world confrontation can often manifest unexpectedly while playing D&D. It displays D&D's capacity to empower players to practice critical skill training through storytelling and it can create real world conflict scenarios that require the use of these same skills practiced in simulation.

Recalling this story brings me back to a time of great social anxiety and tremendous personal and emotional instability. I had recently experienced a devastating personal falling out within one of my small communities with socially catastrophic consequences. This incident loomed over me daily, emboldening my already lingering self-doubt and cynicism. As a result of this real-world experience, I felt my identities, including my given gender, had been seized upon despite my best efforts to show who I was and what my values were. This struck a terminal blow to my ability to actively engage in activism or with respected organizations within my home region, especially those in which my ex-colleagues and friends held privileged positions. I felt voiceless, betrayed, and scared of the enduring prejudicial public shredding I was subjected to by my peers. Ultimately, I had to consider my basic alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA) which Fisher and Ury (2011) identify as possessing two core principles. First, protect yourself from harmful agreements, and second, ensure that any agreement that is reached satisfies your needs as well as possible by focusing on interests (What if They Are More Powerful, paras 2-3). In effect, faced with a party unwilling to open a dialogue in good faith, I had become agencyless to correct the situation. I was forced to withdraw from the conflict and related social spheres to minimize further and disproportionate emotional and psychological harm to myself.

This story relates to the real-world memory above in both timing and critical skill experience. Not long after the above conflict, I played Nausicaa and was unexpectedly forced to confront my BATNA again. While suffering an all-encompassing sense of doubt, self-

loathing, and hopelessness, and feeling adrift without a clear idea of who I was and what I stood for, simulating heroic optimism and agency through Nausicaa served as an escapist balm. Everything I did in the real world was done in a haze of self-loathing and spiteful critique. Nausicaa persistently required me to step out of that dark cycle of powerlessness, compromised agency, threatened identity, and overbearing negativity into a protected and removed collaborative social space. In this space I still identified as good and could be confident in who I was and what I could do. D&D facilitated a healthy social engagement for me with others when I needed it the most, at a critical and challenging time, with the experiential effect of variably shielding me from my worst feelings. While D&D empowered me through heroic utopian fiction to practice sense-making processes as if I was someone else, it also enabled me to engage in real-world critical reflexivity on morality. It served as the basis of my exploration of the devastatingly oppressive fog over my life.

Nausicaa's story is salient in this real-world context for three main reasons. First, playing as Nausicaa called into question the appropriateness of my identifying as a female character, given my recent denouncement by certain peers and the resulting psycho-social effects I was enduring. It required me to be additionally self-aware and deliberate in exploring alternative identities through play in ways I perhaps would otherwise have taken for granted and been ignorant of. Second, Nausicaa's adventure acted as a collaborative distraction from the real world with a passive therapeutic effect. Still, when it was interrupted by the real-world narrative-based conflict, it had compounding consequences for me as a disruption to my agency in-game with the real-world consequence of shattering my agency and confidence building practice I was relying on to help heal and protect my space.

At that moment, such an intrusion by the DM over my ability to choose Nausicaa's actions in the game was not only an aesthetic experience and arresting effect but also an unintentional reopening of a similar real-world trauma I was, until then, escaping from. While

encounters such as this can be swiftly resolved with a satisfactory in-game compromise, I fervently recall how my expectation that this was a simple narrative misunderstanding swiftly soured. When it became clear to me the DM understood what I wanted but did not seem to care when faced with the prospect of negotiating a mutual understanding, it dawned on me that it was necessary to consider my BATNA. Unlike my other real-world experience, I was in what should have been a safe social space which I was relying upon at that moment in time as I grappled with the fallout from an actual real-life encounter. My DM was now actively using his power over me to impose his will. This weaponization of power undermined the underpinning collaborative nature of D&D. It thrust me out of constructive storytelling simulated events and into a real-world negotiation involving agency and power over dynamics.

I believe D&D's capacity to affect my real-world critical skill training is partly due to the game's nature as a system of creative simulation. While D&D's explicit intent and purpose had direct fictional consequences for me, the game is fundamentally a social experience between people and thus retains an impactful real-world footprint. In this case, the relocation of Nausicaa into melee combat had direct story implications. It also put me into direct conflict with the DM over their choice to override my agency and intrude upon the shared narrative and my fun. It brought real world questions to the forefront, which I then had to address using the problem-solving, conflict management, cooperation, and anger management skills I had learned playing D&D while under duress. If it weren't for D&D, I would not have been playing this game with those people and would not have experienced this conflict. This significant credit is often neglected when considering D&D's critical skill training authority and social space-creating environment.

Nausicaa's story is one of the most memorable moments of real-world D&D facilitated conflict I've recently experienced. It engaged both in-game and out-of-game and

internal and external elements related to emotion, identity, imagination, and gender in conflict. It was particularly impactful as I assessed my situation and deployed my BATNA. As a direct result of D&D, I was no longer training my critical skills in an imaginative play space, but actively engaging them in real world conflict negotiations. Using these skills effectively while suffering from peace capacity-building deficiencies was possible because D&D facilitated a low-risk space for me to be in.

Story of Now

Nausicaa's story shares how playing D&D put me in a place where playing at imaginative storytelling, an activity that can have therapeutic and educational relevance, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, can also create instances of real-world conflict. Playing D&D engages a host of critical skills being practiced and deployed constantly. In this case, I was unexpectedly pulled out of my collaborative simulation and thrust into a situation where I was in direct conflict with the DM, who was intent on wielding power over me as an implement to achieve their preferred results at the expense of my needs in the simulated game. I was furious at the intrusion and violation of player agency. Still, instead of confronting them at that moment, I restrained my emotions and begrudgingly accepted the demand that Nausicaa be in melee combat at the expense of my fun. Notably, the conflict didn't end there.

Having established my BATNA, I approached the DM after the game and began a conversation with them about how what had happened made me feel. I then attempted to negotiate a joint understanding of the event. Unfortunately, the DM would not relent and equated my participating in the melee and taking the resulting damage as a necessary contribution to playing together as a team. Despite all my critical skill training to date, I could not resolve this conflict with the DM. This resulted in my decision to leave the game which

ultimately triggered others to do so too, effectively disbanding the group and ending the campaign. The DM was furious with this outcome and blamed me. Taken at face value, I've been asked, even as I write this chapter, why I would include a story about an instance where my D&D facilitated conflict both in and out of the game that was unresolved despite my critical skill training, as I have endured for nearly 30 years as a player and DM. I didn't have an answer right away but reflecting upon the question brings me to some conclusions that connect D&D to PACS as an action-based critical skill practice and it can facilitate pathways towards meaningful healing.

D&D's real-world potential as a school of the moral imagination is not that it enables the limitless use of the imagination; it's that the game facilitates the players exposure to and training in critical skills. When undertaken in liminal play spaces, this experiential training facilitates players' exposure to and confrontation of fictional and real-world conflicts from which they often learn important lessons while at play. D&D is innately an active and participatory collaborative simulation of conflict facilitated by story. Since D&D enables imaginative play to straddle both worlds, we actively train in critical skills while making decisions in and out of conflict. D&D further facilitates the evolution of these educated hope-inspired critical skills by creating unexpected moments of real-world conflict that require the same skills to resolve. Nausicaa's story is an excellent example of how decisions made by the DM affected my experience and resulted in a real-world conflict that prompted a material negotiation that ultimately failed. D&D's utility is not that it solves conflict, but rather that it exposes players to critical skill practice using their imagination and it facilitates the active practicing of these skills both at play and in the real-world while mitigating the consequences of confrontation and failure.

D&D can facilitate imaginary and real-world exploration of topics such as power, emotion, agency, and identity in a place where the consequences are limited in scope. D&D

allowed me to explore alternative gender identities safely and in a healthy way even though my identities and identity-based values had been soundly rejected by peers in my preceding real-world experience. Even though this conflict touched on many of the same values, skills, and questions as my preceding real-world conflict, my agency and power to direct my choices were influenced very differently. Nausicaa's story provided me with a pathway grounded in both the real world and a utopian secondary world where I was empowered to develop and then deploy experientially trained critical skills. D&D achieves this effect by explicitly structuring a collaborative play space where people are expected to attend to their needs collaboratively with others, even if it ultimately fails.

In effect, D&D created both safe fictional and real-world spaces where I was permitted to train in skills and then engage with topics that had explicitly become intimidating to me in using them. In the self-deprecating place I was inhabiting, I still can't imagine another intervention method that could have facilitated similar critical and effective experiential learning. Because of D&D's play-based simulation, I could make consequential BATNA-related decisions knowing that right or wrong, those decisions and their consequences would remain within the context of that small game without the risk of lingering social or emotional repercussions. D&D, through simulated play, has trained me for decades in critical skills. This story illuminates how D&D can simultaneously engage participants in actively learning those critical skills and facilitate both simulated and actual practice in both worlds.

In this instance, a mutually acceptable resolution was not achievable. Unfortunately, my trust in the DM to use their power to facilitate mutually fun experiences did not survive. I decided to quit the game and did so with a renewed confidence in myself and my critical decision-making capacity, having been reminded that I had a voice and agency over the outcome. Even though the player-DM negotiation had failed, D&D had facilitated a real-

world situation that engaged similar real-world experiences with the effect of reminding me of my values and worth.

Findings

Several salient themes emerged from the data that are located within open ended questions that distil the learning that is found within Marshall Ganz's story of self, us, and now that are presented below. Within these questions I outline the eight key findings from my autoethnographic work including hope, trust, agency and power; confidence and self-worth; courage and morality; and empathy, identity, and the imagination, and draw connections between them and D&D's peace praxis potential.

Who

Who we present ourselves to be in the real world is often a situational construct complicated by external expectations. The D&D game is steeped in constructive identity reimagining at all levels of the game and in every game that starts from the fundamental aspect of character creation requiring players to make decisions about their appearance, skills, occupation, class, gender, and race etc. This also carries over into the real-world as players present themselves to others in an increasingly inclusive social space. These simulated and real insightful moments into alternative identities have been valuable experiences that have empowered me to experience a whole host of challenges and perspectives I may not have experienced otherwise. Contrary to my experience of being bullied in public school because I was non-conforming, D&D and the community to which I have belonged has empowered players like me to identify alternatively as their characters and it has supported my ongoing and ever evolving liberation from the hegemonic oppression of prescriptive identity in ways

that are otherwise far more difficult to obtain due to our risk adverse, status quo sustaining normative expectations (Borecky, 2021, pp. 47-48; Garcia, 2017, p. 236).

In the stories shared above I show how in my moments of need, conflict, and impactful reflexivity, instances of freedom and agency afforded by D&D facilitated the development of critical skills necessary to my handling of these crises. D&D empowered me to explore alternatives without severe penalty. The game allowed me to make challenging decisions without fear and to experiment with challenging moral conundrums while engaging with topics as serious as life and death without the fear of its devastating effect. Through simulated narrative play, D&D routinely engaged me with an extensive list of critical skills allowing me to reconfigure who I was as a timid insecure boy into the capable man that I've become. Removed from the limitations of the real-world, participating in D&D stories allowed me to simulate alternative identities within a protected space that empowered me to examine new points of view in a collaborative simulated game milieu and recreate myself on my own terms, even if my characters more frequently identified as alternative genders, races, and cultures to my real-world norm. Acknowledging that narrative simulation does not enable me to absorb the experience of others real world identities, it has provided me with opportunities to walk in different shoes I typically do not have access to. Taking on an alternative point of view to which I am not typically exposed, provided me with opportunities that have been invaluable counterpoints to the mainstream externally oppressive cultural narratives of who others believe I should be.

Because D&D is a game of stories, it's subject to fewer enforceable restrictions and it is commonly available to players around the world to immerse themselves in. In the three aforementioned stories I played with players over 10 years older or younger, living in different countries, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, while in other games I've played with non-native English speakers. While some limitations on who can play D&D

continue to exist such as internet access, language, local accessibility to rules and resources, D&D has become increasingly accessible with its mixed media platforms and translations. Since D&D at its core is a game of storytelling it represents a vehicle of subcultural reimagining and critical consciousness training with global reach. This has allowed me to interact with people I wouldn't normally meet on a deeper more intimate level, which has been beneficial to me in opening my vista about class, culture, ethnicity, faith, and gender.

What

D&D is an inclusive, participatory, and mutually facilitated creative play experience that has created opportunities in fictional secondary worlds and the real-world for me and a plethora of players to exercise dialogue, reflexive insight, and positive connections to players simultaneously. It has allowed me to establish healthy relationships and explore negative ones safely, and it has shifted my default approach to human-to-human interaction from transactional to supportive, from an individual point-of-view to being collectively minded, and from reliance on others to self-reliance by removing barriers imposed from without and within the game. Senehi (2002) defines this type of storytelling as “constructive storytelling” in that it facilitates critical awareness, understanding, and provides a voice to participants (pp. 44-45) in which the players are “transcultural storytellers” (Senehi, 2008, p. 211).

D&D's popular cultural influence continues to grow as it becomes increasingly familiar and accepted via mass communication media. This unique game when played by a diverse population of players includes positive therapeutic and critical skill training functions for the players. As a form of structured and creative roleplay, D&D facilitates the creation of simulation spaces whereby the players can challenge visions of self and society safely. When I did so as Brooke who wanted to save her child at any cost, I simulated the emotional

experience and affirmed my priorities in real life as a father. When I risked my life to do what I knew was right despite the possibility of dire consequences as Millil, I experienced the consequences of standing up for my beliefs. When I failed to resolve a conflict in Nausicaa's campaign, I faced failure and accepted it with grace.

D&D has emerged not only as a means for players to combat negative emotions, the effects of isolation, and stress throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, it has also kept me positively connected with more people, via online platforms, than I otherwise would have with people during the lockdown. What D&D has done for me in these stories and over my lifetime cannot be understated. Freire notes that love, hope, and shared trust bound by empathy are essential for individuals to generate critical attitudes (2018, pp. 39-40). In my case as exemplified by my shared stories and countless others experienced throughout my gaming experience, these four essential elements come together in the real world because of shared secondary world fictional experiences. It has enabled me to become more utopian in my hope for the future as demonstrated by Brooke's heroic parental decision that exposed my parent hope limitations. Freire (2018) also writes that we are both oppressed and the oppressor and in this emotionally charged moment the truth of my own self-imposed oppression became evident. As I compared my inclinations to Brooke's hopeful act, I reflexively reconsidered my peace cultural values on life, death, and family.

D&D has created a space for me that is constructive and often facilitated for me critical intra and inter-personal dialogue that resulted in my increased self and collective awareness. This has taught me critical peaceableness lessons in empathy and trust without me even understanding that I was learning as I was doing. These essential critical skills I learned for generating critical attitudes through storytelling have become the foundations of several enduring relationships I developed based on mutual trust and respect while facilitating my experiential peace culture training.

D&D's embedded morality system's experiential impact on me goes beyond prescribing these values to actively encountering them by encouraging my courageous performative exploration of their meaning and on the ground effect and influence. It facilitates my exploration of morality as non-linear and subjective. It also enables players to engage collaboratively with difficult and even transgressive content and situations possibly maturing their moral functioning in ways that have been shown by some researchers to dynamically and performatively shift players' real-world behaviours away from norms of self-interest towards shared social values (Kawitzky, 2020, p. 130; Wright et al., 2020, pp. 101-103, pp. 108-109, pp. 116-118).

Abbots et al. (2022) have shown that D&D can increase players' confidence and train their ability to confront and cope with changing and challenging real-world situations (Baker et al., 2022). Boulding also identifies confidence as integral to the development of everyone's integrity as one of her five craft skills that are essential to producing peaceableness within the person (Boulding, 1990a). For example, in Nausicaa's story when I asserted my agency and power by initiating a negotiation with my DM, I was experientially fortifying my confidence and self-worth by directly engaging with conflict in a constructive way that reached beyond the play space and began a larger healing process for me.

My narrative D&D examples can only reproduce to a certain degree D&D's active learning capacity for players. Nonetheless, it is clear to me, and I hope now to you, that combining roleplay, an established critical knowledge generating simulation tool with fictional narrative at play produced for me an opportunity to explore identity through educational play experiences with a scaffolding personal and grassroots cultural effect.

Where

The three stories above represent the mixed media and platform approach that enhances and extends D&D's influence among players. In Millil's case, this story took place around my kitchen table where, traditionally, D&D games have been played. This setting leans towards familiar, small groups of local players and is replicated more and more frequently around tables at cafés or game stores and organized events like conventions or adventure leagues, and meetups are arranged to connect players with others when friends and family are not able or willing to participate in organized play.

Brooke and Nausicaa's stories represent an alternative approach to play that has become increasingly popular, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online play using virtual tabletops such as Roll20 or Foundry have facilitated my connection to new people and new ideas outside of my typical range of experience. This results in the simultaneous exposure of the players to new identities as well as the formulation of new narrative identities for exploration. For example, my survey of Brooke and Nausicaa's alternative identities in the online games in combination with the real-world and secondary worlds they inhabited contributed in new and valuable ways to enhance my participatory and collaborative education in critical skills and social-emotional reflexivity. This process exists concurrently in all modes of play as a personal education for players with cultural consequence but also as a live collaboration around group culture as players explore and ultimately develop a communal understanding in their gaming groups of what behaviours are acceptable and which are not.

In addition to D&D's real-world footprint, it also exists simultaneously and collectively in the secondary worlds that it facilitates as well. Even in these collaboratively imagined places, love, hope, empathy, and trust are not always present or achievable in D&D's world building yet this learning and insight has facilitated my personal growth. In

addition, Fischer and Ury's (2011)'s method for negotiating agreements without giving away agency or power first served me well in the case of Nausicaa's "story of us" as I deployed my BATNA and best good faith effort to resolve the conflict. To this day, the training facilitated by that secondary world generated conflict and conflict resolution training continues to facilitate my ability to assert my agency and power in negotiations with the goal of operating independently of any constraint so that I can find the best possible resolutions to conflict scenarios. In this way D&D facilitates both simulated and real-world opportunities for me to engage with established negotiation techniques and to preserve my agency as well as developing interdependent power sharing with others that has a real-world experiential training effect for me.

When

D&D's influence in my life has spanned decades and the game has been consistently influential even when I took the rare few pauses away from this interactive social activity. Having made several home moves as an adult cross country and internationally, it always served as my means of meeting new people and finding new communities and friends. During my research for the thesis, I found that research on play often focused on childhood and early learning. Yet I was keenly aware of the experiential value my stories could demonstrate not just for children but for adults alike. What strikes me most about the Millil, Brooke, and Nausicaa's stories in this chapter is that D&D's creative identity formative influence over me has remained consistent in terms of its influence, as well as critical skill training, and identity experimentation and exploration over decades.

Observationally, I've also seen and played D&D together with new players and veteran players of all ages despite the compounding systemic devaluing of creative play as.

Furthermore, D&D facilitates the shattering of societally normalized age partitions and begins the work of breaking down intergenerational relationship barriers. Experientially, I have come to recognize D&D's lifelong influence on my identity and non-traditional education through play, as my primary critical skills development technique. D&D has facilitated my growth by facilitating the use of my moral imagination and I anticipate the game will continue to influence my personal cultural development and that of the social and gaming communities I identify as part of.

How

I began this thesis with a micro story about being asked how my thesis proposal defence had made me think differently about PACS and the social sciences. After sharing the stories and reflections in this autoethnographical empirical chapter, I hope to have provided both insights into how D&D has and continues to facilitate significant critical skill training through play while it is relevant to PACS theory development and grassroots practice. At the core of my D&D experience is the essence of collaborative fictional play which Vygotsky (1978) noted facilitates both physical and social learning and informs both individual and group development and essential needs maintenance which I hope my stories effectively exhibit (cited in Minhua et al., 2011, p. 310; Turk, 2015, pp. 24-25).

Simultaneously, Boulding (1990a) reported that peaceableness is comprised of teachable skills such as those highlighted in my stories above (Boulding, 1990a, p. 158; Boulding, 2000, p. 1). These three stories represent nearly three decades of experience with D&D and provide a window into the significant influence storytelling has had on my values, life history, and perception of the world, a process PACS has established as an identity forming socialization tool (Senehi, 2015, p. 208, p. 210; Senehi, 2022, p. 43).

As both structured cooperative play and storytelling practice, D&D becomes a space for peaceful cultural production where relationships based on respect, trust, and shared utopian narratives are facilitated and protected (Garcia, 2017, p. 234; Senehi, 2002, p.44; Senehi, 2020a, p. 46; Senehi & Byrne, 2006, p. 248). While all these possible outcomes are not always achieved, as demonstrated by Nausicaa's story, even these moments have contributed as positive negative play in a collaborative and supportive environment so that players can confront difficult content and assumed truths about others and our world with the secondary effect of undermining real-world systemic powers of oppression and facilitating opportunities for players to engage with and improve their cooperation and conflict resolution skills (Sidhu & Carter, 2021, p. 4; Spotorno et. al., 2020 pp.215-216).

Thus, D&D is a game of heroic fantasy where players most often play heroes questing throughout the play space in an effort to right wrongs and do good. As a structure of fictional story creation D&D nourishes player's imaginations and is appealing to them because it provides pleasure and instruction while also probably subtly shaping their beliefs, behaviours, ethics, and culture through the safe secondary worlds it provides them with to practice within (Gottschall, 2012, p. xvii, p. 176, p. 197). Peace cultures thrive on visions such as these by providing alternative pathways of action and worlds where collaboration and teamwork are accepted truths (Boulding, 2000, p. 29). These fundamentally utopian images and experiences are profound critiques of the present and when reflexively investigated as I have done in my studies and thesis writing, often bridge the gap between the theory of utopian peace culture and accessible training of utopian peace culture through experiential activism in safe imaginary worlds.

By imagining a secondary world within which we exist, D&D serves the cause of liberation, defined by Freire, as the action and reflection of people upon their world to transform it, by de-colonizing knowledge production and awakening people's critical

consciousness (Freire, 2018, p. 84; Freire, 2021, p. 39). In this way, D&D as a vehicle of empowerment, empowers players to challenge normative systems of oppression and violence through participatory creative action and advances the cause of collective liberation within the game's fundamental collaborative structure. By deploying our play and story skills to imagine better, even utopian possibilities, D&D players become students in Lederach's (2015) imagined school of the moral imagination. In this space, Lederach asserts that teachers would only be storytellers and common folk would be required to do only one thing, talk honestly, openly, and frankly with each other about their lives and fears, in effect taking risks (Lederach, 2015, p. 555; Lederach, 2005, p. 177). D&D can accomplish this process regularly and does so by listening to and exploring our deeper inner voices together in such a way that the functions of education and training are buttressed by shared life journeys that explore the meaning of things in safe, accessible play spaces (Lederach, 2015, p. 176). In this way I believe, D&D's most genuine utility to PACS is that it is a system that produces fictional narratives rooted in the real world that encourages players to rise above destructive patterns and facilitate the imagining and creation of constructive responses and initiatives that transcend and ultimately contest the sustained destructive challenges of the present (see Lederach, 2005, p. 182).

Conclusion

The chapter explored the broader common-sense interpretation of D&D as reflected by the three stories I shared located within Marshall Ganz's typology of the story of self, us, and now that were then interpreted by questions of who, what, where, when, and how to derive the learning related to my authentic experiences that may have some wider implications for PACS. This autoethnographical chapter outlines some of my insights and reflections about shared moments of experiential knowledge production facilitated by D&D

and explored the impact of the critical skill learning and critical consciousness training these powerful moments have and continue to have on my identity, education, and culture through play. This chapter also examined how the narrative experiences shared among the game's players could replicate similar moments of pertinent peace culture influence for others. This chapter illustrates how D&D can be utilized within PACS praxis.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

In this conclusion chapter I outline some of the overall key findings from the research. I began this thesis with a personal story of self-discovery incited by a query during my thesis proposal defence in chapter 1. While the decision to investigate how my experiential D&D storytelling expertise was relevant to PACS praxis had already been made, the thesis defence question itself instigated a culturally grounded reflection on fictional play experiences I've had over the past several years. I critically examined some of the impacts I believe they've had on my critical skill and consciousness development. Chapter 2 provided a broad review of the origins and evolution of D&D by drawing connections from ancient games to modern pracademic use. D&D is a collaborative storytelling game that creates simulated spaces for players' critical experiential training. Chapter 3 compiled a review of some related PACS literature within the framework of four critical and interconnected essential areas of influence: education, culture, play, and identity.

Chapter 4 introduced the autoethnographic methodology used in the thesis. As a non-traditional method of knowledge production, autoethnography contributed a method that empowered me to share my experiential knowledge in what is often a restrictive academic space. Moreover, the method encouraged a genuine engagement between myself and the audience in a way that facilitates both the sharing of my experiential knowledge that is often devalued in the traditional banking education world. Chapter 4 also outlines my positionality as both participant and researcher and acknowledges both the study's potential significance as well as its limitations. Chapter 5 examines three poignant D&D stories of experiential learning and explores the personal and broader implications of these experiences for me, and the potential impact similar stories may have for others. It then provides an overview of my PACS-inspired experiential findings and examines who, what, where, when and how these

findings could be salient to PACS praxis and the 8 core value findings most pertinent to PACS praxis and peaceableness training. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes some of the overall key findings and suggest future avenues in which PACS could further explore D&D as a valuable and accessible tool for people's critical consciousness training and liberation from the Dreamer slaying patient hope that underscores the mass acquiescing of students to banking knowledge systems of oppression

Overall key findings

There were four overall key findings from this thesis. First, D&D continues to be a viable and effective tool for educated hope training and intervention for myself and likely other gamers that informs core PACS theory and practice as well as the critically imaginative peace studies literature that inspired this research. As a form of "constructive storytelling" (Senehi, 2002, p. 45), D&D has included me in exercises of collaborative power sharing and mutually validating dialogue and reflexive insight. The game's framework, in my experience, has continuously encouraged an equitable agency to be present between players of diverse origin, and experience and has brought together people in my life, and the lives of others in a plethora of diverse communities.

Second, D&D is capable of nurturing utopian imagining among players through the fictional rearranging of traditionally confined concepts including identity, and culture, and it even facilitates through positive negative play, the development of player's critical skills. Through the exploration of challenging content and themes such as violent conflict in protected simulated story spaces, D&D can create secondary worlds for players to experiment in on a myriad of transgressive content and situations that may have dynamic implications for how they assess and act on their real-life scenarios.

Third, through my three personal D&D stories of experiential learning in this alternative environment, I was able to describe and provide examples of a widely accessible storytelling simulation based problem-solving game that has the potential to transform dysfunctional systems of education as called for by Burton (1990, pp. 276-277). As both an individual and local community driven activity, D&D is simultaneously capable of restoring player's agency in a zone of peace practice which Hancock (2016) suggests is an invaluable method of encouraging accountability and local peacebuilding capacity. D&D also actively deploys this peace agency in simulated problem-solving environments collectively developed and explored in our imaginations which Levent et. al. (2006) presents as advanced opportunities for players to improve both awareness of and ability to resolve conflict situations. Additionally, I have demonstrated how D&D is capable of teaching critical skills that promote player's positive development of prosocial and nonviolent relationships which Hymel (2018) alternatively labels as the promotion of social and emotional education capable of giving hope to future generations.

As I explored in the thesis, D&D could be capable of effectuating utopian imaging among its players as it has done for me with the effect of awakening repressed capacities to imagine a better future and balance between separateness and togetherness as described by Boulding (2017, p. 62, p.138; Boulding 2000, p. 2). Fortified by a standard set of rules that encourage creativity and cooperation, social interactions both in the real-world and in the collaboratively constructed secondary worlds where play facilitates player's agency to break down real-world status quo sustaining systems into new utopian forms. When playing D&D and faced with challenging negative or even violent choices, the play experience can transform players' positive and negative play moments into utopian activism as together, players and their characters struggle as a team to right wrongs and make these secondary worlds a better place. Ultimately, D&D didn't transfer agency to me as a player, it trained me

in how to use storytelling simulation to build my own agency and to pursue better futures for myself and my characters. This collaborative experience of beyonding and training in critical skills has both secondary and real-world implications that can extend, as it has done for me, into our daily lives (Wright et al., 2020, pp. 101-102).

Fourth, taken together, D&D may be an ideal means to empower the oppressed and challenge some of the normative status quo systems of dominant neoliberal culture by activating our human oneness or “humatriotism” defined by Theodore Lentz (1976) as loyalty to the whole of humanity (as cited in Lentz, 1984, p. 49). D&D is also capable of spreading a desire for liberation through “constructive storytelling” (Senehi, 2002) as it has done for me in such a way that transformative social-cultural change is not only imagined but made actionable in the creative spaces made accessible by play, the universality of story, and the liberation of culture and identity from the real-world through the union of both. In effect, D&D facilitates both the player’s short-term happiness granting them escape from unpleasant realities, and a longer-term critical consciousness training that can empower both individual and group player’s collective liberation.

Future research and practice

As a game played by millions and accessible to many more, D&D’s potential for future research and practice is vast. During my research however there were three future directions I’d like to see advanced within PACS.

First, it would be good to see D&D or other RPGs used within the university education system, especially in PACS, as a credited learning elective. A D&D course would simultaneously serve to facilitate compelling simulations capable of training players’ critical skills allowing them to explore topics that may not be addressed by banking education course

material. Moreover, it could simultaneously deliver therapy to players's in a fun and intrinsically engaging manner. Second, I noted a distinct difficulty in locating research on D&D in carceral communities in the US despite compelling experiential sources highlighting its impactful rehabilitative influence (see de Kleer, 2017; Hicks, 2020; Richie, 2017; Williams, 2019). Research should be conducted in this area to contest the counterproductive restrictions on D&D in these communities.

This research could and should be done in various diverse communities to take advantage of the game's structured process for creating positive social environments capable of circumventing and transforming real-world cultural divisions and social conflicts to test the games capacity to teach the players various problemsolving, critical thinking, and adaptive peacebuilding skills outside of their normal groups. Any research conducted in these milieus must consider the risks to the researcher and participants carefully and take steps to work with the appropriate university ethics research boards to ensure the safety of all participants.

Additionally, a third inspiring research opportunity might consider the association of play education between children and adults collaboratively. Given Vygotsky's (1978) point that play facilitates individuals physical and social learning with individual and group development and needs maintenance for children, it would be significant to explore the impact of storytelling and simulated play with adults amongst themselves and towards younger peers. I intend to introduce my children to D&D as I have run and played many D&D games that I enjoyed and that brought players of all ages into the same stories and the same spaces. I now know learning takes place both experientially and culturally across generations. I am excited for the potential of PACS research to advance our understanding of how D&D may already be contributing as a multigenerational cultural cornerstone of

complex, critical peace skills and educated hope learning experiences to the benefit of players of all ages.

Conclusion

This thesis contributes a valuable exploratory investigation of D&D's relationship to PACS literature and praxis using an autoethnographic method and a critical storytelling approach (Senehi, 2020a) using Haven's (2015) core story components and structure as a guide and grounded in Ganz's (2015) narrative method. Concurrently, this thesis explored PACS' interdisciplinary concepts like Lederach's (2010) school of the moral imagination, liberation and imagining (Boulding, 1990), critical consciousness (Freire, 2021) with my real-world professional practice, and personal experience to facilitate an understanding of D&D's connection with the PACS literature that has real culturally embedded peace culture and training potential for its grassroots players, as it has for me.

Storytelling and this reflexive process have made me aware of several diverse ways in which stories have strengthened me. Stories that are both fictional and participatory, like D&D, have facilitated and continue to dominate the way I make new friends and develop relationships, identify, and resolve conflict well into adulthood. Stories connect me to others around the US and the world in ways no other social activity has ever done for me, and has for 30 years, provided me a safe place to go to and develop my social skills, reflect, and explore, in and out of conflict scenarios. It has enabled me to develop a sense of confidence as a storyteller, even without me knowing that that is how I have increasingly come to identify myself. D&D has facilitated the development of my reading, writing, thinking, public speaking, analytical skills, and creative capacity. It has taught me lessons about fair play, honesty, integrity, cooperation, and critical peace skills.

Knowing the impact storytelling has had on me and having completed this first academic review of my experiences as a storyteller, I go forward with a renewed energy, goal and focus on life that reaffirms the personal truths of the story's importance to me and to PACS at large. D&D has facilitated a prolonged training for me that has provided me with the strength to endure moments of extreme challenge. It has exposed me to literature, film, art, people, places, and, most importantly, stories that have undoubtedly transformed me into who I am today. In the words of Conan the Barbarian, portrayed by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the film *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), a character imagined by Robert E. Howard and one of Gary Gygax's very own motivators for creating D&D; "that which does not kill us makes us stronger." While I've not been unharmed by the trials of life to date, D&D and the resulting stories that I have been immersed in have undoubtedly fortified my resilience and shaped me in purpose, capacity, and agency to make me stronger.

Since its introduction, D&D has been a collaborative imaginative sharing activity for its players with the effect of building communities and entertaining its players. It exists both as a game and as a system to frame, rather than restrain, play. Over a relatively short period of time, it transformed itself from a culturally divergent activity feared by many and alien to most at the height of the satanic panic in North America and Europe during the 1970s into a mass media and market darling translated into multiple languages and played by millions. D&D has been a problem-solving educational activity for me and has both out of necessity and because of its own generational transformation come into itself as a viable simulated method of real-world critical skill training that is generally accessible to a plethora of people across cultures, classes, genders, and religions. Finally, by combining existing academic and professional knowledge with my lived real and secondary world experiences, this thesis contributed to the demystification of D&D as a utopian peacebuilding praxis tool for its players.

References

- Adams, A. S. (2013) Needs met through role-playing games: A fantasy theme analysis of dungeons & dragons. *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research*. 12(6), 69-86.
<http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/kaleidoscope/vol12/iss1/6>
- Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S. L., & Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography*. Oxford University Press.
- Baker, I. S., Turner, I. J., & Kotera, Y. (2022). Role-play games (rpgs) for mental health (why not?): Roll for initiative. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-022-00832-y>
- Barras, C. (2020). Is an aboriginal tale of an ancient volcano the oldest story ever told?. *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)*.
<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abb2656>
- Bertolo, M., & Mariani, I. (2013, September 27- September 28). *Meaningful play: Learning, best practices, reflections through games*. [Paper presentation] MIT Game Lab, Vienna, Austria. shorturl.at/hnCJ2
- Björkdahl, A., & Kappler, S. (2017). *Peacebuilding and spatial transformation: Peace, space and place*. Routledge.
- Blackmon, W. (1994) Dungeons and dragons: The use of a fantasy game in the psychotherapeutic treatment of a young adult. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*. 48(4): 624-632). DOI: 10.1176/appi.psychotherapy.1994.48.4.624
- Bochner, A. P., & Ellis, C. (2016a). *Evocative autoethnography: Writing lives and telling stories* (Vol. 17). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315545417>

- Bochner, A. P., & Ellis, C. (2016b). The ICQI and the rise of autoethnography: Solidarity through community. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 9(2), 208–217. <https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2016.9.2.208>
- Bonawitz, E., Shafto, P., Gweon, H., Goodman, N. D., Spelke, E., & Schulz, L. (2011). The double-edged sword of pedagogy: Instruction limits spontaneous exploration and discovery. *Cognition*, 120(3), 322–330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2010.10.001>
- Borecky, A. (2021). Dungeons, dragons, and music. *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*, 2(1), 46–64. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jsmg.2021.2.1.46>
- Boulding, E. (1990a). *Building a global civic culture: Education for an interdependent world*. Syracuse University Press.
- Boulding, E. (1990b) *Three faces of power*. Sage Publications.
- Boulding, E. (2017). *Elise Boulding: Writings on peace research, peacemaking, and the future*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-30987-3>
- Boulding, E. (2000). *Cultures of peace: The hidden side of history*. Syracuse University Press.
- Brynen. (2014). Teaching about peace operations. *International Peacekeeping*, 21(4), 529–538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2014.946740>
- Brynen, & Milante, G. (2013). Peacebuilding with games and simulations. *Simulation & Gaming*, 44(1), 27–35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878112455485>
- Burton, J. W. (1990). *Conflict: Resolution and prevention*. St. Martins Press.
- Burton, J. W. (Ed.). (1990b) *Conflict: Human needs theory*. Palgrave Macmillan
- Burton, J. W. (1998). Conflict resolution: The human dimension. *International journal of peace studies*. 3.1., <https://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/>

- Byrne, S., & Senehi, J. (2012). *Violence analysis, intervention, and prevention*. Ohio University Press.
- California Teachers Association. (2015, November 2). Public Narrative [Video]. YouTube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7CW_10C7IQ
- Callaway, E. (2019) Is this cave painting humanity's oldest story? *Nature*.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-03826-4>
- Carroll, J. (2017). Why we need a journal with the title evolutionary studies in imaginative culture. *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture*, 1(1), Vii-Xii.
[doi:10.26613/esic.1.1.1](https://doi.org/10.26613/esic.1.1.1)
- Carter, A. (2011). Using dungeons and dragons to integrate curricula in an elementary classroom. In M. Minhua, A. Oikonomou & L. C. Jain (Eds.), *Serious games and edutainment applications* (pp. 329-346). Springer London.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4471-2161-9>
- Chinn, P. (2013) *Peace and power: New directions for building community* (8th ed). Jones & Bartlett Publishers
- Clarke, C., Arnab, S., Morini, L., & Heywood, L. (2019). Dungeons and dragons as a tool for developing student self-reflection skills. In M. Gentile, M. Allegra, & H. Sobke (Eds.), *Games and learning alliance: 7th international conference* (pp. 101–109). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11548-7_10
- Cohen C. E., Varea, R. G., & Walker, P. O. (2011). Acting Together II: Building just and inclusive communities. New Village Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt21pxmtg>

- Cormier, P. N. (2018). Storytelling and peace research in indigenous contexts: Learning the peace culture of Opaaganasiniing (place where the pipestone comes from). *Storytelling, Self, Society*, 14(2), 161–184.
<https://doi.org/10.13110/storselvesoci.14.2.0161>
- Cotterrell, R. (2017). *Law, culture and society: Legal ideas in the mirror of social theory*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351217989>
- Crevelde, M. (2013). *Wargames: From Gladiators to Gigabytes*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139579872>
- Critical Core. (n.d.). *Harness the power of therapeutic gaming with critical core*. Retrieved June 9 2022, from <https://www.criticalcore.org/>
- Critical role foundation. Critical Role. (2022, October 3). Retrieved october 26, 2022, from <https://critrole.com/foundation/>
- Critical Role Foundation. (n.d.). Choose Stephen Colbert's adventure... again. Retrieved April 9, 2022, from <https://tiltify.com/@criticalrole/choose-stephen-colberts-adventure-again>
- Crookall, D. (2008). Alan coote, gary gygax, language socialization. *Simulation & Gaming*, 39(2), 161–163. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878108319039>
- d’Estrée, T. P., & Parsons, R. J. (2018). *Cultural Encounters and Emergent Practices in Conflict Resolution Capacity-Building*. Springer International Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71102-7>
- D&D in a Castle*. (n.d.). *A vacation beyond imagination: The premier luxury D&D vacation*. Retrieved July 24, 2022, from <https://dndinacastle.com/>

- de Kleer, E. (2017, July 25). *How inmates play tabletop RPGs in prisons where dice are contraband*. Vice. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/padk7z/how-inmates-play-tabletop-rpgs-in-prisons-where-dice-are-contraband>
- Darvasi, P. (2018, October 18). How ‘dungeons & dragons’ primes students for interdisciplinary learning, including STEM. KQED. shorturl.at/gjnO4
- Di, G. (2022, April 13). How to Create Mixed-Race D&D Characters [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAtHpBsUpqc>
- Dragonhelm. (December 24th, 2021). How the Hickman revolution changed d&d forever. Dragonlance Nexus. shorturl.at/fY235
- Dyson, J. P. (2011, May 6) The influence of dungeons and dragons on video games. Museum of Play. <https://www.museumofplay.org/2011/05/06/the-influence-of-dungeons-and-dragons-on-video-games/>
- Eagle, J. (2019). *War Games*. Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813598956>
- Ellis, S., Hendler, J. (2017). Computers play chess, computers play go...humans play dungeons & dragons. *IEEE Intelligent Systems*, 32(4), 31–34. <https://doi.org/10.1109/MIS.2017.3121545>
- Englund, T. (2014). *Live action role play (larp) in a context of conflict: An ethnographic study of larp in Ramallah* [Master Thesis, Malmo University]. Diva portal. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1482581/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Fine, G. A. (1983). *Shared fantasy: Role-playing games as social worlds*. University of Chicago Press.

Fischer, R., (2011). Cross-cultural training effects on cultural essentialism beliefs and cultural intelligence. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(6), 767–775.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.08.005>

Fischer, R. & Ury, W. (2011). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*. (3rd ed.). Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (2nd ed.). Vintage Books

Foundry Virtual Tabletop. (n.d.). Home Retrieved July 24, 2022, from

<https://foundryvtt.com/>

Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 50th Anniversary Edition*. Bloomsbury

Freire, P. (2021). Education for critical consciousness [Kindle book] Bloomsbury Academic.

shorturl.at/aeOZ8

Fry, D. P. (2007). *Beyond war the human potential for peace*. Oxford.

Game to Grow. (n.d.). *About game to grow*. Retrieved June 7, 2022, from

<https://gametogrow.org/about/>

Gannon, S. (2017). Autoethnography. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of*

Education. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.71>

Garcia, A. (2017). Privilege, power, and dungeons & dragons: How systems shape racial and gender identities in tabletop role-playing games. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 24(3),

232–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2017.1293691>

Gelot, L. (2019). Training for peace, conscientization through university simulation. *Journal of Peace Education*, 16(2), 195–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2019.1576514>

Gentile, Allegra, M., & Söbke, H. (Eds.). (2019). *Games and learning alliance 7th*

international conference. Springer International Publishing.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11548-7>

Gottschall, J. (2012). *The storytelling animal: how stories make us human*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Hall, C. (2022, March 22). *Dungeons & dragons' next anthology is written entirely by black and brown authors*. Polygon. shorturl.at/adyA0

Hancock, L. E. (2017) Agency & peacebuilding: the promise of local zones of peace, *Peacebuilding*, 5:3, 255-269, DOI: 10.1080/21647259.2016.1253604

Hart, L. (2021, December 21). Did Tracy Hickman ruin d&d? [Video]. YouTube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCmKwSzXMAE>

Henrich, S., & Worthington, R. (2021). Let your clients fight dragons: A rapid evidence assessment regarding the therapeutic utility of "dungeons & dragons." *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2021.1987367>

Herman, E. S., Chomsky, N., Gosling, P. (2002). *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of the mass media*. Pantheon Books.

Hicks, T. (2020, July 20) *Incarcerated men find escape through roleplaying game dungeons and dragons* [Radio broadcast]. KALW Public Media
<https://www.kalw.org/show/crosscurrents/2020-07-20/incarcerated-men-find-escape-through-role-playing-game-dungeons-and-dragons>

Hymel, S., & Darwich, L. (2018). Building peace through education. *Journal of Peace Education*, 15(3), 345–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2018.1535475>

Jackson, C. (2022, September 2). *Amid criticism, wizards of the coast quietly removes racist lore from dungeons & dragons*. Kotaku. shorturl.at/sHI17

Jackson, P. W. (2012). *What is education?* University of Chicago Press

- Kant, I. (2015). *On Education* (A. Churton, Trans.). (originally published 1803)
- Katz, N. H., Bascombe, N. G., & Tokar, P. (2019). Illuminating interviews: Insights into the hearts and minds of conflict resolution practitioners. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 36(4), 345–371. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21248>
- Katz, N., & Lawyer, J. (1993). *Conflict resolution: Building bridges*. Corwin Press Inc.
- Kawitzky, F. R., (2020). Magic Circles. *Performance Research*, 25(8), 129–136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2020.1930786>
- King, B., Borland, J. (2014). *Dungeons & dreamers: a story of how computer games created a global community*. ETC Press
- Laycock, J. (2015). *Dangerous games: what the moral panic over role-playing games says about play, religion, and imagined worlds*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520960565>
- Lederach, J. P. (1996) *Preparing for peace: Conflict transformation across cultures*. Syracuse University Press
- Lederach, J. P. (1999). *The journey toward reconciliation*. Herald Press.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford University Press.
- Lederach, J. P. (2015). Spirituality and Religious Peacebuilding. In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199731640.013.0021>
- Lentz, T. (1984). Humatriotism. *Peace Research*, 16(1), 49–49.
- Levent, Y., Tuncer, Ö. I., & Nasser, G. (2006). Simulation-based problem-solving environments for conflict studies. *Simulation & Gaming*, 37(4), 534–556. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878106292537>

- Levitas, R. (2008). Pragmatism, Utopia and Anti-Utopia. *Critical Horizons: Journal of Social & Critical Theory*, 9(1), 42–59. <https://doi.org/10.1558/crit.v9i1.42>
- McLeod, S. (2022, August 18). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of cognitive development. *Simply Psychology*. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html>
- Minhua, M., Oikonomou, A., & Jain, L. C. (2011). *Serious Games and Edutainment Applications* (1st ed. 2011.). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4471-2161-9>
- More, M. (2022, September 19). *For some d&d players, tabletop roleplaying is more than dice and magic – it’s a ‘sanity saving’ mental health boost*. LXnews. shorturl.at/gwMOT
- Mount Tamalpais College. (2022). *A 25-year commitment to education*. <https://www.mttamcollege.org/>
- Neglia, L. (2018, March 7). How I use dungeons and dragons in the classroom. *Classcraft*. <https://www.classcraft.com/blog/how-use-dungeons-dragons-classroom/>
- Nelson, M. (2020). Battling on boards: The ancient Greek war games of ship-battle (naumachia) and city-state (polis). *Mouseion: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada*, 17(1), 3–42. <https://doi.org/10.3138/mous.17.1.02>
- O’Sullivan, D. E. (2012). *Chess in the Middle Ages and early modern age: A fundamental thought paradigm of the premodern world*. Walter de Gruyter
- Pavie, X. (2020a). Spiritual exercises to (re)think the innovator. In *Critical Philosophy of Innovation and the Innovator: Vol. 6. Interdisciplinarity, science and humanities series: Innovation and responsibility set* (pp. 101-138). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119405139.oth1>
- Pavie, X. (2020b). Conclusion: Philosophy and education, the ultimate help for innovation. In *Critical Philosophy of Innovation and the Innovator: Vol. 6. Interdisciplinarity,*

- science and humanities series: Innovation and responsibility set (pp. 139-154). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119405139.oth1>
- Pranis, S. B., & Wedge, M. (2003). *Peacemaking circles: From crime to community*. Living Justice Press.
- Reimer, L., Schmitz, L., Janke, M., Askerob, A., Strahl, B., & Matyók, T. (2015). *Transformative change: an introduction to peace and conflict studies*. Lexington Books.
- Richie, B. (2017, August 21). Dungeons & dragons – A life changing experience. Mount Tamalpais College. <https://www.mttamcollege.org/dungeons-dragons-a-life-changing-experience-by-brian-richie/>
- Robichaud, C. & Irwin, W. (2014). *Dungeons and dragons and philosophy: Read and gain advantage on all wisdom checks*. John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Roll 20 (n.d.). *Home*. Retrieved July 24, 2022, from <https://roll20.net/>
- Rønning, S. B., & Bjørkly, S. (2019). The use of clinical roleplay and reflection in learning therapeutic communication skills in mental health education: An integrative review. *Advances in medical education and practice, 10*, 415–425. <https://doi.org/10.2147/AMEP.S202115>
- Rubenstein, R. (2001). Basic Human Needs: The next steps in theory development. *The International Journal of Peace Studies, 6*(1), https://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol6_1/Rubenstein.htm
- Save against fear. (2022). *About*. Retrieved June 18, 2020, from <https://www.saveagainstfear.com/about>
- Senehi, J. (2002). Constructive storytelling: A peace process. *Peace and Conflict Studies, 9*(2), 41–63. <https://doi.org/10.46743/1082-7307/2002.1026>

Senehi, J. & Byrne, S. (2006). Youth and post-accord peacebuilding. In S. McEvoy-Levy (Ed.), *Troublemakers or peacemakers* (pp. 235-255) Notre Dame Press.

Senehi, J. (2008). The role of constructive transcultural storytelling in transforming ethno-political conflict in Northern Ireland. In J. Carter, G. Irani, & V. Volkan (Eds.), *Regional and ethnic conflicts: Perspectives from the front lines* (pp. 227-237). Pearson.

Senehi, J. (2015). Building peace: storytelling to transform conflicts constructively. In D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste, & J. Senehi (Eds.), *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 201-212). Routledge.

Senehi, J. (2020a). Theory-building in peace and conflict studies: The storytelling methodology. In S. Byrne, T. Matyok, I.M. Scott & J. Senehi (Eds.), *Routledge companion to peace and conflict studies*. (pp. 45-57). Routledge.

Senehi, J. (2020b). Transcultural storytelling. *Storytelling, Self, Society*, 16(1), 3-32.
<https://doi.org/10.13110/storselfsoci.16.1.0003>

Senehi, J. (2021). Generating discursive resources: Storytelling for positive peace. In K. Standish, H Devere, A. E. Suazo, & R. Rafferty (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Peace* (pp. 1149–1167). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-0969-5_60

Sidhu, P., & Carter, M. (2021). Pivotal play: Rethinking meaningful play in games through death in dungeons & dragons. *Games and Culture*, 16(8), 1044–1064.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211005231>

Spotorno, R., Picone, M., & Gentile, M. (2020). Designing an online dungeons & dragons experience for primary school children. In I. Marfisi-Schottman & F. Balloti & L.

Hamon & R. Klemke (Eds.), *International Conference on Games and Learning Alliance* (Vol. 12517, 207-217. Springer International Publishing.

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63464-3_20

Spry, T. (2001). Performing autoethnography: An embodied methodological praxis.

Qualitative Inquiry, 7(6), 706–732. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040100700605>

Stanford (2015, March 30). Your brain on story [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGrf0LGn6Y4>

Stephenson, C. M. (2012). Elise Boulding and peace education: Theory, practice, and Quaker faith. *Journal of Peace Education*, 9(2), 115–126.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2012.700196>

Swanger, J. (2015). Revisualizing (in)justice: Peace studies in the early 21st century. In

Amster R., Finley, L., Pries, E., & McCutcheon, R. (Eds.), *Peace studies between tradition and innovation*, 4–16. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Tekinbaş, K. S., Zimmerman, E. (2004). *Rules of play: game design fundamentals*. MIT Press.

The Bodhana Group. (n.d.). *Therapeutic Tabletop Gaming*. Retrieved June 13, 2020, from

<https://www.thebodhanagroup.org/>

Thiessen, C. (2011). Emancipatory peacebuilding: Critical responses to (neo)liberal

trends. In T. Matyók, J. Senehi, & S. Byrne (Eds.), *Critical Issues in Peace and Conflict Studies*, 117-140. Lexington Books

Tito, G., Mazzanoble, S., (Hosts). (2015, October, 2) D&D in the classroom [Audio podcast episode]. Wizards. <https://dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/dd-classroom>

Turk, A. (2015). Parents' beliefs and attitudes about a play curriculum [Doctoral

- dissertation, Kent State University College and Graduate School of Education, Health, and Human Services]. OhioLINK ETD Center.
- Turney, A. (2020, November 2). Why playing d&d in prison is so hard (& why it shouldn't be), Screen Rant. <https://screenrant.com/dungeons-dragons-banned-prisons-controversy-inmate-therapy-jail/>
- Twitch tracker (2022). Critical Role. Retrieved June 7, 2022, from <https://twitchtracker.com/criticalrole/statistics>
- Upton, B. (2015). *The aesthetic of play*. The MIT Press.
- Veldthuis, M., Koning, M., & Stikkolorum, D. (2021, November). A quest to engage computer science students: Using dungeons & dragons for developing soft skills. *10th Computer Science Education Research Conference*, 5-13. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3507923.3507927>
- Voorhees, G. A., Call, J., & Whitlock, K. (2012). *Dungeons, dragons, and digital denizens: The digital roleplaying game*. Continuum.
- Vu, R. (2017). Fantasy after representation: D&d, game of thrones, and postmodern world-building. *Extrapolation*, 58(2-3), 273–301. <https://doi.org/10.3828/extr.2017.14>
- Wezerek, G. (2017, October 12). Is your d&d character rare?. FiveThirtyEight. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/is-your-dd-character-rare/>
- Williams, L. L. (2019). Lawful neutral: The justice system and dungeons and dragons. *Cardozo J. Equal Rts. & Soc. Just.*, 26, 129. shorturl.at/cFGKL
- Witwer, M. (2015). *Empire of Imagination: Gary Gygax and the birth of dungeons & dragons*. Bloomsbury

Wizards of the Coast. (2020, June 17). Diversity and dungeons & dragons.

<https://dnd.wizards.com/news/diversity-and-dnd>

Wolfendale, P. & Franklin, T. (2012). Why d&d is art. *Academia*.

https://www.academia.edu/35516678/Why_D_and_D_is_Art

Wright, J. C., Weissglass, D. E., & Casey, V. (2020). Imaginative role-playing as a medium for moral development: Dungeons & dragons provides moral training. *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 60(1), 99–129.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167816686263>

Yazan, B., Canagarajah, S., & Jain, R. (Eds.). (2020). *Autoethnographies in elt:*

Transnational identities, pedagogies, and practices. Taylor and Francis.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003001522>