“A Living and Breathing World…”: Examining Participatory Practices Within *Dungeons & Dragons*

by

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A thesis submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Communication (MCS)

July 18, 2015

School of Communication Studies

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ABSTRACT

Permeated and referenced throughout popular culture, *Dungeons & Dragons* has become iconic as the cardinal and archetypal tabletop role-playing game. Participants have been drawn to *D&D* for over forty years, departing into imagined and collaborative fantasy worlds. This thesis is concerned with analysing current participatory practices in *D&D,* accounting for evolving styles of hybridised gaming and retentions of traditional tabletop play. It ventures beyond initial conceptual enquiries, developing tangible conclusions to the questions: "How important is the idea of community when playing *Dungeons & Dragons*?" and "What is appealing about constructing fictitious identities within the group, actualised through notions of play?" To assist in answering these questions an Internet survey was developed. Survey data is presented, analysed, and contrasted with existing role-playing game scholarship. Emergent findings discuss participant experiences of "entertainment" "fantasy", "community", and preferred "*D&D* editions". It is strongly contended that *D&D* transcends the superficialities associated with a "game". Participants powerfully engage — transmuting participatory experiences into broader realms of purpose and meaning. The game facilitates the continual formation and negotiation of community and identity, demonstrating its wider socio-cultural applicability. The ability and appeal to engage with substantial identity exploration is clearly observable within *D&D* practices. The game offers participants accessibility into divergent paradigms of reality. Participants' playful explorations have a lasting effect in the "real world". Finally, participants develop and enjoy a strong sense of community through their long-term gaming relationships. Regardless of whether these communities are enacted in "online" or "offline" spheres, these spaces endow participants with substantial benefits — belonging, acceptance, and a shared sense of "fun".

Keywords: *Dungeons & Dragons,* fantasy, game studies, popular culture, sociology.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare this submission to be my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

Signed:

Corey Ryan Walden
18/07/2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has involved a medley of ideas percolating and developing over the past two years, resulting in the thesis you are now reading. Throughout this process there have been various individuals who have supported my academic pursuits.

Thank you to my wife Sarah. You have continually supported my decision to pursue ongoing education, providing continued love and encouragement throughout this process. You have begrudged neither the stacks of nerdy books piled on our computer desk, nor the financial challenges of the past few years. I am truly grateful to you.

It would be extremely remiss not to acknowledge my supervisor Dr Lorna Piatti-Farnell, whose mentorship has been invaluable. You have thoroughly believed in me, understanding my vision and passion. Your continued guidance and constructive feedback have been instrumental in the formulation of this thesis. Thank you! (Is it time for a doctorate?)

My parents deserve credit for their continued love and support. A special mention is due to my mother Carol Walden and aunt Anne Lochead for providing essential proofreading talents and general feedback. Jim and Libby — my parents-in-law — are to be thanked for countless home-cooked meals and warm encouragement.

A big "thank you" is reserved for the communities of Dragonsfoot, Enworld, and Wizards of the Coast — especially the survey participants. The final "thank you", however, must be attributed to the fathers of *Dungeons & Dragons*: E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Rastus Burne was possessed with a desire to obtain things. His method was dishonest; he was a thief. Still, he had a moral compass which served him well. He refused to trample on the poor, but swindling the rich was fine. He had friends in the right places. Any valuables he acquired could be rid of with little burden, and much profit. After all, what are friends are for if not to help?

1.0 Introduction

This thesis explores participatory practices within the *Dungeons & Dragons* tabletop role-playing game. An ongoing concern throughout this work is formulating and refining contemporary participatory notions of "community" and "identity" within the game. Ubiquitous Internet technologies have altered global gaming habits, impinging on traditional notions of tabletop *Dungeons & Dragons* [hereafter abbreviated to *D&D*]. Prevailing digital technologies and associated cultural shifts necessitate a scholarly re-examination of participation practices within *D&D*. Novel or emergent participatory trends are contrasted with existing knowledge of role-playing gaming. An Internet survey has been undertaken, providing quantitative and qualitative data of *D&D* gaming practices. Survey data is complemented with existing role-playing gaming scholarship. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to provide an understanding of the background and applicability of this research within a wider academic context. Section 1.1 details the background and development of this research topic. Section 1.2 overviews the research questions guiding this thesis. Section 1.3 elaborates on the overall thesis structure, while section 1.4 provides a cursory definition of core terms found in this work.

1.1 Background

Dungeons & Dragons was released in 1974, heralding a new gaming phenomenon — the role-playing game (Peterson, 2012). Over forty years later *D&D* continues to thrive, earning an enduring legacy in contemporary popular culture. Filmic references to *D&D* occur in *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (Spielberg, 1982), *Freaks & Geeks* (Apatow, 2000), *Futurama* (Louden & Moore, 2000), *Community* (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012), and *The Big Bang Theory* (Lorre, Prady, & Molaro, 2013). In 2000 the tabletop role-playing game industry was worth approximately two billion dollars (Dancey, 2000). Publisher Wizards of the Coast [WotC] estimates over thirty million people have played *D&D* since its release in 1974 (Ewalt, 2013). These figures represent a substantial cultural demographic. The electronic gaming industry has borrowed extensively from the concepts of *D&D,* informing the manner in which millions of gamers play online and offline; defining and redefining contemporary notions of the fantasy genre (Johnson, 2013; Tresca, 2011). Many digital role-playing games have been directly inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons,* including *Asheron's Call, Baldur's Gate, Bard's Tale, Diablo*, *Elder Scrolls, Fable, EverQuest, Final*

Fantasy, Heroes of Might & Magic, Heroes of the Lance, Hero's Quest, Icewind Dale, Lord of the Rings Online, Might & Magic, Neverwinter Nights, Pool of Radiance, Ultima, and *World of Warcraft* (Tresca, 2011). Gaming has evolved dramatically in the past forty-years through innovative mechanics, digital technologies, and globalisation. Notwithstanding these shifts, *D&D* appears to remain a viable and popular form of tabletop gaming. In a more general sense, tabletop games have become increasingly popular due to pervasive Internet technologies and passionate fans (Woods, 2012). In 2014 WotC released the 5th edition of *D&D* (Mearls & Crawford, 2014). The 5th edition *Player's Handbook* topped the Amazon Best Sellers list in August 2014 (Ewalt, 2014; Girdwood, 2014; Smith, 2014) indicating initial success amongst a large worldwide audience.

My personal introduction to *Dungeons & Dragons* began when I was 14 years old. I recall being immediately captivated. It was a game that demanded my imagination, and I have continued to play varying forms of tabletop and digital role-playing games ever since. My interest in researching *D&D* developed during the first half of 2014. Through a medley of social media outlets and websites, I observed the promulgation of online tabletop gaming, and what appeared to be a resurging interest in tabletop *D&D*. These observations morphed into a scholarly interest, and when the prospect of writing a thesis arose, this was a topic that retained my motivation and interest.

1.2 Research Questions and Rationale

As I conducted preliminary research it became apparent that role-playing games had received significant academic focus, while the contemporary participatory practices of *Dungeons & Dragons* had not. Gary Alan Fine's foundational sociological study *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (1983) addresses in depth the notion of role-playing game communities. Adding to this knowledge are more recent studies, particularly Daniel MacKay's *The Fantasy Role-playing Game: A New Performing Art* (2001), *Gaming as Culture* (Williams, Hendricks & Winkler, 2006), Sarah Bowman's *The Functions of Role-Playing Games: How Participants Create Community, Solve Problems and Explore Identity* (2010), Michael Tresca's *The Evolution of Fantasy Role-Playing Games* (2011), Stephanie Cover's *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games* (2010), various articles by J. Tuomas Harviainen (2012), and historian Jon Peterson's comprehensive *Playing at the World* (2012). While these texts offer substantive insights into role-playing games, there remains a lack of foci on contemporary *D&D* communities; this prompted my interest towards further research.

The rationale and value of this research is multifaceted. Gaming is receiving increasing academic credibility and interest, especially in relation to popular culture (Hjorth, 2011). Substantial blurring occurs between traditional notions of tabletop gaming and emergent digital technologies — which act to supplement, substitute, or entirely replace their more traditional counterparts. Examining this relationship has been largely neglected, suggesting an applicability of research. A secondary consideration is the interpersonal nature of tabletop gaming. Evolving digital technologies permit extensive global communication and connection where previously

these opportunities did not exist. Conversely tabletop gaming remains viable as an intimate communal experience, perpetuated by impassioned gamers (Woods, 2012). Scant academic research has been conducted on the recently released 5th edition *D&D,* but there has been substantial media interest in the game (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2015; Bebergal, 2014; Ewalt, 2013; Ewalt, 2014; Girdwood, 2014; Jacobson, 2014; Jagneaux, 2014; Smith, 2014). Further academic discussion is warranted due to the game's resurgent popularity. Situating participatory experiences of *Dungeons & Dragons* within contemporary global currents would therefore prove useful.

Research Questions

Remaining cognisant of the aforementioned considerations, two primary research questions were developed to guide this study:

1. How important is the idea of community when playing *Dungeons & Dragons?*

2. What is appealing about constructing fictitious identities within the group, actualised through notions of play?

Both questions serve as an inquiry into participant notions of "community" and "identity" formation. An online participant survey has been designed with the purpose of exploring these questions. Survey data has been analysed and coded thematically, then complemented with existing scholarly research to supplement critical discussions.

1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into 10 chapters. Chapter 2 situates *Dungeons & Dragons* within present and historic socio-cultural and socio-political contexts. Chapter 3 reviews existing academic material pertinent to this study. Chapter 4 clarifies research methodologies used within this investigation. Chapter 5 presents the data and findings gathered from the participant Internet survey. Chapter 6 explores participant notions of "entertainment". Chapter 7 discusses the composition and evolution of "fantasy" within *D&D.* Chapter 8 analyses current conceptions of *D&D* communities. Chapter 9 explores participant commentary on the various editions of *D&D*. Finally, chapter 10 provides a conclusion to this study, summarising the findings, and suggesting avenues for future research. References and appendices are located after the conclusion.

1.4 Definition of Terms

Certain terminologies have been used in this thesis. A glossary is provided in Appendix I with the intent of clarifying most linguistic particularities. Two recurring usages follow:

RPG — An "RPG" is an abbreviation of "Role-Playing Game". An RPG generally refers to a game in which participants assume the role of a fictitious and created persona, and explore a shared fantasy world.

D&D — "*D&D*" is an abbreviation of the tabletop RPG *Dungeons & Dragons.* Occasionally *D&D* may refer to an online or digital iteration, although this should be explained within the associated text. Unless otherwise noted, "*D&D"* is used to refer to the generic game, rather than any particular edition.

CHAPTER 2: THE SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS OF *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*

The city of Farlow was a hive of politics. It had been built in the mouth of the harbour, growing into a teeming metropolitan. The preceding centuries had always brought change. Sometimes small shifts occurred, other times, complete revolution. Rastus smiled inwardly as he thought of the factions and guilds vying for power. The trick was finding out what each wanted. Play them off against each other. Fortunately, Rastus was an expert at such games; you either learnt quickly or you perished.

2.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the socio-cultural context of the *Dungeons & Dragons* game, exploring the relationship between issues of the past and their conflating influences on the present. These explanations are useful to illumine the game's inception, development, and progression — situating it contemporarily within a global and digitised culture. Section 2.1 provides an overview of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Section 2.2 discusses 1960s and 1970s cultural developments — namely the proliferation of fantasy literature — with analogous and continued relevance in current North American culture. Section 2.3 acknowledges the societal concerns that escalated into "Satanic Panic", permeating American culture between the late-1970s to 1990s. It is contended these concerns mirror apocalyptic centennial and millennial fears — though the impact of these fears have continued to stigmatise conceptions of *D&D* even to the present. Section 2.4 discusses the events of a post-2000 America, noting the continued cultural relevance of fantasy-themed media. Finally, section 2.5 discusses interactions between the Internet, media, and fandom practices.

2.1 Overview of Dungeons & Dragons

Dungeons & Dragons is a cooperative tabletop role-playing game, set in the imaginations of the players (Bowman, 2010; Cover, 2010; Fine, 1983). The game requires two types of participants: a Dungeon Master [DM] and players. The DM narrates and arbitrates the game, creating the setting where the collective fantasy is situated (Gygax, 1978; Mearls & Crawford, 2014a). *D&D* players typically assume a fictitious identity, controlling one character called a player character [PC] (Fine, 1983). Creating a character involves selecting a "race", a "class", and generating six ability scores (Gygax, 1978; Mearls & Crawford, 2014c). Racial options typically include: dwarf, elf, gnome, half-elf, half-orc, halfling and human (Cook, 1989; Gygax & Arneson, 1974; Gygax, 1978; Mearls & Crawford, 2014c; Tresca, 2011). Class options include: assassin, barbarian, bard, cleric, druid, fighter, illusionist, magic-user [also known as a wizard or sorcerer], monk, paladin, ranger, thief [also known as a rogue] and warlock (Cook, 1989; Gygax & Arneson, 1974; Gygax, 1978; Mearls & Crawford, 2014; Tresca, 2011). The six ability scores in every edition are: constitution, charisma, dexterity, intelligence, strength and wisdom (Allston, 1991; Cook, 1989; Cook, Tweet & Williams, 2003; Gygax & Arneson, 1974; Gygax, 1978; Heinsoo, Collins & Wyatt, 2008; Holmes,

1977; Mearls & Crawford, 2014c; Mentzer, 1983; Moldvay, 1981). Dice are frequently used to determine the outcome of social interactions, combat, casting spells, and the use of character abilities. An eclectic range of dice are used: twenty-sided dice [d20], twelve-sided dice [d12], ten-sided dice [d10], eight-sided dice [d8], six-sided dice [d6], and a four-sided dice [d4]. Rolling two ten-sided dice simultaneously can generate percentages [d100] (Mearls & Crawford, 2014c). Unlike conventional games, *D&D* has no clear winners or losers (Cook, 1989; Ewalt, 2013). The game tends to be a cooperative affair between the players, while the DM ideally maintains a position of neutrality (Mearls & Crawford, 2014a). *D&D* can be played for multiple hours — as a one-off adventure, or episodic adventures known as a "campaign" (Ewalt, 2013; Fine, 1983; Mearls & Crawford, 2014a). Some groups favour a storytelling bent, while others pursue exploration and combat (Tresca, 2011). Campaigns can be highly structured; others are loosely structured settings known as "sandboxes" (Bowman, 2013, pg. 15). As characters experience the fantasy world, overcome challenges, and defeat monsters, they improve in ability and amass wealth (Tresca, 2011).

A conscious choice within this thesis is situating the research within a North American context. This stance is appropriate due to the historicism associated with *Dungeons & Dragons*: both in terms of the game's inception, and its continued cultural development and impact. The remainder of this chapter will focus on some of the sociocultural factors related to the game.

2.2 1960s-1970s Culture: Sex, Drugs & Rock n Role-Playing

Culturally, *Dungeons & Dragons* emerged from mid-1960s and 1970s North America. First released in 1974, *D&D* was the collaborative progeny of two wargamers: Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax (Bowman, 2010; Peterson, 2012; Tresca, 2011). In 1972 Arneson demonstrated his *Blackmoor* game to Gygax. Impressed, Gygax convinced Arneson to send him twenty pages of campaign notes (Peterson, 2012). Implementing his *Chainmail* rules and Arneson's campaign notes, Gygax produced a manuscript for a fantasy game, eventually naming it "*Dungeons & Dragons"* (Peterson, 2012). *Dungeons & Dragons* was published by TSR — a newly formed gaming company owned by Gary Gygax, Don Kaye, and Brian Blume. Original *Dungeons & Dragons* consisted of a printed woodgrain box and three booklets entitled *Men & Magic, Monsters & Treasure* and *The Underworld & Wilderness Adventures* (Gygax & Arneson, 1974). A renaissance of fantasy during the 1960s-1970s can explain the initial popularity and cultural relevance of *D&D* (Bowman, 2010; Peterson, 2012). Concerns of political unrest, and the significantly unpopular Vietnam War, increased the reception towards fantasy and science fiction literature during the late 1960s (Franklin, 1990; Peterson, 2012). As Jon Peterson suggests "America itself had changed during the intervening decade into a much more receptive venue for an epic fantasy" (2012, p.106). Thematically, fantasy and science fiction literature enabled escapism from societal uncertainty, yet allowed spaces where fiction mirrored reality (Franklin, 1990; Furby & Hines, 2012). An obvious example during this period is the astonishing success of the mid-60s American paper-backed edition of *The Lord of the Rings*. Ballantine sold 3,000,000

paperback copies of J.R.R Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* between 1965 and 1968 (Peterson, 2012). As Peterson notes:

> *The Lord of the Rings* became a youth counterculture fad, a touchstone for anyone connected with the fanciful movements of the 1960s. As a side effect, the reading public and publishers suddenly became desperate for any literary work with a veneer of fantasy about it. (Peterson, 2012, p. 106).

Consequently, pulp fiction of the 1930s-1950s regained popularity during this era (Franklin, 1990). Pulp authors like Robert E. Howard and H.P Lovecraft had never been published in novel format during their lifetimes (Vintage Books, 2011). Novelisation of these works meant new audiences could access science fiction and fantasy that had previously descended into cultural obscurity. These pulp tales were allegorically reflective of North American culture, and were thus relatable to American audiences (Tresca, 2011). The influence of "J.R.R Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, and other fantasy writers" is evident in *Chainmail: Rules for Medieval Miniatures* — a miniatures wargame— in which participants are encouraged to "refight the epic struggles" depicted in fantasy works (Gygax & Perren, 1975, pg. 28). Gygax and Perren's *Chainmail* supplement, Arnseon's *Blackmoor*, and Dave Wesley's *Braunstein* games have commonly been cited as the progenitors of *Dungeons & Dragons* (Bowman, 2010; Peterson, 2012). Kevin Moist argues "many of the defining issues wrestled with by the 1960s counterculture persist in our postmodern present in varied, sometimes even more pronounced, forms" (2010, pg 1242). Pop-cultural music, film, fashion, literature, and art of the 1960s continue to be contemporaneously interesting (Moist, 2010). Themes of the 1960s reflect postmodern and current contexts — mirroring present issues, beheld through nascent perspectives (Moist, 2010). *Dungeons & Dragons* fits this criterion, continuing to be both popular and culturally relevant due to prevailing interest in fantasy and role-playing games.

2.3 The Millennium and Satanic Panic

As the millennium approached, media reflected concerns of what the 21st century would bring — heightening fears of societal degradation (Spooner, 2006). Social anxieties were not unique to the final moment of the 20th century, but were observable between the late-1970s-1990s. Simultaneously, Satanic scare became prevalent within North American culture; new religious movements were frequently described as "cults" and defined "participants as misguided, mentally unfit or evil…viewed by some as threats to the moral fabric of society and to family life" (Reichert & Richardson, 2012, pg. 47-48). The notion that *D&D* could be a cultural "threat" was evident on September 15, 1985 when Gary Gygax appeared on the television programme "60 Minutes" (CBS, 1985). A concerned mother named Patricia Pulling publically blamed *D&D* for her son Irving's suicide, after discovering his secret involvement with the game. Pulling believed Irving had been placed under a "curse" (CBS, 1985). Forming "Bothered About Dungeons and

Dragons" in 1983, Pulling campaigned through various conservative Christian and mainstream media outlets (BBC, 2014; Ewalt, 2013). As Catherine Spooner contends, the termination of a century or millennium represents an apocalyptic time, where "preoccupation with the darker side of human life – death, crime, insanity, perversion, obsessive desire, the supernatural and the occult" inevitably climaxes (2006, pg. 21). Almost uncannily, certain audiences echoed these preoccupations, believing *Dungeons & Dragons* to utilise:

> demonology, witchcraft, voodoo, murder, rape, blasphemy, suicide, assassination, insanity, sex perversion, homosexuality, prostitution, satanic type rituals, gambling, barbarism, cannibalism, sadism, desecration, demon summoning, necromantics, divination and other teachings. (BBC, 2014).

In 1979 a student named James Dallas Egbert III was reported missing, suspected of enacting a real-life *D&D* game in steam tunnels beneath Michigan State University campus (Ewalt, 2013). *D&D* made national headlines as news outlets claimed linkages between the game and cult-like behaviours (Ewalt, 2013). Soon after, Egbert was discovered alive, but a year later he committed suicide (Peterson, 2012). The suicide, along with his initial disappearance was blamed on *Dungeons & Dragons,* leaving a wake of concerned parents, and negative publicity for TSR (Ewalt, 2013; Fine, 1983). In *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend* Jeffrey Victor describes the process of rumour becoming legend:

> First, isolated local rumor stories need to find a channel to reach a broad, mass audience. These stories need to become "marketable" for the mass media. (Victor, 1993, p. 8).

This pattern was observable in both the Egbert case, and in the "60 Minutes" story of Irving Pulling. National publicity engendered by mass media coverage, embedded *Dungeons & Dragons* as a cult-like phenomenon in the cultural psyche of America. As Jon Peterson describes:

> The story of Egbert vanished from the newspapers — but the culpability of *Dungeons & Dragons* was not simultaneously effaced from the popular imagination. The myth of the game that drove kids insane was simply more powerful than the dull reality that so much hype and furor derived from a private investigator's misguided hunch. The story decoupled itself from James Dallas Egbert and floated in the cultural imagination, ready to attach itself to other protagonists. (2012, p.600).

National response towards *D&D* became representative of moral panic and Satanic scare (Reichert & Richardson; Victor, 1993). Mainstream audiences formulated their opinions based on media angling, resulting in a long-term stigma associated with the game (BBC, 2014; Ewalt, 2013). *Dungeons & Dragons* became an effective scapegoat to blame for larger socio-cultural concerns — including perceived cult-like activities (Peterson, 2012). Pre-millennial concerns and

panics sifted into contemporary contexts, metaphorically representative of other themes and issues broached in current media. As "legacies of the past and its burdens on the present" (Spooner, 2006, pg. 8) continue to interact and affect current perceptions of *Dungeons & Dragons* within the 21st century, these backgrounds are useful to acknowledge. The following section discusses the post-2000 climate of North America, along with its ongoing cultural scares.

2.4 Post-2000 North America and Fantasy Media

Significant socio-cultural upheavals transpired in the 2000s, as the national identity of the United States faced several potent concerns. The bombing of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001 demark a "fracture point" in the perception of the United States as "invincible" or "inviolable" (Tucker & Walton, 2012, pg. x). The events of 9/11 signify a symbolic moment where "ideologies, outlooks, and worldviews" shifted for North Americans (Tucker & Walton, 2012, pg. x). The emergence of "icons", "heroes" and "anti-heroes" can be witnessed in this symbolic moment, illustrating the turning point of this event (Tucker & Walton, 2012, pg. x-xi). Notions of the "icon" or the "hero" are a repeated motif within post-2000 *Dungeons & Dragons.* Ritual and symbolism inherent within role-playing games enable players to inhabit heroic spaces (Bowman, 2010). These practices imbue a "heroic" role upon the player, endowing them with autonomy and power to dispose of "monsters" or encountered foes. For some, the cultural relevance of fantasy role-playing games may be appealing in a post-9/11 climate. As Balfe suggests, *D&D* settings present a disconnected and Westernised lens of "other" cultures, where their counterparts in "reality" may be significantly more complex (2004). The ability to distil protagonists into "good", "evil", "heroic", "monstrous", or "other" remain common analogues within human narratives (Bowman, 2010). Ongoing narratives of this type are therefore salient within contemporary American culture.

Within the first decade of the twenty-first century, other North American politics — such as the traumatic wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the financial crisis of 2008-2009, and the sinking standard of living — have likewise affected public consciousness (Tucker & Walton, 2012). The popularity and prevalence of fantasy tropes within mainstream media continues into the 2000s. This is evidenced in film, television (Walters, 2011) and gaming (Tresca, 2011). The popularity of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* adaptations, alongside films like *Harry Potter,* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* suggest sustained filmic captivation within contemporary media fantasies (Walters, 2011). Conversely, themes of conflict and moral ambiguity are core issues within HBO's television adaptation of *Game of Thrones* (Garcia & Antonsson, 2012). These complexities offer stark contrast to pre-eminent binaries of good and evil popularly depicted in epic fantasy (Garcia & Antonsson, 2012). Distinct moral binaries within fantasy have traditionally provided the consumer with order or a distinct sense of "right" and "wrong", contrasting often confusing realities. Media containing conflict and heightened moral complexity mirrors contemporary Western society — appearing to be useful or intriguing for consumers (Garcia & Antonsson, 2012). Mechanically and philosophically, the flexibility of *Dungeons & Dragons*

continues to allow participants the ability to negotiate issues of conflict, violence, and moral uncertainty (Shank, 2015). It is argued these gamed analogues continue to be useful for participants, assisting in escapism, cultural expression, and creating meaning.

2.5 Gaming, Digitality, the Internet and Fandom

The locus of digitality can be situated within the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Larissa Hjorth identifies the constant and prodigious rise of global gaming in the 21st century (2011). Myriad opportunities exist to play digital games — via personal computer, laptop, tablet, or phone — and the rapid accessibility of these devices have made gaming a popular pastime for the casual gamer "filling in" time, and the "hardcore" gamer for whom gaming is a lifestyle (Hjorth, 2011, pg. 4). Digital games have enjoyed widespread playability and uptake, but so too have participants been drawn to tabletop games (Woods, 2012). This has been recognised in both academic research and prevalent media commentary. Stewart Woods attributes this to the Internet, where gamers can post on forums, websites, create fan content, and connect with like-minded fans (2012). As gaming media continues to develop and expand so too have notions of "immersion, engagement", and "distraction" (Hjorth, 2011, pg. 129). These changes are not dissimilar to the escapist nature of other entertainment mediums, nor is it dissimilar to evolving *D&D* practices.

Gaming need not be a discrete binate of either "digital" or "tabletop"; it can be hybridised. Henry Jenkins describes the 21st century as being occupied by "convergence culture" (Jenkins, 2006a). Convergence refers to technology interacting across multiple media industries, as audiences readily travel between entertainment experiences (Jenkins, 2006a). The manners of consumption — television, music, print, gaming, and the Internet — coalesce in novel ways, making one medium increasingly difficult to distinguish from another (Mandel, 2015). As modes of consumption coalesce, a culture of media multitasking occurs — as users implement various technologies simultaneously (Mandel, 2015). The manner in which the corporation and the consumer communicate has similarly evolved (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). Through Internet technologies the boundaries between the two have thinned, and the ability for the fan to communicate with the creator has necessarily shifted (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). The ethereality of these transitions alter fandom practices; fans can influence producers' decisions or perceptions due to their closer virtual proximity. Technological and relational changes within the 21st century must be noted to understand *Dungeons & Dragons* contemporarily. *D&D* has traditionally been a purely tabletop pursuit — "analogue" in nature — yet the effects of fandom practices and media convergence have resulted in unavoidable alteration and divergences.

2.6 Conclusions

This chapter has explored pertinent sociocultural currents influencing present understandings of *Dungeons & Dragons.* Factors associated with a North American experience have been identified. This study draws upon an American sample and the primary history of the game is situated within North America. Section 2.1 began by explaining an overview of the game. The following

section, 2.2, noticed the resurging popularity of fantasy literature in the 1960s and 1970s, indicating its impact on the formation and receptions towards *D&D.* It has been argued these themes remain interesting from a pop-cultural vantage, relevant to this current moment. Section 2.3 identified the impacts of Satanic and moral panic. Representative of millennial populace fears, these concerns continue to infiltrate current perceptions of *D&D.* The focal point of section 2.4 concentrated on post-2000 North American. As populations faced the shock of 9/11 and other political aftermaths — a harbinger of national uncertainly — millennial fears became transplanted into post-2000 America. Society has embraced a game in which clear divisions of "hero" and "monster" could be enacted in an otherwise complex reality. Contemporary mainstream media maintains an interest and appetite for fantasy, remonstrated through popular filmic interpretations of *The Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter,* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.* Although clear binaries of "good" and "evil" remain popular, there is an observable interest in moral ambiguity and conflict, represented in other fantasy media like *Game of Thrones.* Thus, *Dungeons & Dragons* becomes a viable option for moral or narrative exploration. Finally, section 2.5 suggested the entrenchment of technology and digitality within modern society, resulting in a new proximity between creator and consumer. This has resulted in the prevalence of fan-culture, convergence, and the adoption of widespread gaming, for the casual and the "hardcore" gamer alike. These dynamics will be discussed further in later chapters. Chapter 3 provides a literature review, examining themes and concepts relevant to this study, and identifying gaps in current research.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Whistling, Rastus prowled the streets of the noble's district. He did not belong here, but he was convincing. Surreptitiously, he spied through manor windows, eavesdropped on conversations, and attempted to get a wide range of information. He spent a few hours by an eminent golden fountain, but his reconnaissance yielded nothing of interest: just petty nobles going about their petty lives.

3.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews themes and scholarship pertinent to the macro research topic of *Dungeons & Dragons.* While not exhaustive, this chapter offers appraisal of existing and select research, determining its applicability to this current work. Research gaps are identified and pursued in subsequent chapters. Presenting and evaluating existing research will assist in later discussion, satisfying the two research questions of this thesis: "How important is the idea of community when playing *Dungeons & Dragons*?" and "What is appealing about constructing fictitious identities within the group, actualised through notions of play?" This chapter is divided into thematic sections. Section 3.1 of this chapter explores notions of "community". Section 3.2 unpacks the concept of "social identities". The following section, 3.3, describes "gaming cultures". The focus of section 3.4 is to explore evolving understandings of "fandom". Concepts pertaining to "nostalgia" are examined in section 3.5. Finally, section 3.6 outlines key considerations of "fantasy".

3.1 Community

Scholarship pertaining to tabletop role-playing games has consistently contended they occur and exist within communal and collaborative contexts (Bowman, 2010; Cover, 2010; Fine, 1983; MacKay, 2001; Peterson, 2012; Tresca, 2011; Williams, Hendricks & Winkler, 2006). While this notion is not at all disputed, much of the listed scholarship pertains to the rather broad "role-playing game" as a category, rather than to *Dungeons & Dragons* specifically. While it would be reasonable to argue *D&D* is a "role-playing game" — and for this argument to be neither a misnomer nor inaccurate — defining all manner of role-playing games in this broadest sense, and observing the extent to which communal interaction occurs within these sub-communities, is too nebulous for the purposes of this study. Thus, while *D&D* is a role-playing game, and whilst it is accepted the game takes place under generally "communal" conditions, the specificity of how greatly *D&D* participants value "community" is left largely unexplored. It is therefore reasonable within this study to initiate various inquires, so as to address these perceived academic gaps.

It would be valuable to directly ask whether *Dungeons & Dragons* participants deem "community" to be important — measuring its relevance within this study. An exploration of what "community" entails for participants would also be useful. Gary Alan Fine's *Shared Fantasy* (1983) articulately explores notions of participation and community within role-playing games.

Contemporary researchers have added to this initial body of knowledge, many of whom are participants themselves, though the focus tends to broadly encompass the wider RPG hobby rather than *D&D* exclusively (Bowman, 2010; Cover, 2010; MacKay, 2001; Tresca, 2011). Scarce academic research exists relating to the recently released 5th edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* — indicating a substantial gap in research. Further research is useful to determine how technology may be influencing or shifting contemporary conceptions of community for *Dungeons & Dragons* players. The purpose of this research will be to diminish these perceived research gaps. Inquiring into current participant conceptions of *D&D* communities is useful, particularly to gain an updated perspective. The following sections of this chapter will define a generalised understanding of "community", augmented with survey data in later chapters. This preliminary definition of "community" provides a basic notion of what is meant when "community" is referred to.

3.1.1 Community and Commonality

Defining "community" has traditionally, and continues to be, a concept open to much discussion and debate (Cohen, 1985; Hillery, 1955). Despite difficulties to concretely define "community", a recurrent understanding is that members must share common ties, values or interests (Booth, 2009; Cohen, 1985; Erickson, 1997; Piatti-Farnell, 2015). In 1955, social scientist George Hillery Jr. provided a simple definition of community:

> Community consists of persons in social interaction within a geographic area and having one or more additional common ties. (1955, p.111).

Hillery's foundational definition has been re-appropriated and restated in varying forms, inspiring subsequent definitions of community (Erickson, 1997). Although now out-dated, Hillery's definition provides a useful base for understanding community; namely the idea that "common ties" are shared by community members. The emergence, promulgation and normalisation of digital technologies — particularly the Internet — means geographical proximity is unnecessary for the occurrence of community. When the requirement of geographical proximity is removed, an updated perspective of "community" emerges — a definition considerate of Internet technologies and their effects on conceptions of community. Even within a globalised context "common ties" remain a prime requisite in the formation of community. In this regard Hillery's work continues to be valid in contemporary societies. Paul Booth (2009), along with Lorna Piatti-Farnell (2015), perceive the necessity for community members to share interests and commonalities. Going beyond mere "commonality" however deepens understandings of community. It is suggested communities must also share "values and practices" (Erickson, 1997, pg. 27). This position assists in attributing an ethical meaning-making process to community membership.

Thus far, examining the manner in which "community" is *used* linguistically has been overlooked. Rather than forming a specific academic definition of "community", Anthony Cohen

examines the usage of the word within day–to–day vernacular (1985). The motif that community members "have something in common with one another" that "distinguishes" them substantially from other members of other groups is concurrent with the definitions of community already established in this chapter (Cohen, 1985, p.12). Cohen also focuses on notions of symbolism and community boundaries, offering additional avenues of exploration not present within prior discussions of community. Piatti-Farnell supplements Cohen's observations by noticing the prominence of "social interaction" within community, as "commentaries and reactions have a transformative effect" on participants (2015, pg. 104). This notion recalls sociologist Erving Goffman's theories of the interaction order (1982)[explored in subsequent sections]. Piatti-Farnell's position is more succinct, and is applied within the context of contemporary Internet communities, proving to be more directly useful to this study.

Despite subtle differences between the scholarship discussed, it is apparent commonality is recurrent in any definition of community (Cohen, 1985; Erickson, 1997; Hillery 1955; Piatti-Farnell, 2015). This thread of discussion illuminates the idea that commonality, shared interests, values and practices are fundamentally rooted in conceptualisations of community. *Dungeons & Dragons* players share the commonality of enjoying the game, distinguishing them from other communities who do not share their enthusiasm.

3.1.2 Membership, Relationship and Hierarchy

As Web 2.0 continues to develop and evolve, the formation of group membership continues to be relevant for both offline and online communities (Woods, 2012). Whether a collective of people are located in an online sphere or congregate in person, all communities require a "form of mechanism for membership" (Booth, 2009, pg. 11). Paul Booth does not elaborate on what this form of mechanism might entail, leaving the reader to speculate (2009). Thomas Erickson proposes a similar idea, adding that "relationships" are the requisite for community membership (1997). These notions are congruous with Erving Goffman's commentaries on societal formations. According to Goffman the perspectives of an individual or group influence one's actions within a collective (Goffman, 1982). Booth and Erickson neglect to detail the inherent social complexities within membership formation, necessitating an investigation of additional literature. Etymologically the words "communication" and "community" are linked — indicating relationships evolve through communication, which eventuate in communal experiences (Chee, Vieta & Smith, 2006, pg. 160). As James Carey suggests: "communication is viewed as a process through which a shared culture is created, modified, and transformed" (1975, pg. 177). In this sense, Carey — like Chee, Vieta and Smith — believes communication to be the beginning of community and culture. For the purpose of this research it is presumed a similar occurrence eventuates with *Dungeons & Dragons* communities; that relationships and communication are at the fore of community construction — being an effective "mechanism for membership".

Within *D&D* there are clear negotiations of power — the role of the DM versus individual player autonomy (Fine, 1983). These dynamics have the potential to cause friction or dispute within a group (Fine, 1983). Correspondingly, absorbing culture is a variable process,

determinable by members' willingness to assimilate group ideologies. While some members adhere to grouped norms, others may reject or deviate from these norms (Fine, 1983). According to Fine, the acquisition of culture occurs through social interaction — though his thoughts depart from Erickson, Booth, and Carey — as he perceives culture cannot be "learnt"; instead, all we can obtain is a "*rendering* of that culture" (1983, pg. 152)[Italics in original text]. Fine elucidates the subjectivity of individual perceptions of community — implying every member's perception of a group will differ, that a culture can never truly be objectively known. Fine's conceptions of community are also concerned with group hierarchy, viewing the DM's role as powerful, authoritative and prestigious - theoretically possessing more membership power than a player might (1983). While this may have been true in the late 1970s and early 1980s when Fine's study was conducted, the relationship between DM, player, and the game's narrative focus, has shifted somewhat in its contemporary form (Tresca, 2011). That is not to say the power dynamic between player and DM is absent, for this would be fictitious — a power dynamic will always be present between DM and player — but the dynamic has been reframed and renegotiated with a pursuit towards an egalitarian or shared composition. Fine's commentaries relating to power dynamics and group hierarchy remain valid, yet are not applicable to every group.

3.1.3 Ritual and Symbolism

Group ritual and symbolism are fundamental to communal role-playing game practices (Bowman, 2010; Harviainen, 2012). Literature cited within this chapter has either overlooked or only superficially examined these factors. This section will amend this oversight, exploring the strong correlation between ritual and symbolism within community. Sarah Bowman perceives group membership occurring through shared "ritual enactment" and "rite of passage" — processes that increase social cohesion (2010, pg. 15). Rite of passage allows participants to impute group membership, and often involves transitioning between social roles or hierarchies. Role-playing games fit the criteria for modern-day ritual, as they draw on mythology and archetypal symbolism — creating social bonds through community, and allowing for co-created epic narratives to occur in the process (Bowman, 2010; Fine, 1983). Using role-playing games to create community ritual becomes relevant for social cohesion and embodying collective mythoi (Bowman, 2010; MacKay, 2001). As Western society has become increasingly fractured, secularised and globalised, the presence and practice of ritual has diminished, or become unsatisfactory to collective needs (Bowman, 2010; Corcoran & Devlin, 2007; MacKay, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Although these themes are pertinent to RPGs — and therefore *D&D* — the cited authors are rather broad with their analysis of symbolism, and appear to perceive ritual as a fairly transparent or observable behaviour.

It is instead suggested ritual is dually observable and surreptitious. Ritual and symbolism can be intuited or felt, rather than overtly recognised and practiced:

> The symbolism may be explicit as, for example, in rituals which discriminate among roles, between life and death, between stages and statuses in the life cycle, between

> gender, between generations, between the pure and the polluted. It may be explicit in the arcane fantasy of myth and totem. But much of our symbolism does not have a special vocabulary or idiomatic behaviour: it is, rather, part of the meaning which we intuitively ascribe to more instrumental and pragmatic things in ordinary use – such as words. (Cohen, 1985, p. 15).

Cohen identifies overt ritual within society, but recognises symbolism allows communities to repurpose words, infusing them with unique or subtle meaning. Communal vocabulary may contain commonly used words, albeit implemented and parsed in a way distinctive or unique to that grouping. Alternatively, a community may invent original words. Where Bowman perceives a societal decline in ritual, Cohen views ritual as an often subtle or unspoken force. Nevertheless, both can identify the existence and role of practiced ritual when concepts of community are considered. For Bowman, ritual is largely practiced; for Cohen it is felt or known in day-to-day life. Erickson acknowledges the dynamic of symbolism and ritual within collectives, although not as acutely as Bowman or Cohen. Of particular interest are "practices, procedures and symbols", and the existence of "shared history", "artefacts" and "places" described cursorily by Erickson (1997, pg. 27). Objects and locales associated with role-playing games represent shared and collective symbolism. These artefacts and places include gaming tables, dice, rulebooks, character sheets, pencils, conventions, hobby stores, and even mythical/imagined "locations" within the game. Overt symbolism, ritual, and gaming artefacts are integral to the *D&D* experience — due to iconographies associated with the game. *Dungeons & Dragons* contains ritual symbolism in a mythological, philosophical, linguistic and practiced sense; therefore both notions of ritual — overt and/or intuited — are useful.

3.2 Social Identities: Cultural and Subcultural

Notions of identity formation are frequently discussed within existing academic research pertaining to role-playing games (Bowman, 2010; Fine, 1983; Nephew, 2006; Williams, 2006). Texts pertaining to "identity" are often panoramic, discoursing interrelationship between community, culture, and identity (Carey, 1975). That is, "identity" is a manifestation inseparable from one's relationship with self and others. In a role-playing game, two discrete identities are negotiated simultaneously— one's identity in "reality", and one's assumed and constructed identity in-game (Bowman, 2010; Fine, 1983). Both "identities" are in a constant state of flux and transition: negotiated culturally, socially, or through game mechanics. Gary Alan Fine discusses the extensive presence of identification within RPGs (1983). Although remaining conceptually valid, Fine's work pre-dates the widespread emergence of the Internet. Moreover, Fine focuses on RPGs as a macro study instead of *D&D* specifically. As has been asserted already, this is a common limitation in other academic writing on similar topics (Bowman, 2010; Cover, 2010; Harviainen, 2012; Tresca, 2011). Major crossovers exist between "role-playing games" and "*D&D*", yet there are distinct differences requiring academic extrapolation.

One notable divergence is the varying degrees of narrative focus between RPG gaming formats. A Live Action Role-Play [LARP] is largely narrative-focussed, with emphasis placed on the identities players inhabit. Compare a LARP to a dungeon crawl in *D&D* where little role-playing emphasis need occur for many sessions; it *can*, but is not required. In *Shared Fantasy*, Fine analyses a range of role-playing groups through a sociological lens, concluding they are indeed cultures and subcultures in their own right (Fine, 1983). Fine introduces a term he coins "idioculture": each group holds "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs peculiar to an interacting group to which members refer and employ as a basis of further interaction" (Fine, 1983, pg. 136). Micro-cultures have their own mores, nuances and ideologies.

While Fine acknowledges the distinct cultures, subcultures, and idiocultures that role-playing game communities create and share, he is not particularly vocal about the cultural products associated with individual or collected identity. John Fiske, in juxtaposition to Fine, distinguishes products and commodities as cultural and subcultural artefacts, influencing perceptions of self:

> By wearing jeans we adopt the position of subjects within that ideology, become complicit with it, and therefore give it material expression; we "live" capitalism through its commodities, and by living it, we validate and invigorate it. Every commodity reproduces the ideology of the system that produced it: a commodity is ideology made material. (Fiske, 1989, pg. 14).

Fiske's perspective is certainly not at odds with Fine's, but he focuses on the cultural meaning associated with commoditised objects. "Jeans" may then be viewed as a cultural icon — though of course the noun "jeans" could be substituted with alternative appellations pertaining to *Dungeons & Dragons*. Gaming paraphernalia associated with *D&D* can alter a participant's gaming identity, or contribute to notions of status or credibility. According to Pierre Bourdieu, industry, capital, and ownership of commodities influence perceptions of personal status within wider society (1986). There are apparent crossovers between Fiske and Bourdieu's theorising, both of which are useful within this research. That identity, lifestyle, and culture are entwined is not novel, but following Fiske and Bourdieu's contentions it becomes apparent how a game like *D&D,* and its associated artefacts, might impact on self-perception. Consider the immersive and communal nature of the game: participants gather to negotiate fictitious identities through play, while simultaneously negotiating their social identity as a "gamer" (Fine, 1983).

Although Fiske distinguishes commodities as the embodiment and validation of culture, games can be said to fulfil a larger social purpose. Within a pop-cultural paradigm games can propel identity construction and imbue cultural meaning:

> Pop culture has a surprising way of moving back and forth between the trivial and the profound. One person's harmless waste of time might be another's bid for transcendence — and games are certainly one of the best examples of how entertainment can be far

> from simple. If enough people believe that games are meant to be mindless fun, then this is what they will become. If enough people believe that games are capable of greater things, then they will inevitably evolve and advance. (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. ix).

It is the gamer's decision determine the level of meaning they instil in their games. In turn, this informs the participant's "gamer" self. Each gamer may then directly influence the wider subculture or culture to which they belong — altering whether a game is perceived as a "mindless" pastime, or a meaningful pursuit. Salen and Zimmerman's arguments parallel Fine's. Comparatively Fine says:

> Analyzing these fantasy games provides insight into the creation of group cultures, and the way in which these group cultures transform more extensive cultural systems. When a gaming group exists over several weeks or months, this shared culture can become quite extensive and meaningful for group members. (1983, pg. 2).

Fine identifies the potential of group cultures within fantasy games to invoke change in the larger cultural systems of society. Primarily, the connection between community and identity is substantial. Anthony Cohen would agree with Fine's assessment. Dissimilarly, Cohen focuses on linkages between boundaries and identity. Boundaries indicate the beginning and end of a community, influencing the way it perceives itself — forming and informing its identity. When community boundaries are defined — whether these are consciously or subconsciously explicit — it may be perceived and compared with other communities (Cohen, 1985). Similarly two individuals can be compared with each other once personal boundaries of identity are distinguished. Community then becomes the arena in which one learns to become social or cultured (Cohen, 1985). Cohen recognises the roles of shared language and iconography, providing members with a means to communicate and form collective identity. The meaning of each icon and boundary is not a universal experience, but is based on personal interpretation (Cohen, 1985). In this way, Fine, Cohen and Fiske would agree community influences identity, and vice versa. The individual enjoys an epiphytic relationship with the wider community, as each needs the other for development and survival. The individual, however, must work within the paradigms, boundaries and understandings their community sets and instils.

The "interaction order" is what Erving Goffman theorises to be the boundaries placed on a person by themselves and by society (Goffman, 1982). Similar to Cohen, Goffman argues substantial portions of our lives are dominated by our interactions with others, and the human condition is primarily a socially situated experience. Unlike Cohen, Goffman accentuates the extent these social interactions impact the individual, extending inside their private lives. A person can be indoctrinated into society through exposure to affect, body language, expression, and the symptoms of social structures (Goffman, 1982). Goffman situates these occurrences within the space and time they occupy, or the context in which they occur. It is evident for Fine, Cohen, Goffman and Fiske that identity is manipulated and negotiated through participation,

social feedback, translating social meaning, and understanding communal boundaries. This raises the question of how important or appealing creating a fictitious identity is to *D&D* players. A subsidiary exploration would be whether these constructed identities are useful, valuable, and what benefits they offer participants. Further research may inquire whether *D&D* participants prefer to identify as player or Dungeon Master. As identity construction is such a substantial aspect of *D&D* (Fine, 1983), these considerations beg investigation to determine whether one's liminal or ephemeral identity within the game world is appealing. This may ascertain whether participants can satisfactorily change their social status through play — where in "reality" their status may be undesirable or seemingly unattainable. Provided players are willing to suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves in the game, deep identity inhabitation can occur within a role-playing game (Bowman, 2010; Fine, 1983; Harviainen, 2012). Contrariwise, it should be recognised not all gamers are drawn to role-playing games to enact an alternate identity. Exploration, adventure, or some other attraction may be equally or more important. Ergo, although role-playing game scholarship continues to be largely relevant and useful within this study, specific research into *D&D* is necessary for localised understandings — therein lies a distinct area for further research. Notions of identity are explored in later chapters.

3.3 Gaming Cultures

Gaming is widespread in globalised culture to the extent it has become a phenomenon. In 2011 McGonigal estimated half a billion people throughout the world spend at least one hour every day playing online games (as cited in Huntemann & Aslinger, 2013). Correspondingly Nunneley estimated one billion people regularly game on computers, mobile devices and consoles (as cited in Huntemann & Aslinger, 2013). Video gaming is one of the highest areas of developed new media technology (Schott & Horrell, 2000), and by 2016 it is estimated the global market will reach $81 billion US dollars (Huntemann & Aslinger, 2013). Even non-digital games accounted for $1.9 billion in the United States for the year of 2013 (Gilsdorf, 2014). Currently the gaming industry commercially rivals the motion picture industry (Woods, 2012). The world is interconnected; instantaneity has become the expectation if not the rule. Unsurprisingly, the predicted future growth of the gaming industry will focus on online delivery (Huntemann & Aslinger, 2013). Clearly gaming cultures are not an insignificant demographic — in both economic reach, and as a prominent cultural force for millions of people.

Taxonomising *Dungeons & Dragons* within "gaming culture" is necessary for defining its position in relation to other games. Stewart Woods divides the contemporary board game market into three distinct categories: traditional games, mass-market games and hobby games (2012). Traditional games have no attributed author and have evolved since their origins in antiquity. Examples include *Chess* or *Draughts*. Mass-market games are those familiar to the general public, readily accessible from most game retailers. Examples include *Monopoly, Scrabble* or *Pictionary*. Finally, hobby games are aimed at subcultural audiences and tend to be very specific in genre and execution. Examples include *The Settlers of Catan, Warhammer 40,000* or *Magic: The Gathering*.

Hobby games contain four prime sub-categories: wargames, role-playing games, collectible card games and eurogames (Woods, 2012). As *D&D* is a role-playing game, the "hobby game" is its obvious classification. Woods' systemic framework is useful for directly situating *D&D* within game studies, exacting the game's location within the broad and often-nebulous gaming universe. Categorising *D&D* within this framework identifies the game's relative proximity to digital games. A limitation of Woods's classification system is the oversight of taxonomising digital gaming. Rather, an interdisciplinary model of game studies offering an encompassing study of digital and non-digital gaming is preferred. Larissa Hjorth identifies the necessity for combined modality, as games and media continue to develop exponentially (2011). Concurrent with converging media technologies, platforms employed for gaming and the methods of play continue to rapidly evolve (Hjorth, 2011). Hjorth's position is not uncommon, as other authors have attested a similar perception (Eskelinen, 2005; Frasca, 1999; Jarvinen, 2009; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). A position inclusive of evolving gaming practices offers greater opportunity to distinguish between wide varieties of games. Internet-based "tabletop" gaming is an emergent form of gaming, validating further research into these gamed practices. Roll20, Google+ Hangouts, or Skype allow participants disjointed by geographical proximity to connect and play tabletop games, where previously this was not convenient or possible. These shifts, and their impact on *Dungeons & Dragons*, are not widely discussed within academic research.

Subsisting with converging technologies are the effects of cultural globalisation. Bryant Johnson refers to the "semipermeable" cultural barriers that have existed throughout pre-digital history (2013). Historically, cultural absorption necessitated literal travel and journeying by recipient societies. Various political, legal, linguistic, and financial obstacles prevented the spread of new ideas and commodities (Johnson, 2013). With the degradation of firm cultural barriers, mediating the flow of information becomes problematic — if not impossible (Johnson, 2013). Now, the flow of commodities — often of an ephemeral nature — are readily dispersed throughout any culture and country with accessibility to the Internet. Moreover, consumers are becoming increasingly comfortable with digital sales. Gaming company Paradox Interactive reported 90% of their revenue originated from digital sales (Johnson, 2013). Acquiring board games foreign to North America was once an expensive and complicated affair. Gaming websites now bring visibility to new games through "word-of-type" (Johnson, 2013, pg.140). This assertion, while valid in the context of this study, does not take into account the still-subcultural element of board gaming, compared with ubiquitous digital gaming.

Stewart Woods (2012), like Johnson, acknowledges digital gaming culture, but is forthright many audiences now perceive board games to be an anachronism. Woods lauds the sociability of tabletop games, positing at the heart of enjoyment is player interaction; the ability to affect others through gameplay is fun and dynamic (Woods, 2012). Similar interactive possibilities exist within Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games [MMORPG]. McQuade, Gentry and Colt suggest key features of MMORPGs are the character interactions and teamwork required for overcoming challenges — to gain rewards and progress within the game (2012). Thousands of players can simultaneously join servers and share their gaming experiences in

concert. Michael Tresca extrapolates two unique features of MMORPGs: an explorable synthetic world, and the creation of a community to which one may belong (2011). Players enter a "universe" where teamwork and communication — often between complete strangers — is essential for overcoming challenges. Parties of players are formed, assisting one another to advance in the game (Tresca, 2011). Compared with tabletop RPGs, party sizes are often larger in MMORPGs with 12 or more players not being uncommon (Tresca, 2011).

These considerations are relevant, though they do not address the varying demographics associated with gaming. One academically recurrent relationship is the interplay between gender and gaming. A popular conclusion in gaming studies indicates females do not play games to the same extent as males (Carr, 2005; Schott & Horrell, 2000). Within *D&D,* the "female gamer" has traditionally been a minority (Fine, 1983; Peterson, 2012). While theorists, educators, and game designers have viewed this incongruity through the lens of biologically gendered preference, this is not an adequate explanation (Carr, 2005). Diane Carr does not believe "gender alone is a reliable predictor of gaming habits" (2005, p. 465). This position broadens the scope for elucidating female participation within gaming culture. While Carr raises these concerns, she does not examine the issue specifically in relation to *Dungeons & Dragons.* Last year a short video documentary was published online exploring gender imbalances within *Dungeons & Dragons* (Jacobson, 2014). A major theme of the film inferred enjoyment is a conditioned construction rather than anything inherently biological (Jacobson, 2014). This position essentially agrees with Carr's premise. In *Playing at the World* Jon Peterson explores the history of female participation within *D&D* (2012). Role-playing games evolved from the niche-like subcultural status of the wargaming hobby — a scene dominated by a primarily male audience. According to Peterson this eventuated in smaller number of female participants (Peterson, 2012). Diane Carr appears to offer assent with Peterson's conclusions, saying games "draw on genres and imagery long associated with masculinity within popular culture, such as war", as games are often made, marketed, and sold to cater to a male audience (Carr, 2005, p. 467). Gareth Schott and Kirsty Horrell suggest males are posited as gaming "experts", disempowering female participants and reinforcing a spectator role for the "female gamer" (2000).

Complementary to discussions of gender is the concept of stereotyping and labelling based on gaming activities. Various labels and appellations have been attributed to *D&D* and those who participate. The game has been described as "bizarre", "Satanic", and an "occult" pastime (Peterson, 2012, pg. 597-602). Those who play have been labelled "nerds", "weirdos", "criminals" (Ewalt, 2013, p.26), "rebellious", and cultists (Peterson, 2012, pg. 597-602). The term "tabletop grognard" has become representative of a certain niche of *Dungeons & Dragons* players (Tan & Mitgutsch, 2013). The term "grognard" has Napoleonic roots, referring to the veterans of war who had served with Napoleon long enough to not fear rebuttal or retribution for their grumbling (Ewalt, 2013; Peterson, 2012). The term has now become colloquial for "old school" *Dungeons & Dragons* players. Acknowledging these signifiers and the associated impact on *D&D* participants is useful. In subsequent chapters, stigmas and labels experienced by *D&D* participants will be explored further.

3.4 Fandom

In a contemporary study of *Dungeons & Dragons* it is worth recognising the digital revolution, which has effectively reconfigured communicative relationships "blurring the lines between producers and consumers" (Pearson, 2010, p. 84). This aligns with Alvin Toffler's proposed "prosumer", which represents the changing economic relationship between those who produce and those who consume (1980, pg. 300). Online measures of communicating have expedited the pathways for fans to interact with powerful corporations, changing the fabric of cultural production (Pearson, 2010). Henry Jenkins' concept of media convergence encapsulates the production process between fan and industry.

> Fans are central to how culture operates. The concept of the active audience, so controversial two decades ago, is now taken for granted by everyone involved in and around the media industry. (Jenkins, 2006a, p.1).

Evolving fan culture is relevant to the relationship between the *Dungeons & Dragons* brand and the consumer. According to Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) greater interactivity between producer and fan can result in a preferable model of industry. Sharing ideas, and "remixing" has become common practice among fandom, as hybridity becomes the norm for cultural products (Johnson, 2013). This is evident in the case of the "produser" — a term coined by Axel Bruns to describe fans who are simultaneously producers and users (Bruns, 2006). One critique of the "produser" questions its actual prevalence among the average user (Bird, 2011). In the case of *Dungeons & Dragons* however, the term is largely applicable, as fandom plays an extensive role in the creation of products, and the interactivity between producer and user.

Within *D&D* fandom: participants are encouraged to modify the game to suit their own purposes (Gygax & Arneson, 2013a; Mearls & Crawford, 2014a; Peterson, 2012). In the early 2000s *D&D* publisher Wizards of the Coast created a document titled the "Open Gaming License" [OGL] (2004). The OGL encouraged community members, fans, and small developers to legally create their own *D&D* products, resulting in an explosion of new content (Tresca, 2011). Due to the OGL, various *D&D*-related games and communities emerged that otherwise may have not legally existed. Examples include *Astonishing Swordsmen & Sorcerers of Hyperborea, Basic Fantasy Role-Playing Game, BLUEHOLME, Castles & Crusades, Dark Dungeons, Lamentations of the Flame Princess, Labyrinth Lord, OSRIC, Pathfinder, Swords & Wizardry,* and *13th Age* (Blackball, 2015; Bulmahn, 2009; Finch, 2011; Gonnerman, 2014; Heinsoo & Tweet, 2013; Marshall, 2006; Proctor, 2007; Raggi, 2013; Talanian, 2012; Thomas, 2015; Troll Lord Games, 2013). A similar relationship between fan and producer eventuated during the creation of 5th edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, when "over 175,000 fans" assisted with playtesting (Mearls & Crawford, 2014, pg.2). In a very real sense, game development becomes a collaborative and consultative exercise

between producer and fan. These *D&D* "official" and grassroots communities, require further academic research.

Jenkins refers to the interaction between consumer and fan as "the meeting point between transmedia commercial culture and a grassroots participatory culture" (2012, pg. 23). These interactions tell us "something about how we produce and engage with entertainment media in a networked culture" (Jenkins, 2012, pg. 23). The "Twittersphere" is a digital space, which can frequently predict the commercial successes or failures of a cultural product, due to the observable passion of the associated fandom (Jenkins, 2012). During the development of 5th edition *D&D*, this author was able to contact Mike Mearls — one of the lead designers — via Twitter with questions about the upcoming game. The questions were publicly visible to thousands of people, and Mearls could respond directly to the questions. Therefore, Jenkins's notions of fandom have direct experiential relevance to this study. A similar sentiment is echoed by Stewart Woods, who contends:

> For some people…board games are far from being redundant. To them they are a hobby, a passion, even an obsession. (Woods, 2012, p. 5).

Bruns, Jenkins, and Woods perceive the perpetuation of the hobby to be the hands of the fans. There are several noticeable research gaps relating to fandom and *D&D*. The edition preferences of *D&D* fans appear to be largely unexplored — certainly not recently. Explanations of why certain editions are preferred by fans, and information on which editions have been consistently enjoyed and played, will be explored in following chapters.

3.5 Nostalgia

The term "nostalgia" stems from the Greek words *nostos* — a return home; and *algos* — pain or yearning (Margalit, 2011). In a literal sense the term nostalgia represented a strong, unfulfilled desire to return home, or put simply: homesickness (Margalit, 2011). Contemporaneously, nostalgia refers to idealisation of the past, and the inaccessibility of re-experiencing the past (Margalit, 2011). According to Margalit, "returning home" is "bound to fail" as the "wanderer has been changed and the home has been changed" (Margalit, 2011, p. 272). In this sense, nostalgia represents the longing to return to an unrecoverable past. This notion retains similarities to the description presented in Amy Holdsworth's *Television Memory and Nostalgia*:

> As a form of engagement, nostalgia is more about a desire to remember, not to re-experience; to recall not to recover. My own understanding of nostalgia…is borne from Jean Pickering's notion of nostalgia as a "leisure activity". (2011, pg. 102).

Although Holdsworth discusses nostalgia through the lens[1] of filmic interpretation, her sentiment has application in the context of this thesis. Holdsworth describes the pursuit of nostalgia during times of "leisure" or when reflecting on the past. There appears to be intrinsic uncertainty in knowing whether remembrances will remain, or whether current reality will differ from memory. The pursuit of nostalgic experience for *D&D* players is very much that of a "leisure activity", both figuratively and literally. A player may re-purchase sold or lost *Dungeons & Dragons* books, or dig their musty copies from storage to "remember" and "recall" the visual and kinaesthetic memories associated with the rulebooks, dice and supplements. As *D&D* is experiential in nature, many nostalgic recollections and pursuits of the game will be attempts to "re-experience", "recover", and re-create those feelings and experiences of youth. From this angle Holdsworth's perspective is incomplete, as she suggests nostalgia is "not to re-experience".

Gillespie and Crouse would disagree with this position, as the essence of their study is situated with the re-experiencing of nostalgic iconography (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012). Fredric Jameson offers a differing theory on nostalgia. Jameson describes the "damaged existence" of modern society as a recurrent philosophical theme. Damaging occurs through alienating and dehumanising elements of contemporary life. Stemming from one's damaged existence comes the "dream of wholeness" (Jameson, 1969, pg. 53). Jameson views a person's memories and experiences to be socially conditioned — reliant on recurrences, and likeness of events, which have cultural origins. For Jameson the notion of familiarity and repetition contains "haunting significance" as society changes or "decays" (Jameson, 1969, p. 55). As the past and present continue to diverge, there is an attempt to reconcile the two, perpetuating a comparative activity of a moral and ethical nature. Unlike Holdsworth, Jameson takes into account the experiential nature nostalgia, but recognises the futility of attempts to recover and reconcile the "wholeness" of youth.

Nostalgic study is intrinsically complex given the idealistic, romantic, and often fictitious portrayal of the past (Judy, 2004; Moran, 2002; Scanlan, 2004; Stewart, 1993). Susan Stewart, writing on nostalgia, says:

> Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind and before that experience. Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack. Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality. (Stewart, 1993, pg. 23).

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[1] Forgive the pun.

When considering the pop-cultural phenomena of *Dungeons & Dragons*, Stewart's musings highlight the extent to which *D&D* products have become artefacts of nostalgic memory — including the cartoon, action figures, rulebooks, miniatures, dice, and even clothing. According to Joe Moran a "nostalgia mode" is created by dominant cultural practices, commodifying the consoling myth of nostalgic memory. Heritage industries profit from the "nostalgia mode" — toy manufacturers, publishers, and the media (Moran, 2002, pg. 156). Their investment is in mythologies and themes of childhood "purity" and "innocence", weaving a snapshot of the "self-contained, immutable and secure past" that "sidesteps contemporary problems and smooths over the realities of historical conflict'"(Moran, 2002, p. 156). Cultural artefacts, including books, clothes, tourist sites, photographs, and other consumer products, have an interacting relationship with discourses of childhood and nostalgia (Moran, 2002).

Similar nostalgic discourse appears in Gillespie and Crouse's work. Gillespie and Crouse discuss the Old School Renaissance [OSR], a community of gamers emerging from *D&D* fandom that laud pre-2000 editions of the game, with an intent to emulate and develop the aesthetic of these prior editions — creating unique products in the process (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012). Besides Gillespie and Crouse's analysis, there is minimal research on the role of nostalgia in understanding *D&D* practices, namely regarding notions of community and identity. This leaves ample area for further exploration, and raises some fundamental questions regarding nostalgia. Ascertaining whether participants observe a nostalgic impact on their gaming practices would be useful. Knowing how nostalgic memory affects gaming experiences is another logical pathway to pursue, and determining whether this alters or influences participant perceptions of edition choice. These two considerations may correlate to the amount of time a participant has been playing the game — another issue worth exploring. Given current movements like the OSR, which are situated partially within remembered contexts, the distinct parallels between the work of Moran, Stewart, and Gillespie and Crouse remain particularly applicable to this current work.

3.6 Fantasy

Defining "fantasy" precisely remains problematic, as "genre" is a mutable concept. Jennifer Cover describes genre "not [as] stable forms, but living entities that change over time. They spawn new genres. They die out. They shift in purpose and in form" (Cover, 2010, pg. 39). Instead, the *purpose* of fantasy is easier to determine. Fantasy has been explained according to the "vision" and psychological comfort it affords the consumer, and its ability to offer insight into the human condition (Bowman, 2010; Lochead, 2013; Plank & Alpers, 1978). Anne Lochead writes:

> Furthermore, by refusing to be tethered to observable realities, the fantasy genre has a unique function of enabling us to see from a fresh perspective and to see further. Through the lens of the imaginative unreal, the real world gains a sharper focus enabling us to perceive realities to which we were previously blind. (2013, pg. 3).

Comparatively, Jasmina Kallay marries ideologies of "narrative" and "gameplay", exploring genre through this perspective (2010). Kallay suggests games and stories contain psychotherapeutic elements, an idea iterated by Sarah Bowman (2010). In contrast, Bowman perceives fantastic interplay between fantastic Jungian archetypes and role-playing gaming:

> Since their inception in the early seventies, RPGs have emphasized three major generic themes: fantasy, science fiction, and horror. Each of these genres activates particularly powerful aspects of the human psyche. Fantasy taps into the deep well of the collective unconscious, calling forth the age-old archetypes and myths inherent in ancient storytelling practices. The content of fantasy will always find relevance to human beings because these mythological symbols represent, in Erich Neumann's terms, the three most important and eternal threshold experiences of human existence: the process of birth, maturation, and death. Science fiction offers an exploration of the relationship between human beings and technology in an age of increasing reliance on machines, Horror allows people to confront the monstrous, both internally and externally. Thus, the history of role-playing games with regard to thematic popularity reflects both universal aspects of the human psyche and culturally specific ones. (Bowman, 2010, pp. 22-23).

Role-playing games comprise of fluid genre shifting, not being fastened to any resolute notion of genre or trope: not unlike the nature of fantasy itself. The wider fantasy milieu appears to be one of transience and vision (Plank & Alpers, 19878). In *Dungeons & Dragons* as players negotiate the laws of fictional multiverses, encounter monsters of both benevolent and malign natures, and engage with fantasy narratives, the player is dislocated from "reality" and situated elsewhere. The "elsewhere" enables players to shed or renegotiate fixed identity during gameplay — returning either changed in some way, or at the very least, with a temporal experience of other possibilities. Gary Alan Fine seems to share a similar perspective to Lochead and Bowman; that fantasy holds seemingly infinite possibilities or perspectives for the consumer (Fine, 1983). The only limitations Fine cites within fantasy role-playing games are the limitations of a player's creativity and imagination. Fine concedes this notion is illusory however, as the fantasy game must still dwell within the confines of the collective imagined cultural boundaries of the created worlds the player's inhabit (Fine, 1983):

> Since these games involve fantasy — content divorced from everyday experience — it might be assumed that *anything* is possible within a cultural system. Since fantasy is the free play of a creative imagination, the limits of fantasy should be as broad as the limits of one's mind. This is not the case, as each fantasy world is a fairly tight transformation by the players of their mundane, shared realities. While players can, in theory, create anything, they in fact create only those things that are engrossing and emotionally satisfying. (Fine, 1983, p.3).

As was discussed in the previous chapter, *Dungeons & Dragons* evolved from Gygax and Arneson's personal fantasy interests, and the proliferation of *The Lord of the Rings* throughout North American culture in the 1960s and 1970s (Bowman, 2010; Peterson, 2012; Tresca, 2011). Popular culture fantasy has evolved from a largely Tolkien-centric paradigm to amalgamate many digital gaming conventions that did not exist in the 1960s and 1970s (Tresca, 2011). *D&D* draws on a breadth of fantasy inspiration, effectively becoming a pastiche, or even disputably a genre of fantasy in its own right. Early authors of inspiration for Gygax and Arneson were Poul Anderson, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Lin Carter, de Camp & Pratt, Robert E. Howard, Lord Dunsany, Fritz Lieber, H.P Lovecraft, Michael Moorcock, J.R.R Tolkien and Jack Vance (Gygax & Arneson, 1974; Gygax, 1979). The latest edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* includes Gygax's original "Inspirational Reading" list (Gygax, 1979, pg. 224), while adding newer literary inspirations, including Terry Brooks, Tracy Hickman & Margaret Weis, George Martin and R.A Salvatore (Mearls & Crawford, 2014c). The current 5th edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* has been self-described as a "role-playing game…about storytelling in worlds of swords and sorcery" that "begin with a foundation of medieval fantasy" (Mearls & Crawford, 2014c, pg. 5).

It is not disputed *Dungeons & Dragons* involves fantastic elements, but it does pose the question whether existing research can adequately explain participant experiences and constructions of fantasy within *D&D*. This is doubly valid when considering the sheer variety of "fantasy" across medias, ranging from White Wolf's *World of Darkness* RPG games to Stephanie Meyers' depiction of vampires and werewolves in the *Twilight* series; to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and George Martin's *A Game of Thrones* in novelised or filmic form; and whether *Star Wars* can be taxonomised as "fantasy" in a traditional sense, or whether it is now distinctly and utterly "science fiction". With innumerable variations of fantasy literature, ascertaining the nature of *D&D* fantasy is useful, particularly to determine how participants perceive it. The evolution of the former has been addressed (Bowman, 2010; Cover, 2011; Tresca, 2011, Peterson, 2012), while the latter remains debatable and subjective to player preferences and experiences, though determinable using analytical frameworks. Existing scholarship enables a vision of what "fantasy" may offer or allow to participants, but a significant onus remains to investigate the notions of *D&D* fantasy further. Inquiring into the fixture or liminality of *D&D* fantasy will illumine its bounds and freedoms, adding to existing scholarship.

3.7 Conclusions

This chapter has presented various themes and motifs applicable to this research project. Prevailing themes were: community, social identities, gaming culture, fandom, nostalgia, and fantasy. Besides discussing a range of scholarly perspectives, the validity and applicability of these theories have been ascertained in light of this research topic. Various research gaps have been identified, with suggestion that further research can assist with providing new insights. The next chapter, Chapter 4, outlines the research methodology used within this thesis.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To find a prize worthy of his attention, Rastus required some insider information. At his inn of choice — the Golden Pes — he ordered a flagon of mead and waited. Eventually a portly man approached. "Rastus you rogue! What can I do ye for?" The discussion was not elongated, but a suitable method revealed itself through their dialogue. He was certain he would find the information he sought.

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodologies employed in this thesis. An interdisciplinary approach has been chosen to best address two guiding questions: "How important is the idea of community when playing *Dungeons & Dragons*?" and "What is appealing about constructing fictitious identities within the group, actualised through notions of play?" Section 4.1 describes the methodology used within this research, and the rationale for why these methods have been chosen. Section 4.2 outlines the research design. Finally, section 4.3 provides a conclusion.

4.1 Methodology

Research typically appeals to the "search for better knowledge" (Phophalia, 2010, pg. 1). To "better knowledge" of *Dungeons & Dragons,* an interdisciplinary research approach has been selected. As Klaus Krippendorff suggests, "*methodology* is not a value in itself. The purpose of methodology is to…plan and examine critically the logic, composition, and protocols of research methods; to evaluate the performance of individual techniques; and to estimate the likelihood of particular research designs to contribute to knowledge" (2013, pg. 5)[Italics in original text]. After critically evaluating different research methods, a mixed methodology has been implemented — combining a quantitative and qualitative approach. This decision is cognisant and purposeful. Gathering well-rounded data and undertaking comprehensive analysis aims to further the body of knowledge pertaining to *D&D,* accurately attending to the research questions guiding this thesis. Nicholas Walliman has described the validity and purpose of a mixed methodology in its ability to gather "hard" data of an empirical nature, juxtaposing this with subjective and "human" participant experiences (2011, pg. 174). Walliman's rationale mirrors the research intentions of this project. Using a single methodology would have been counterproductive within this research, especially due to the narrative prominence and experiential nature of *Dungeons & Dragons* (Cover, 2010; Fine, 1983). Therefore, a mixed methodology is most suited. Qualitative research is used to accurately reflect participatory experiences, while quantitative research assists with identifying numerical and thematic patterns.

Quantitative research "has the ability to measure or quantify phenomena", analysing this "numerically" (Sahu, 2013, pg. 7). The accuracy of this methodology requires a precise data collection process (Sahu, 2013). The Internet survey has been designed to include quantitative

elements — using a statistical survey format. Numerical analysis has provided empirical data; namely percentage-based trends, and binary yes/no answers. This approach assists in eliciting participatory patterns and gaining statistical insights. In contrast, qualitative research involves observing human behaviours, discovering motivation and feelings, and attempting to discern insights into the psychology of participants (Sahu, 2013). A qualitative methodology is clearly useful in this research; the sample is comprised of a distinct sociological subculture — the intention is observation. Qualitative research has enabled participant stories and experiences to come to the fore within this research. These experiences have been compared with existing anecdotal data and research. Although some social scientists associate a superficiality or inaccuracy to qualitative research, it is very useful for ascertaining participants' subjective experiences (Fine, 1983), a core interest of this thesis.

Combining these two approaches forms the basis for the content analysis. Krippendorff refers to the process of content analysis as analysing "texts in the contexts of their uses" which distinguishes them from other methods (2013, pg. xii). Krippendorff suggests this methodology is nuanced due to its ability to coax symbolic and thematic meanings (2013). Content analysis is suitable within this research to extract observable themes. Participant survey responses have been coded via key words — catalogued according to semantic, contextual, and parsed associations. Key words have been tabulated and core themes identified. These themes influence the content of the analysis chapters, although full or excerpted quotations are sometimes reproduced in these discussions. Similarly, the quantitative data supplements the analysis chapters, providing firm statistical contexts. Coded keywords and themes, identified within the survey data, are produced in section 4.2 below.

4.2 Research Design

Internet survey participants were gathered from a North American sample. This was due to the traditional socio-cultural contexts related to *Dungeons & Dragons.* Drawing upon a global sample would have exceeded the strictures of this project. Participants were required to be 18 years or older, identify as North American, and play *D&D*. Thirty-one questions were posed in the survey pertaining to predetermined themes. The themes emerged from existing academic research, the literature review, and the context chapter. They were: community, identity, nostalgia, future directions of the game, participant ages, the length of time playing, participant edition preferences, the effects of *D&D* on the individual, comfort levels within gaming groups, and querying the appeal of *D&D.* The survey comprised both quantitative and qualitative questions. Some questions were open-ended with room for participants to make comments, while others were multi-choice, or had strict parameters often resulting in binary or numerical answers. A total of 51 participants contributed to the survey, which ran on Survey Monkey between 1.30pm-7.30pm, September 23, 2014. Before the survey was activated, it was presumed an entire week would be required to receive a full quota of 50 participants. Instead this was achieved within six

hours. Anomalously, Survey Monkey deactivated the survey after 51 participants had completed it, rather than the programmed quota of 50.

The sample was selected from three prominent *Dungeons & Dragons*-related forums: *Dragonsfoot* (http://www.dragonsfoot.org/forums/), *Enworld* (http://www.enworld.org/forum/forum.php), and *Wizards of the Coast* (http://community.wizards.com/forums/61981). A thread was created on each forum inviting members to participate in the survey, with an external link provided. A conscious rationale dictated using three specific forums. The Wizards of the Coast forum was selected because it is the official *D&D* forum. Wizards of the Coast owns the current intellectual property for *D&D*, therefore it was assumed the audience would enjoy recent editions of the game. Dragonsfoot was chosen because it caters to primarily pre-2000 editions of *D&D*. Enworld was selected as a middle ground: some members play older editions, while some play newer. The intention was to enlist an audience representative of the wider *D&D* community.

There were possible drawbacks to this research design. The sample was required to be North American and adults. The sample size was limited to 50 participants due to the constraints of a master's thesis. Clearly a larger sample would be more representative of wider *D&D* participation practices. Concerns of confidentiality were minimal as the survey was anonymous and no identifying information was gathered. It should be acknowledged participants could have lied about their age, their nationality, or about being *D&D* players. Despite these drawbacks, the sample of 51 participants has provided ample data for this project. Survey data was coded using thematic content analysis. Four main themes emerged: entertainment, fantasy, community, and editions [of *D&D*]. These four themes guide the discussions in the analysis chapter, and relate directly to the two research questions of this thesis. The coded key words and four themes are represented in the table below:

Table 4.1: Core Survey Themes

Theme	Keywords
1. Entertainment	Adventure, amused, appealing, atmosphere, audience, books, boring, campaign, care free, child, childhood, communal, creative, curiosity, descriptive, designing dungeons, dice, enjoyment, enrich, entertaining, exciting, experiences, express, feel, fondness, free time, friendship, fun, gaming, gaming store, good moments, goofy, happier, hobby, identify, impact, inspire, interested, investment, jokes, kid, maps, media, memories, moments, money, nice, niche, nostalgia, online, painting minis [miniatures] PbP [play by post], play, popular, positive, possessions, problem-solving, reading, recapture youth, rewarding, role-playing, relax, sandbox, scenarios, silly, slow, social, storytelling, stress reliever, rolling dice, tabletop, thrill, valuable, victory, worthwhile, writing, younger.
2. Fantasy	Adult context, adventure, artwork, atmosphere, authors, autonomy, books, building, characters, charm, conjures, control, conquer, cool settings, creativity, cultures, depth, descriptive, endless variety, enjoyable, environment, epic, escapism, evolution, explore [their character and themselves], fairy tales, fantastic, fantasies, fiction, folklore, flavour, flexibility, freedom, game world, gaming, grim reality, healthy, history, imaginative, immersing, improvisational, innocent, kill dragons, limitless possibilities, literature, living and breathing world, loot, lore, magical, make believe, maps, meaningful, media, monsters, milieu, mythology, nostalgia, no

	restrictions, open ended, organized imagination, outlet, owl bears, progression, retro styles, revealing, richer, risk taking, roleplaying, root of cultures, self-expression, sandbox, scenarios, shape, slavery, spells, spontaneously, stimulation of imagination, story, stress reliever, surprises, swords & sorcery, themes, traps, world design, unencumbered, unfettered, unique magic items, unpredictability, Vancian magic, victory, vital outlet, without major consequences, wonderment, worlds, writing.
3. Community	15 people at the table!, accepting, accommodates, age differences, belonging, best friend, bond, camaraderie, campaign, casual, children, close, collaborative, comfort, communal, compatible, competitive, connect, contacts, cooperative, co-workers, creative, cultures, daughter, diverse, discussion, ethnic, experiences, familiarity, family, fans, find players, friendship, fun, gaming, gender, group, grown up together, high school, homes, ideas, identity, impact, initiation, interaction, insider's club, interested, jokes, like brothers, like-minded, maturity, memories, needs, niche, nostalgia, open minded, opinions, online, online bickering, PbP [play by post], people, personal, player, playing with my friends, relate, relax, respect, safety, share, shared bond, shared experiences, similarities, social, strangers, style, together, traditions, trust, valuable, without judgement, years.
4. Editions	1e, 2e, 2nd edition, 3rd edition, 4e, 5th edition, AD&D, age, artwork, atmosphere, attached, bad/wrong, battlemaster, books, familiar, cachet, campaign wikis, change, class based, convert, corporate machine, current edition, design, digital age, digital companion tools, digital media, disappointment, easiest, electronic tools, end of D&D, electronics, enjoy, evokes, evolution, familiar, fan-driven, feel, flavour, flaws, fond, game, gold standard, granularity, grew up with, heyday, high school, house rules, influences, initiation, latest, liked old rules better, lost its soul, material, mechanics, memories, mostly dead, munchkinesque, new gamers, nostalgia, OD&D, older, official, online character sheets, options, overcomplicated, overproduced, own, past, PCs [player characters] power, play, popular, possessions, positive set of changes, prefer (other games, Pathfinder, 13th Age), power gaming, print on demand, prior, problems, proven, recapture, reminded, reprints, resurgence in popularity, return to earliest roots, rules, rules light, simulating fantasy video games, style, system, table assistance, technology, thaco [mechanic: to hit armour class 0], throw them out, time, tinkered, today, valuable, Vancian magic, virtual reality interface, virtual tabletop, visual tool, widely accepted, wider player base, wotc [Wizards of the Coast], writing, untapped resource, years, younger, youth.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research methodologies of this research project. It has been asserted that an interdisciplinary approach has been appropriate and effective for this research. This methodology has assisted with answering the guiding research questions. This has occurred through an Internet survey of a quantitative and qualitative nature, with the analysed results compared to existing academic material. The survey data received categorisation by thematic coding, cataloguing and analysis. Chapter 5 presents the data gathered from the Internet survey, with some preliminary analytical observations.

CHAPTER 5: SURVEY DATA AND FINDINGS

"Good news. We have some data you may be interested in", the man muttered — looking up and down the street lest someone overheard. Rastus smirked. "That is good news!"

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the data retrieved from the online survey. The condensed, coded, and abridged versions are presented here, while the raw survey data is produced in Appendix II. In cases where abbreviated or colloquial responses have been submitted, liberties have been taken by this author to clarify words, phrases, or explanations within square brackets. Thematic coding has been applied to participant responses, eliciting primary themes and insinuations. Some preliminary analysis is provided in this chapter, though the main concern is presenting the data in a straightforward manner.

5.1 Questions 1-3

In order for participants to partake in the survey, questions 1-3 were compulsory. This decision was to ensure participants were 18 years or older, identified as North American, and were *Dungeons & Dragons* participants.

Q1. This survey is for those of 18 years or older. Please verify that you are 18 years or above.

100% of the 51 participants verified that their age was 18 years or older.

Q2. Please specify your date of birth (MM/DD/YYYY)

100% of the 51 respondents specified their date of birth. The youngest participant was born July 13, 1996, while the oldest participant was born April 17 1956. While a wide range of ages were represented in the survey data, a distinct majority professed to be between 36-49 years. It had been predicted a more linear pattern of ages would be represented. It is difficult to definitively conclude why the majority fit within this age range — whether this is representative of the wider hobby, or merely who was online at the time of the survey.

Q3. This survey is for a North American sample of Dungeons & Dragons players only. Please confirm that you identify as a North American and that you play/have played the Dungeons & Dragons tabletop role-playing game.

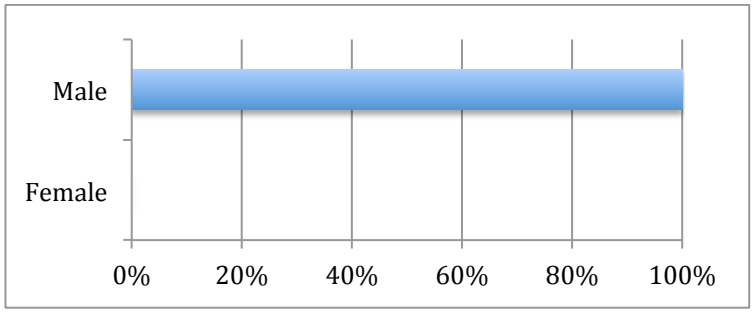
100% of the 51 participants answered "yes" to this question

5.2 Questions 4-6

Q4. What is your gender?

This question was answered by 100% of the 51 participants of this survey. Chart 5.1 below illustrates 100% of the respondents were male. Due to historical estimates of gendered participation within *D&D*, a majority of male participants was expected. It was, however, a regretful and unforeseen outcome that no females participated. The reasons for this outcome are unknown. One possibility may indicate a significant minority of female players on the three forums where the sample derived. Alternatively, it is possible no female forum-goers were online when the survey was live. A tertiary explanation may be female *D&D* players did not feel comfortable participating in the survey.

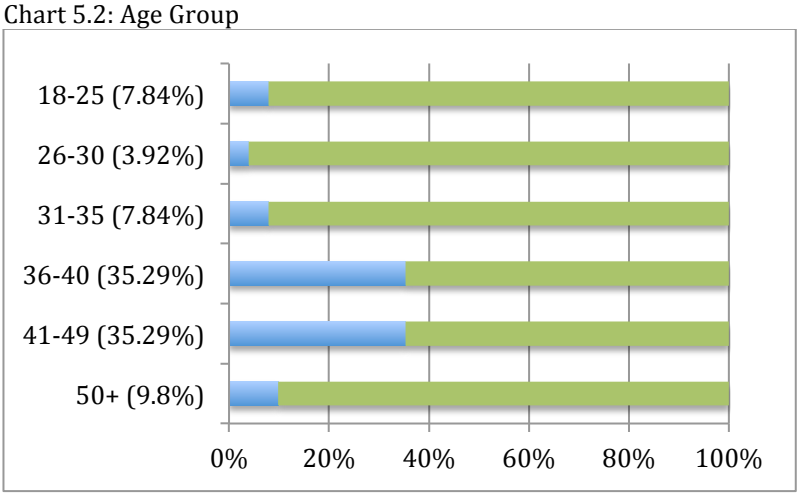
Chart 5.1: Gender



Q5. What is your age group?

All 51 participants answered this question. Chart 5.2 below demonstrates the age groupings of the survey sample. The age bracket of 36-49 years is an obvious majority, as 70.58% of all participants fit within this age category. It is uncertain why this particular age grouping was dominant within the survey, but considering the historical proliferation of *D&D* during the late 1970s and 1980s this result is unsurprising.

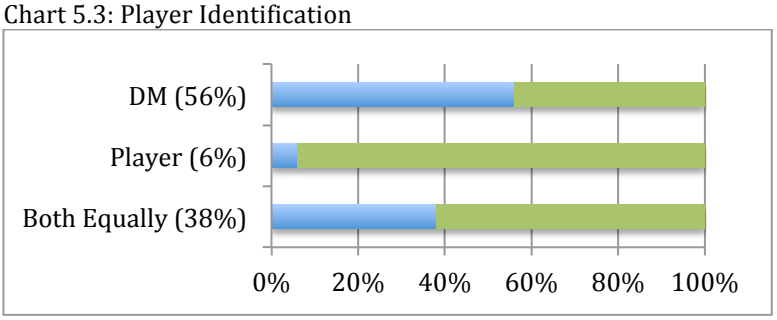
Chart 5.2: Age Group



Q6. Do you identify primarily as a Dungeon Master or Player?

Of the 51 participants only 1 participant bypassed this question. Chart 5.3 below illustrates the types of participatory inclinations professed by survey participants. A comparable distribution between Player and Dungeon Master [DM] was expected, though clearly this was not the outcome. The role of a DM requires substantially more time and effort, thus it was wrongly assumed that a larger portion would identify as "players" exclusively. Those who answered "both equally" may be in gaming groups who alternate between roles periodically, partially explaining a higher percentage of DMs.

Chart 5.3: Player Identification

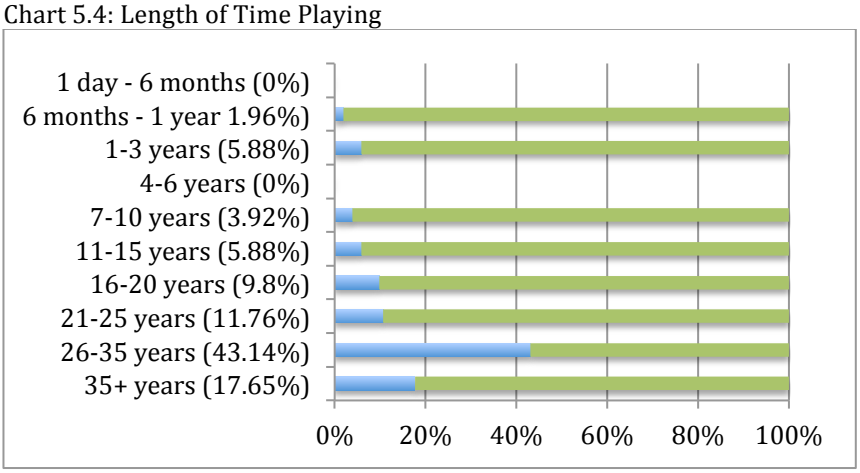


5.3 Questions 7-13

Q7. How long have you been playing Dungeons & Dragons?

The entire survey sample responded to this question. Responses indicate *D&D* has been a long-term hobby for many survey participants, with 43.14% of participants having participated from 26-35 years. This result is commensurate with the age groupings of participants, reflected in Question 5. Those who have played between "21-35+" years account for 72.55% of the survey sample: an obvious majority. This result is reflective of the historical permutation of *D&D* into mainstream consciousness during the late 20th century.

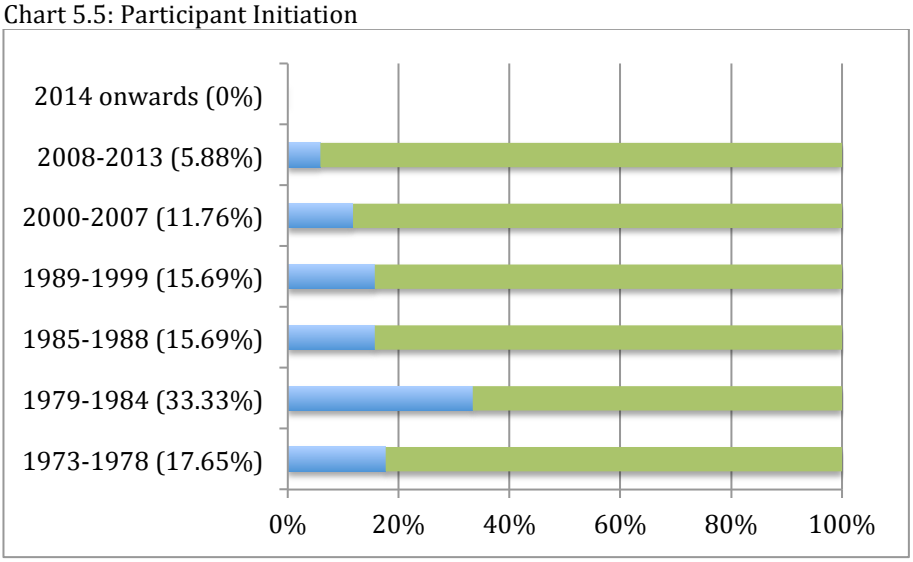
Chart 5.4: Length of Time Playing



Q8. When did you begin playing Dungeons & Dragons?

The entire sample responded to this question. This question was a continuation of Question 7, establishing when the participant began playing. Ascertaining this data could correlate with the edition of *D&D* the participant first played. By estimating different "eras" of edition releases, a tentative link between when the participant began playing, and the edition they first played, begins to emerge: 1973-1977 represents the era of "Original *Dungeons & Dragons*" and "Holmes Basic"; 1977-1984 roughly represents the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* and Basic/Expert/Companion/Immortals era; 1985-1988 represents the "AD&D 1.5" era; 1989-1999 represents the prolific *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 2nd edition era; 2000-2007 represents the 3rd edition era; 2008-2013 represents the 4th edition era; while 2014 onwards marks the beginning of the 5th edition era. These approximations are not conclusive, as participants may have joined the hobby playing an earlier or "outdated" edition. Following the general trend of the survey, the majority of participants began playing *D&D* within earlier time periods. *AD&D* was released in 1977-1979 and received widespread national and international proliferation. This aligns with the 33.33% who began playing *Dungeons & Dragons* between 1979-1984.

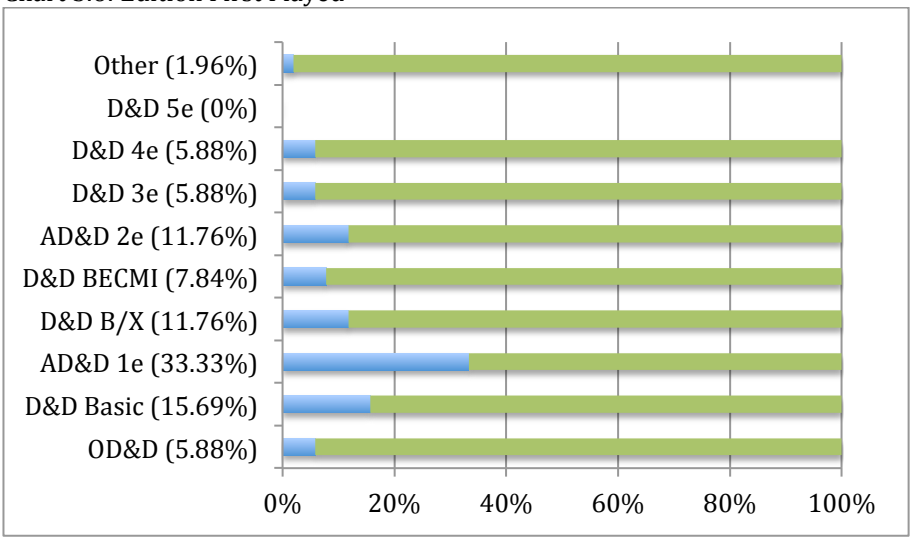
Chart 5.5: Participant Initiation



Q9. When you were introduced to Dungeons & Dragons what edition was it?

This question hones in on the edition participants started playing with, attempting greater specificity than the previous question. All 51 participants answered this question. Chart 5.6 is represented with condensed criteria for greater legibility. For the unabbreviated criteria of this question refer Appendix II. The answers gleaned here match the predictions of the previous question, with the largest portion of participants (33.33%) learning the game using *AD&D* between 1979-1984.

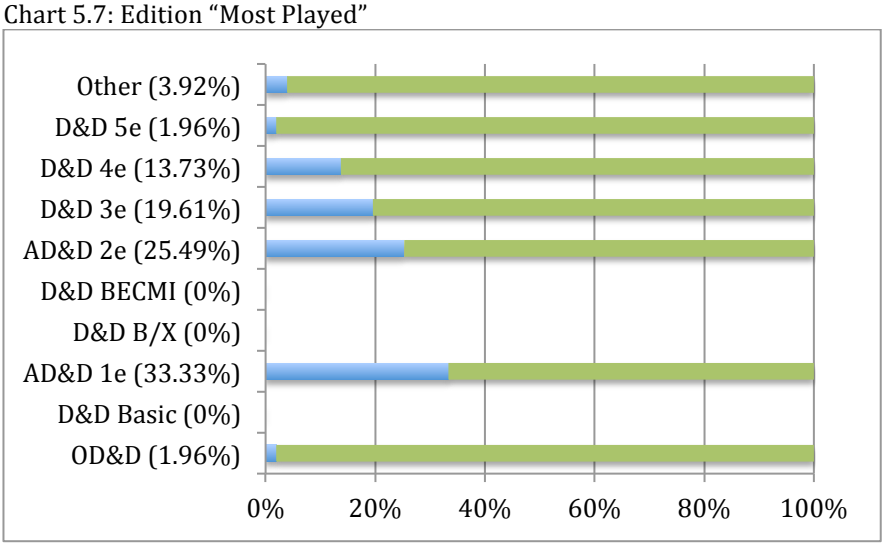
Chart 5.6: Edition First Played



Q10. What Edition of Dungeons & Dragons have you played the most?

Question 10 continues the investigations of questions 7, 8 and 9. All 51 participants responded to this question. Again, a majority of participants selected *AD&D*, with 33.33% of participants choosing this option.

Chart 5.7: Edition "Most Played"



Q11. Why have you played this edition above others? Choose up to two that apply the most.

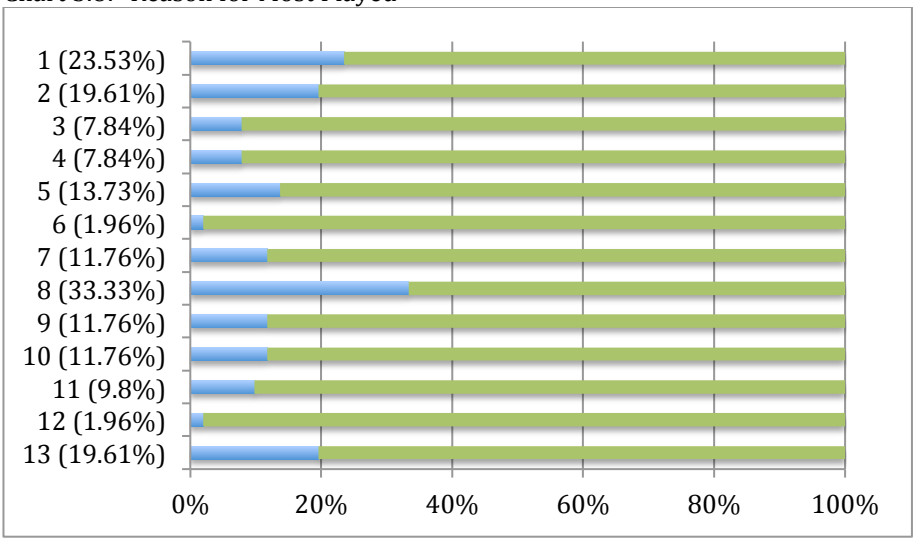
Question 11 was a departure from the quantitative questions above, allowing more complexity of answer. Although there was a multi-choice selection 19.61% of participants answered "Other", expanding on their answer in an open-ended manner. Align the response option on Table 5.1 with the associated number on Chart 5.8. For a list of "Other" responses, refer to Appendix II, Question 11. A notable divergence from previous questions was that participants could select two answers if they wished. Cursory overview suggests participants play a certain edition above others due to their familiarity with the edition. The perceived ease of a rule-set, or the participant's preference to play a certain way, were significant factors in preferring one edition above another.

Table 5.1: Reason for "Most Played"

Number	Answer
1	The rules are easiest/preferable to the way I play.
2	It's the most fun.
3	I have tinkered with the rules to fit my style.
4	It's the latest edition, and I like to be up to date with the rules.
5	I own the books.
6	I like the artwork and design the best.
7	I have nostalgic memories associated with the design, artwork and edition.
8	It's familiar and we've played the same system for years.

9	My friends play and prefer this edition
10	It's the most popular edition among those I know, therefore it's the edition we play the most.
11	It has the most style/flavor.
12	I play this edition primarily because I wouldn't have a game to play in otherwise – none of those I know are interested in playing the edition I prefer.
13	Other (please specify).

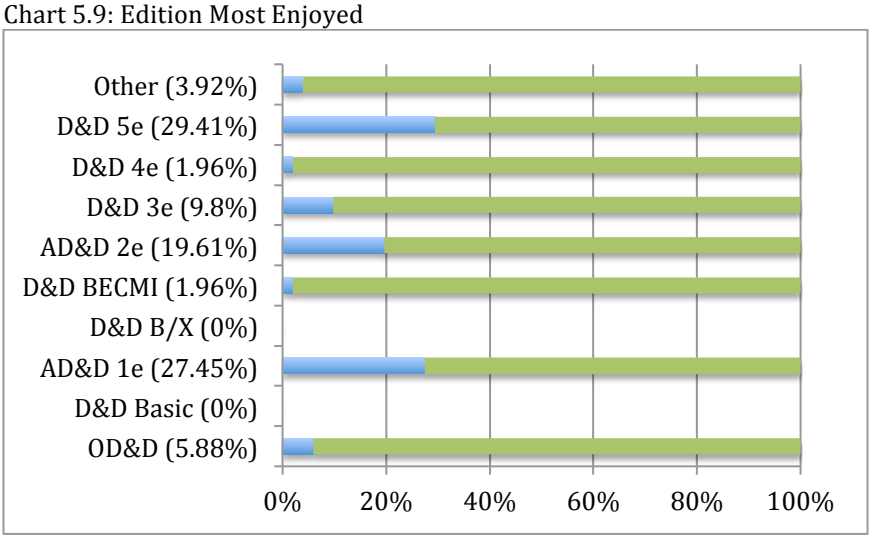
Chart 5.8: "Reason for Most Played"



Q12. What edition of Dungeons & Dragons do you enjoy the most?

All 51 participants answered this question. Notice question 10 responses indicate *D&D* 5th edition had been played the least, indicative of its recent release date at the time of the survey. Question 12 answers suggest almost 30% of participants enjoy 5th edition the most. *AD&D* was a close second, representative of the data gathered in the preceding questions. The "Other" responses can be located in Appendix II.

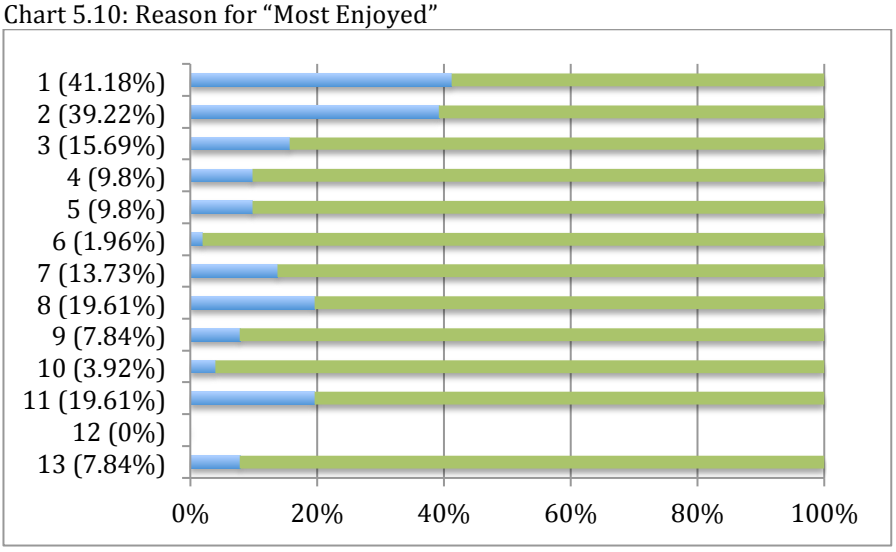
Chart 5.9: Edition Most Enjoyed



Q13. Why do you enjoy this edition the most? Choose up to two that apply the most.

The entire survey sample answered this question. Criterion for this question is identical to Table 5.1 above. Align the number on Table 5.1 to Chart 5.10 below. Comments from "Other" appear in Appendix II. The two dominant answers were "the rules are easiest/preferable to the way I play" and "It's the most fun", indicating participant rationale for enjoying a particular edition.

Chart 5.10: Reason for "Most Enjoyed"

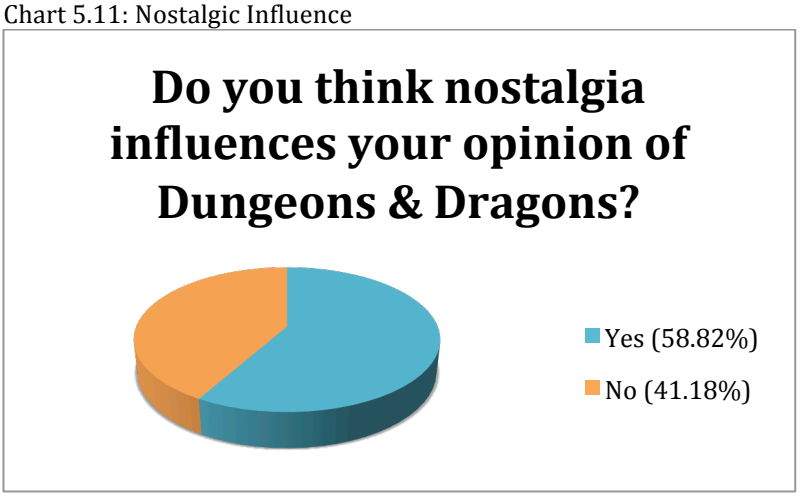


5.4 Questions 14-19

Q14. Do you think nostalgia influences your opinion of Dungeons & Dragons?

All 51 participants responded to this binary question. 58.82% of participants answered "yes", identifying the influence of nostalgia on their opinion of the game.

Chart 5.11: Nostalgic Influence



Q15. If you answered 'Yes' to the last question please explain why.

Since 41.18% of the sample answered "no", they were not required to answer this question. This question was the first open question, where participants were required to furnish their own answer, rather than selecting from a binary or multi-choice answer. Table 5.2 illustrates the coded themes and words compiled from participant responses.

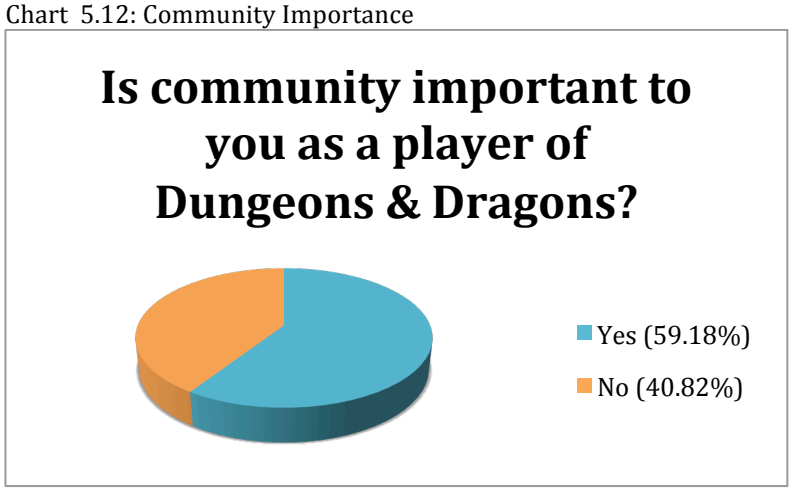
Table 5.2: Nostalgic Themes

Themes	Associated words
Past	Adventure, appealing, best, cachet, change, characters, child, conjures, enjoyment, epic, exciting, experiences, fondness, fun, good, heyday, influences, identify, inspire, jokes, kid, memories, moments, nice, nostalgia, older, play, pleasant, recapture, shared, worthwhile, youth.
Present	Overproduced, today, change, past, newer, nostalgia, reminded, experiences, identify, change, evolution, negatively.
Youth	Recapture, care free, childhood, past, overcomplicated, play, enjoyment, influences, nostalgia, child, identify, kid, younger, adolescent, original, high school.
Relationships	Friendship, jokes, enjoyment, shared, people, impact, experiences, fun.
Atmosphere	Adventure, nostalgia, fun, care free, nice, evokes, cachet, slow, boring, exciting, enjoyable, gaming, sandbox, experiences, liking, look, feel, fantasies, original, roots, style, themes, conjures, epic, story.
Artefacts	Books, possessions, retro styles, more cool, artwork, writing, rules, right, proven, overcomplicated, cachet, attached, valuable, table, media, themes, characters, stories, descriptive, imaginative.

Q16. Is community important to you as a player of Dungeons & Dragons?

Two participants chose not to answer this question. A majority of 59.18% appeared to value community within *D&D*, yet given the highly communal nature of the game, it was anticipated a higher number of participants would answer "yes".

Chart 5.12: Community Importance



Q 17. If community is important in Dungeons & Dragons please explain why/how.

Besides the 40.82% of participants who answered "no" above — and were therefore not required to answer this question — an additional two participants chose not to answer this question. Table 5.3 demonstrates tabulated key words and themes emerging from this question.

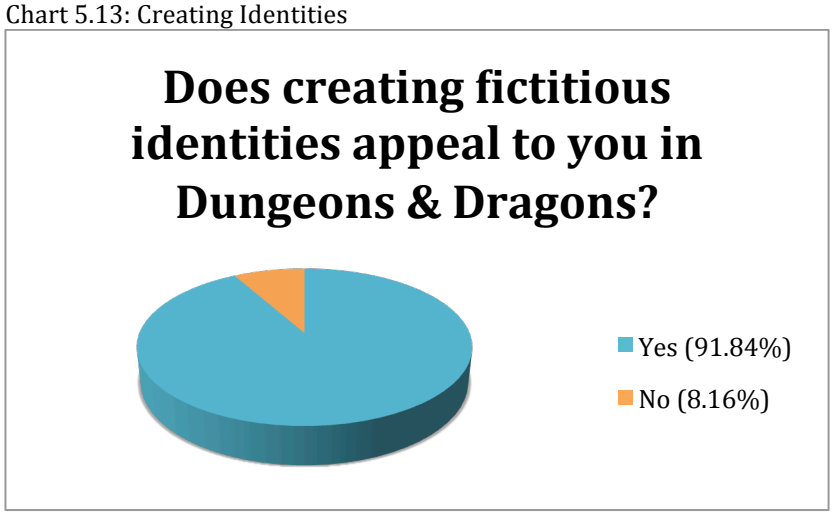
Table 5.3: Community Themes

Themes	Associated Words
Relationships	Players, community, people, fans, DM [Dungeon Master], in-person, interactions, community, strangers, camraderie, group, cultural, comfort, social, friendship, collaborative, interaction, personal, bickering, bond, like-minded.
Community	Online, belonging, inherent, interactions, group, cooperative, communal, cultures, shared interests, social, friendship, sharing ideas, collaborative, interaction, bickering, fun, club, bond, valuable, like-minded.
Shared Gaming	Storytelling, impacting, cultural, similar interests, online, PbP [Play by post], similar expectations, social, internet, shared experience, players, collaborative, group interaction, gaming store, friendship, cooperative (not competitive), fun, bond, insider's club, creative, ruleset, hobby, event.

Q 18. Does creating fictitious identities appeal to you in Dungeons & Dragons?

Only two participants chose not to answer this question. A clear majority of 91.84% of participants recognised the appeal of creating a fictitious identity. This nigh unanimous response was predictable due to the nature of *D&D*: it is a role-playing game. Adopting a fictitious identity is integral to the systems' assumptions.

Chart 5.13: Creating Identities



Q 19. If you answered 'Yes' to the question above: what is appealing about it and why? Choose up to two that apply the most.

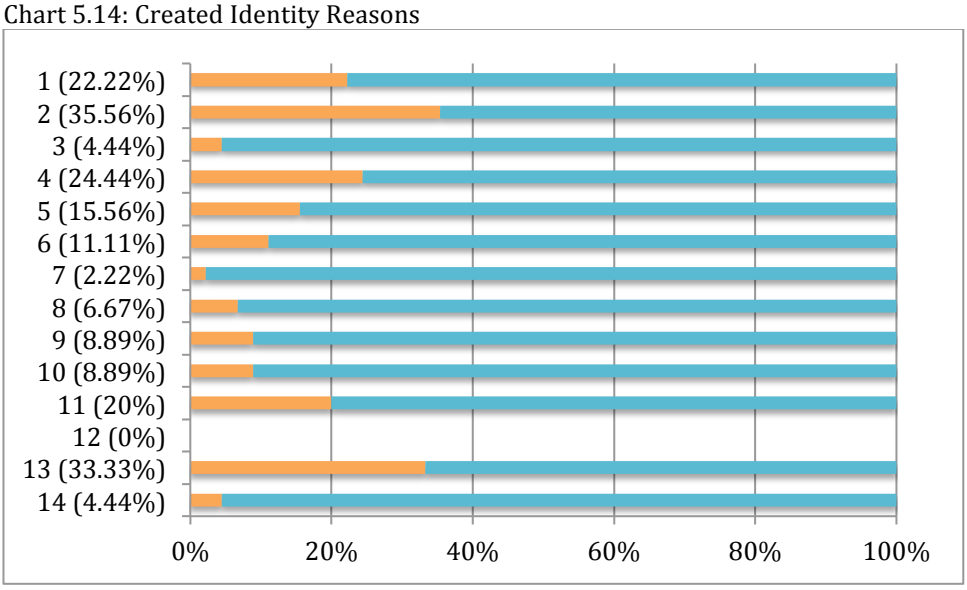
Six participants did not answer this question: four who answered "no" to question 18, and two who chose not to answer it. Table 5.4's answer choices align with Chart 5.14 below. For the reader's convenience, the top four responses were the following:

1. I like immersing myself in the game world: creating a character is the best way to do that.
2. I enjoy mythology, history, folklore and/or fairy tales. D&D allows me to explore this through a created identity.
3. I enjoy being challenged, using my skill as a player to overcome obstacles.
4. It's a form of escapism — it's fun and distracts me from reality for a while.

Table 5.4: Created Identity Reasons

Number	Answer Choices
1	It's a form of escapism — it's fun and distracts me from reality for a while.
2	I like immersing myself in the game world: creating a character is the best way to do that.
3	I can explore aspects of myself through the game, while having fun.
4	I enjoy being challenged, using my skill as a player to overcome obstacles.
5	It transports me to another world/place that I can enjoy for the duration of the game.
6	I like making characters — it's fun to try different combinations of characters.
7	I learn more about myself through playing characters that are either similar or different to me in real life.
8	It allows me to do things I would never do in real life (for whatever reason).
9	Creating characters appeals to me, but it's really just a vehicle so I can play the game.
10	I enjoy thinking up different combinations of characters. I get a lot of enjoyment from the 'build' or 'idea' of a character.
11	I enjoy imagining backgrounds or stories for the characters I create.
12	It's purely a mechanical thing: I want to make the most powerful character possible!
13	I enjoy mythology, history, folklore and/or fairy tales. D&D allows me to explore this through a created identity.
14	I enjoy popular fantasy fiction. D&D allows me to explore this through a created identity.

Chart 5.14: Created Identity Reasons

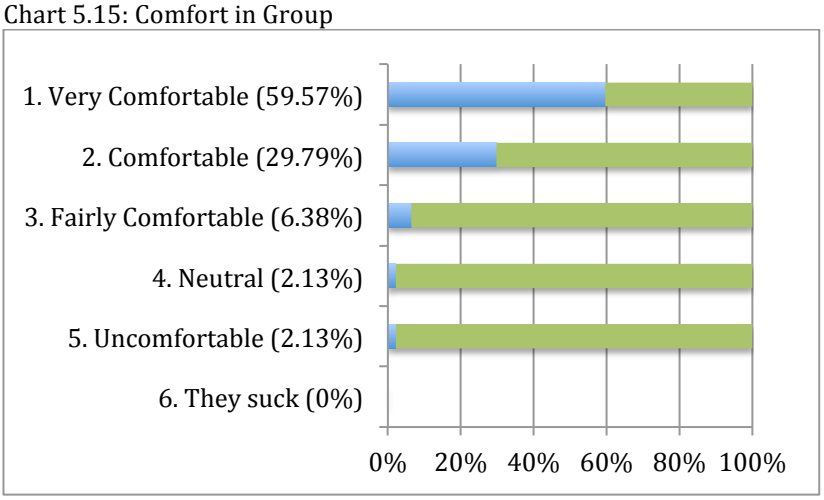


5.5 Questions 20-30

Q 20. How comfortable do you feel with the current group you game with?

Four participants chose not to answer this question. It appears most participants feel "very comfortable" with those they choose to game with.

Chart 5.15: Comfort in Group



Q 21. What do you attribute this comfort/discomfort to?

A total of 44 participants answered this question, while seven did not. A comment box was provided for participants to extrapolate on their experiences of "comfort" or "discomfort". Four themes arose from this question: "friendship", "family", "longevity of relationships" and "notions of safety, trust and respect".

Q 22 What impact has Dungeons & Dragons had on your life?

Seven participants decided not to answer this question. The design of this question was posed as an open question, with opportunities for participants to comment. Table 5.5 presents the core themes associated with this question — using key words and linguistic inferences to ascertain recurrences and patterns within participant answers.

Table 5.5: Themes of Impact

Themes	Associated Words
Encouraging education & learning	Curiosity, learning, inspire, reading, fiction, school, work, keep an audience interested, intelligent, academic life, vocabulary, intellectual pursuits, writing, storyteller, medieval history, career choices, analytical skills, creativity, interests, overcome challenges, math skills, social skills, imagination, collaborative storytelling, open-minded, historical knowledge, expanded horizons, learned a lot, real world, managing groups, [public] speaking, teach, motivate.
Relationships & community	Daughter, best friend, dearest friends, friends, life-long, people, connect, bond, co-workers, time, sustain, work collaboratively, [resolve] conflicts, met people, more open-minded, diverse group, managing groups, teach, motivate, lead, game night.
Coping	Avoid suicide, illness, adventure, passions, psychologically, emotional, coping, capacity, problem solving, stress reliever, happier, overcome challenges.
Creativity	Vital outlet, creative, adventure, writing, storyteller, organised imagination, honed imagination, release, valued, stimulation, flow, grow, designing dungeons, creating programs.
Addiction	Hooked, wasted…$1500 online, consumed free time, opportunity cost
Hobby	Time, money, friends, gaming, passions, big part of my life, general interests, favourite hobby, free time, just a game, immersing, painting minis [miniatures], designing dungeons, creating programs, game night, countless hours.
Nostalgia	Memories, enjoyment, fun.

Q 23. What is unique about Dungeons & Dragons compared with other games?

Eight participants chose not to answer this question. Table 5.6 presents the major themes and patterns that emerged from this question.

Table 5.6: Themes of Uniqueness

Themes	Associated Words
Freedom	Explore, imagination, compared to video and board games, anything is possible, opportunities, improvisational, roleplaying, rewarded, encouraged, unpredictability of players, do anything you want, imaginary worlds, unique house rules, rules can be changed/altered, open ended, living breathing world, limitless possibilities, immersive, synthesizes fantasy, history and mythology, flexibility, try anything, risk taking, rules allow latitude, unlimited scope, depth.
Originality	Gold standard, nostalgia, unlike any other, iconic, lore, novels, beyond any other game, "game world", flavour, unique system/mechanics, first role-playing game, the first RPG, universal language.
Playability	Play more than all other RPGs [role-playing games], other systems were less elegant, mechanics, Vancian magic, hundreds of spells, unpredictability of players, unique house rules, rules can be changed/altered, challenging, enjoyment, continuity, limitless possibilities, problem solving, unique system/mechanics, requires imagination, supplementary material, rules allow latitude,

	charm, unlimited scope.
Narrative	Collaborative, continuous story, imaginary worlds, communal storytelling, epic tales, [reflective of] cultures and society, create mythology, doesn't end, shared storytelling, influenced by fantasy authors, unlimited scope, story oriented, depth.
Memorable	Remember D&D adventures [from] 30+ years ago, shared experiences, experience, my first roleplaying game experience, monsters, immersive, charm.
Community	Personal, collaborative, groups, communal, cultures, society, shared, team, cooperative, no losers, comrades, "all in this together", old friends, popularity, social game, riff off each other, share experiences, accommodates all people.

Q 24. What do you enjoy most about Dungeons & Dragons? Why?

There were 45 participants who provided responses to this question. The responses were examined and keywords and themes were identified. Table 5.7 identifies these themes. For comprehensive responses refer to Appendix II.

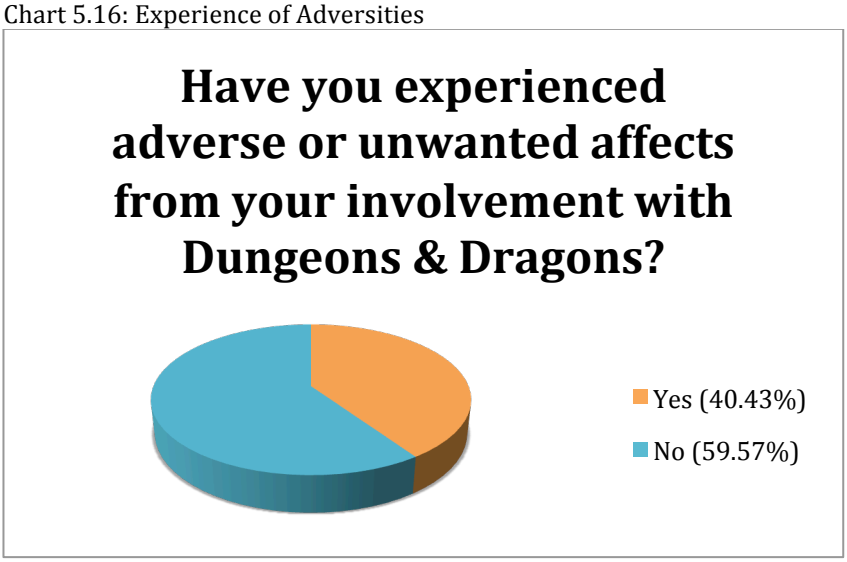
Table 5.7: Themes of Enjoyment

Themes	**Associated Words**
Relationships	Friends, inside jokes, people, others, group, getting together, participating, share, appreciate, enjoyment, joy, react, players, Dungeon Master, shared experiences, laughter, mutual, cooperative, social, like brother, meet new people.
Challenges	Hard-fought victory, loot, adventure, participating, kill dragons, progression, games, strategic, problem-solving, try new things, solution, difficult, resources, cooperative, autonomy, control, surprise, goal, traps, overcome, defeat.
Creativity	Imagination, world building, outlet, storytelling, express, role-playing, self-expression, immersive, fantasy, cultures, you set the boundaries, create, milieu, efforts, enjoyment, joy, maps, strategic, problem-solving, epic stories, infinite, new scenarios, plot
Familiarity	Monsters, change, friends, D&D lore, fantasy, began roleplaying with D&D, my first love, dice, maps, mutual experience.
Freedom	Anything is possible, adventure, storytelling, joy, flexibility, imagination, immersive, constructing, fantasy, explore, flexibility, epic stories, endless variety, part of something bigger, autonomy, control, free, be yourself, play
Originality	Uniqueness of monsters, D&D lore, dice, maps, traditional, unique, magic items.
Escapism	Abandon the mundane, joy, outlet, anything can happen, fantastic, participating, immersive, fantasy worlds, cultures, explore other places, "grim reality", share, stories, hours, games, try new things, epic stories.
Genre	Fantasy, milieu, swords & sorcery, world building, cultures, dice, maps.

Q 25. Have you experienced adverse or unwanted affects from your involvement with Dungeons & Dragons?

Only four participants did not answer this question. A majority of 59.57% participants have not had "adverse or unwanted" experiences associated with *D&D*, yet it is interesting to note 40.43% had. The basis for these experiences are explored further in question 26.

Chart 5.16: Experience of Adversities



Q 26. If you answered 'Yes' to the question above please specify why. Choose up to two that apply the most.

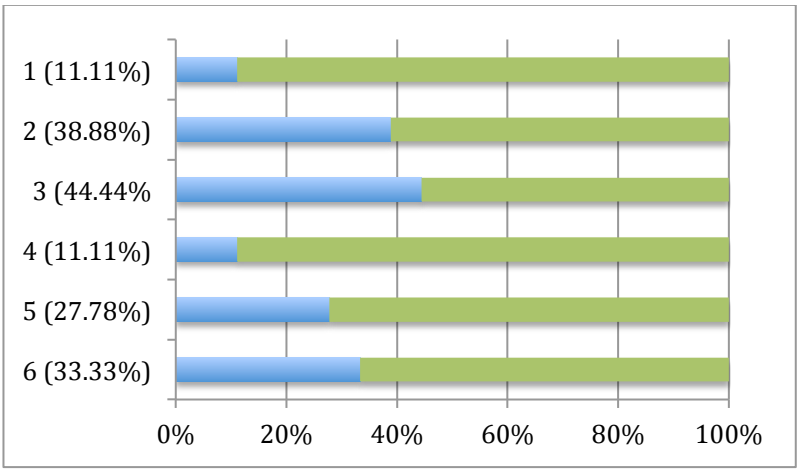
As a majority of participants answered "no" to the previous question, only 18 participants of the sample of 51 responded. Table 5.8 aligns with Chart 5.17 below. The top three answers were the following:

1. I spend too much time on the hobby.
2. I have had negative experiences with other gamers/groups.
3. I have experienced stigma associated with *Dungeons & Dragons.* I have been classified as a "Satanist", "member of the occult" or generally feel the influence of moral panic has impacted me in some way.

Table 5.8: Reasons for Adversities

Number	Answer Choice
1	I have experienced an addiction or obsession with Dungeons & Dragons.
2	I have had negative experiences with other gamers/groups.
3	I spend too much time on the hobby.
4	I spend too much money on Dungeons & Dragons books or related accessories.
5	I have experienced stigma associated with Dungeons & Dragons — I've been classified as a "nerd".
6	I have experienced stigma associated with Dungeons & Dragons — I've been classified as a "Satanist", "member of the occult" or generally feel like the influence of the moral panic during the 1980s has impacted me in some way.

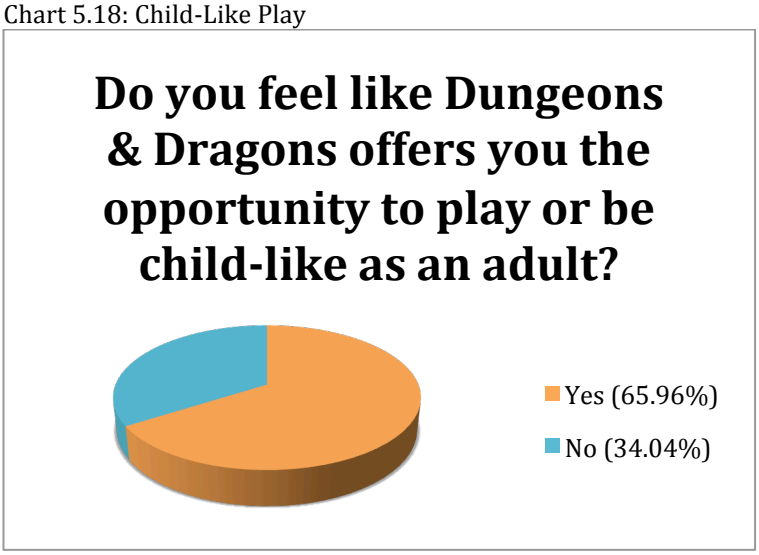
Chart 5.17: Reasons for Adversities



Q 27 Do you feel that Dungeons & Dragons offers you the opportunity to play or be child-like as an adult?

Four participants did not answer this question, while the remainder did. A distinct majority of 65.96% of participants felt as though *D&D* afforded them the opportunity to "play" or be "child-like as an adult". This question yielded a larger "yes" response than was predicted. It was incorrectly assumed a sizeable portion of participants may not identify with connotations of "child-like" or "play".

Chart 5.18: Child-Like Play



Q 28. Is this important to you?

This is a continuation of question 27. Five participants chose not to answer this question, while the remainder did.

Chart 5.19: Importance of Play

Q 29. If you answered 'Yes' to the question above – Why is this important for you?

A total of 28 participants answered this question. This number was roughly approximate with those who answered "no" to the question 28, although some participants chose to bypass this question. After coding the participant responses, the major themes and associated words have been identified on table 5.9.

Table 5.9: Themes of Play

Themes	**Associated Words**
Enjoyment	Imaginative, fun, play, outlet, wonder, relieve stress, build relationships, friends, bonding, goofy, healthy, game, silly, take risks, challenged, participatory, time, special, emotion, experiences, escapism, unique.
Freedom	Express, environment, opportunity, unencumbered, fun, play, outlet, game, unfettered, creative, trust, young, soul, experiences, escapism, unique.
Importance of play	Few opportunities, adult context, freedom, imaginative, innocent, unencumbered, fun, eyes of a child, wonder, first time, need, outlet, break, perspective, everyone needs, relieve stress, build relationships, enjoy life, bonding, friends, entertained, amused, rewarding, goofy, healthy, unfettered, creative, trust, enjoyment, child, silly, different perspective, sharp mind, relate to my children, young at heart, like prayer, sense of wonder, immortal youth, without major consequences, fulfils, special, meaningful, expression of imagination, escapism, recapture wonder, keep in touch with the past.
Absence of play	Stagnant, serious, adult context, social circumstances, environment, need, monotony, real life, everyone needs, work, serious, waste of brain, serious adult, dull, grown up, ill-informed, passive, spectator.
Implications of play	Whiny, stubborn, innocent, adult context, opportunity, environment, social circumstances, fun, wonder, eyes of a child, outlet, break, perspective, adults, relieve stress, build relationships, goofy, healthy, unfettered, child, express, relate to my children, young at heart, childish, man, retaining immortal youth, success, childlike, emotion, recapture wonder.

Q 30. What is your primary motivation for playing Dungeons & Dragons?

A total of 45 participants answered this question, indicating six participants did not. Table 5.10 illustrates the primary motivations for playing *D&D,* drawing on key words, and the thematic patterns that arose from participant responses.

Table 5.10 Themes of Motivation

Themes	Associated words
Entertainment	Fun, play, game, friends, kill owl bears, pretending, hobby, story, entertainment, immersing, imagining, relaxation, read, enjoy, no restrictions, escapism, magical.
Creative outlet	Cool settings, hobby, rich, creative, rich, immersing, imaginary worlds, role-playing, enjoy, desire, left and right sides of my brain, escapism.
Cooperative/Social play	Social cooperation, friends, spending time, interacting, enjoy, getting together, communal, hanging out, relax, socialising, role-playing, mental challenge, collaborative, group, gamers, people, others, care.
Narrative	Story, DM [Dungeon Master], character, creative, entertainment, storytelling, immersing, imaginary worlds, role-playing, situations, scenarios, encounter.

Q 31. Finally, where would you like to see the game progressing currently/in the future?

Of the 51 participants, 45 answered this question. This question concerns itself with the current and future directions of the game. Eight themes emerged from this question: “acceptance”, “digitising”, “grassroots”, “corporate”, “current edition”, “previous editions”, “future editions” and the notion of “disdain or neutrality”. The full representation of participant responses can be located in Appendix II, while Table 5.11 has coded key words and responses according to thematic patterns.

Table 5.11: Themes of Future Direction

Themes	Associated words
Acceptance	Accepted, player base, audience, popularity, resurgence, continues, popular, play, talk about, consolidate, increase numbers, fun, more people, teaching, friends, young players, recapture, draw in people, focus on new gamers.
Digitising	Digital companion, game planning, assistance, virtual tabletop, go digital, virtual reality, interface, share, game world, visual tool, end of D&D, gamers are too set in their ways, grow, change, embrace, electronics, digital media, untapped, tablets, laptops, video screens, full VR [virtual reality], potential, computing, supplement, online character sheets, campaign wikis, technology.
Grassroots (Fan)	Fans, continue to flourish, fan-driven.
Corporate	Committee, too many cooks, driven by marketing, lost its soul, corporate machine, real interaction, game mechanics, flaws, cause problems, wotc [Wizards of the Coast] to burn, back to 1e and 2e, corporate owners.
Current edition (5th edition)	Liking, hopeful, official, clarified, consolidate, increase numbers, flaws, fun, happy, rules light, teaching, role-playing, imagination, best one, stick around, long time, remain stable, not get bogged down in power gaming, too video game, munchinesque [colloquial gaming term], strayed from its roots, simulating video games, PC [player characters] more powerful, nostalgia,
Previous editions	Mostly dead, have all the books, don’t need anything else, teaching, role-playing, imagination,

	back to 1e and 2e, fine for 35+ years, version I like, house rules, tailored, my way, fit, back to simplicity, simulating historic fantasy literature, risk and challenge, One True Game.
Future editions	More diversity, less rigid, perceive classes to change, consolidate, manoeuvres, Battlemaster, self-realisation, closer to its roots, unlimited freedom, settings, focus on new gamers, reprints, print on demand, older products.
Disdain or neutrality	Don't care, future, means nothing, wherever it leads, doesn't need to progress, not concerned, is what it is, good enough, not up to me, no need, doesn't affect me, garbage.

5.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the survey data gathered in this research. Survey questions were designed with particular relevance to the guiding questions of this research, illustrating how this sample of 51 participants feels about various aspects of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Already, the data has illustrated the age-groups; lengths of time playing; feelings around the various editions; reasons for playing; opinions of nostalgia, community, fictitious identities, and child-like play; and predictions for the future of the game. Major themes have been identified, providing a basis for ongoing discussion in subsequent chapters. These themes align with the guiding research questions, particularly pertaining to notions of "community" and the construction of "fictitious identities" within *D&D.* Additionally, this chapter has provided unique insights into how *D&D* players currently perceive their game, forgoing a complete reliance on existing academic texts, which may be out-dated. As discussed in Chapter 4, the four overarching themes identified within this data are "entertainment", "fantasy", "community" and "editions of *D&D*". The first analysis chapter —Chapter 6 — discusses participant notions of "entertainment" within *Dungeons & Dragons.*

CHAPTER 6: ENTERTAINMENT

Rastus Burne balanced precariously on a ledge, outside the mayor's window. Good thieves knew nightfall was an opportune time for such excursions. Luckily, Rastus was the best. A gem lay hidden somewhere inside, yet he did not know where. It was undoubtedly valuable, but what would he find within? He hoped the mayor and his wife were asleep, and the gem within easy grasp.

6.0 Introduction

This chapter explores notions of "entertainment" in relationship to *Dungeons & Dragons.* Four subthemes relating to "entertainment" have been identified. Section 6.1 explores participant experiences of "fun". Section 6.2 discusses the pervasive notion of "play". Section 6.3 identifies participant freedoms within the game. The focus of section 6.4 is to analyse the adverse affects of participating in *D&D.* Finally, section 6.5 negotiates themes of engrossment and identification. The theoretical underpinning of this chapter largely draws on Gary Alan Fine's *Shared Fantasy* (1983). Fine's work has been recognised within role-playing game scholarship as a foundational text in understanding role-playing game culture through a participatory lens (Jones, 2012). This theoretical underpinning is augmented by additional relevant research.

6.1 Experiences of "Fun"

Superficially it may appear inane or obvious to suggest players are drawn to *Dungeons & Dragons* because it is "fun". Survey participants were asked "what is your primary motivation for playing *Dungeons & Dragons?"* In answer to this question, sixteen of forty-five participants used the word "fun" within their response (Question 30). Variations of the word "entertainment" and "enjoyment" were offered as a secondary explanation. Given the proclivity for these answers, it is worth examining notions of "fun". Survey responses were uncannily similar to Fine's research on why people game:

> If one asks participants why they game, they answer quickly and emphasize the **entertainment** ("**fun**") component of the hobby. Social scientists are prone to dismiss such reasoning as tautologous and as indicating that people do not understand the "real" reasons for their commitments (a view shared by psychological determinism and structural-functionalism), or that "**enjoyment**" is a gloss for a more complex explanation. The former approach presumes a person lacking free will, the latter an overly cognitive individual. While such approaches expand our insight of gaming, we should not ignore the players' rationale — that they play because they like playing. (Fine, 1983, pp. 52-53) [bolding added].

While critiques of tautology may offer some verity, qualitative research indicates participant rationale is at least superficially valid. Many survey participants who included the word "fun"

within their answers did not elaborate much — if at all — beyond their initial assertion. Select participants apparently felt "fun" should be sufficient explanation for their gaming involvements. Since participants report to experience the game as "fun", "enjoyable", or "entertaining", this is accepted as a legitimate reason for gaming. Qualitative research must be taken at face value, yet evokes a call to further understand notions of "fun". Fortunately, certain participants provided further reasoning for engaging in the hobby besides cursory explanations of "fun". This establishes the qualitative entertainment value of *Dungeons & Dragons.* The remainder of this chapter will examine contributing factors of *why* people game, and what is meant by "fun". Simultaneously this chapter argues the legitimacy of participant claims that the game is "fun".

Fine expounds participant motivation for gaming as the link between "fun" and "engrossment". Player *engrossment* is fundamental in understanding the gaming experience. Engrossment occurs when players are able to set aside their "selves" or "reality" temporarily, enacting and assuming alternate selves as they play (Fine, 1983). This is a fundamental philosophy of *D&D* or any role-playing game; participants are literally playing or enacting a role, while assuming an imagined identity. By adopting an ephemeral construction of identity, participants become engrossed in the game, which goes some ways towards explaining the "fun" gaming experience (Fine, 1983). In other words, engrossment in the game *is* the "fun" participants experience. For deeper experiences of fun and engrossment, an imperative task for players is to identify with the game, their characters, and the fictitious worlds they occupy (Fine, 1983). While within the game, player ability to set aside "reality" enables them to assimilate the strictures, freedoms and identities presented in the alternative worlds they choose to inhabit (Fine, 1983).

When considering engrossment, it is necessary to examine the liminality between "fun" and "boredom". One participant observed this relationship: "a lot of actual game sessions are…slow and boring, but the memories are of the exciting bits and inside jokes" (Question 15). While players report the overall game experience as enjoyable, moments within the game may be dull. Juxtaposed with the preceding response another participant described *D&D* as "pure fun!" (Question 30). That the gaming experience transposes between intense fun and dull boredom is congruous with Fine's research (1983). Surprisingly this participant's identification of "boredom" was anomalous to the survey; other answers tended to focus on the highlights of the game. Even the participant who experienced interspersed elements of boredom found the payoff of "fun" substantial, justifying continued play (Question 15). Within stimulation studies, evidence suggests participants will unavoidably experience pockets of lesser enjoyment when gaming (Danckert & Allman, 2005). Experientially, boredom can range from a momentary lapse in attention, to a pervasive lack of interest (Danckert & Allman, 2005).

Typically a game of *D&D* may last several hours. It is unsurprising if individuals should experience moments of boredom or distraction throughout this extended duration — especially as games habitually occur in domestic or commercial settings, and players must account for the waxing and waning stimulation of fellow participants. Experiences of boredom are located within an individual's perception of reality, making it difficult to quantify how "fun" or "boring"

an activity intrinsically is without reverting to subjective opinion (Danckert & Allman, 2005). Notwithstanding this inability to objectively measure "enjoyment", pervasive survey data maintains *D&D* is a "fun" experience. Engrossment levels are consistently sufficient for these participants to enjoy the game. The majority of participants have engaged with the hobby for years or decades, further reinforcing the notion that *D&D* grants long-term and continued enjoyment (Question 7). This confirms the original sentiment of the game's entertainment value, but refutes claims of participant superficiality in answering the survey. Understanding levels of participant engrossment and identification is worthy of exploration, as it denotes a deep level of engagement with the gaming experience. These experiences suggest transcendence beyond momentary burst of enjoyment, hinting at a deeper level of participant engagement. Moreover, these findings challenge denigrating claims that participants lack insight, or are specious about their "true" motives of gaming.

6.2 Play

Survey participants were asked: "do you feel *Dungeons & Dragons* offers you the opportunity to play or be child-like as an adult?" 65.96% of participants responded "yes". Most of those who answered "yes" felt it was important to play and be "child-like" as an adult (Question 28). Five themes related to "play" emerged from coding participant response: "enjoyment", "freedom", "importance of play", "absence of play", and "implications of play". These themes provide analytical content throughout this chapter.

Some participants perceived a correlation between being "child-like" and notions of "freedom". One participant asserted *Dungeons & Dragons* allows "relatively complete freedom to do whatever you want"(Question 29). "Play" and being "child-like" were perceived within both positive and negative frameworks. Positively "child-like" denoted imagination, innocence, and being unencumbered, while "play" provided stress relief, participation, and a fun outlet (Question 29). Negative inferences of "child-like" included "whiny" or "stubborn", while "play" sometimes contained stigmatic inferences for adults (Question 29). Certain "adult" roles are not appropriate settings for play. Thus in contexts where *D&D* is permissible, the game becomes associated as a safe or socially sanctioned context for play. A common trend throughout the survey data indicated role-playing allows respite from the monotonies and seriousness of life: "it's an outlet and break from the monotony of real life"; "everyone needs to play — even adults"; and "sometimes you just need an outlet to be goofy. Can't do it at work." One participant suggested play "helps keep me from becoming serious and stagnant", while another decided:

> [R]oleplaying games offer me the opportunity to be spontaneously creative in a social environment. It has nothing to do with being child-like, it has more to do with being able to express ones-self creatively in an adult context where few opportunities to do so exist in typical adult social circumstances. (Question 29).

D&D was regarded as a "great way to relieve stress", as "most 'fun' activities for adults" are generally "passive spectator events. D&D is participatory". Ancillary responses synonymised play with: "fun", "enjoyment", "expression", "wonder", "entertainment", "amusement", "imagination", "creativity", and "escapism".

Play appears to fulfil a number of functions for the adult gamer. Play provides a sense of freedom and enjoyment that may not be experienced to the same degree in other areas of the participant's life. Participant commentary is suggestive of specific environments where play is acceptable — *D&D* being one of them. According to Sarah Bowman (2010) this is a key motive for why people pursue the hobby of role-playing games.

> People use fantasy as a means of self-expression and escape from the mundane in all parts of the world. Role-playing games represent both a new development in culture…but also an age-old form of ritual performance. …These games provide a healthy, useful outlet for creativity, self-expression, communal connection, and the development of important skills over time. (Bowman, 2010, p. 9).

Bowman's position aligns with participatory commentary. Bowman suggests certain "non-gamers" may view immersion within role-playing games to be "psychically damaging" to the participant. Bowman argues against these prevailing stigmas, advocating instead for the "healthy" benefits of role-playing games, and the safe context for exploration these games allow (Bowman, 2010, p.9).

An adjuvant outcome of play is that it fosters relationship between individuals. Play promotes a sense of wellbeing, enables intergenerational relationships, and encourages education and learning (Harviainen, 2012; Marston, 2010; McQuade, Gentry & Colt, 2012). As one participant contended, play promotes individual "health", and allowed him to "relate" to his children (Question 29). According to Hannah Marston this sense of "health" or wellbeing transpires via game mechanics, its genre, its ability to cater to personal taste, and the perceived possibilities available within the game (2010). Possibilities within the game enable imaginative and immersive play, rather than being a true representation or re-enactment of reality (Fine, 1983; Harviainen, 2012). Immersed players enter a temporal — and often unspoken — agreement to set aside "reality" while within the gamed context (Fine, 1983; Harviainen, 2012). In doing so these processes coax a strong relationship between narrative, gameplay and immersion (Harviainen, 2012; White, Harviainen & Boss, 2012). Harviainen suggests measuring the levels of player pageantry within a game, as this can be indicative of participant investment into the gaming experience (2012). Without sufficient levels of arousal, full involvement with the game will be limited. Based on survey responses it is clear a majority of participants find play enjoyable and important in their lives. Through play, self-expression and immersion occur, resulting in an experience players describe as "freedom".

6.3 Freedom

According to survey participants *Dungeons & Dragons* enables "freedom". Like the matter of analysing "fun", it needs to be ascertained what players actually mean when they report perceptions of "freedom". Textually questions 22, 23, and 30 refer to participant experiences of freedom, and analysis can be extracted from these commentaries. Three distinct categories of "freedom" were evidenced in the findings: psychological and physiological freedom, intellectual liberation, and creative and philosophical freedom.

Psychological and physiological freedom associated with *D&D* assisted one participant to "avoid suicide" when he was a teenager, serving as a "vital creative outlet" (Question 22). "Psychologically speaking, the outlet provided via roleplaying" helped another player to "develop a sound and secure emotional coping capacity" (Question 22). *D&D* was perceived as a "stress reliever", and as one participant stated "I've been happier" [due to gaming] (Question 22). *D&D* remained a viable hobby after "physical illness took away sports and rigorous fitness training" for another participant (Question 22). The final response indicates a metaphysical or metaphorical freedom from a situation filled with uncontrollable and unchosen physical limitation. For other role-players the thrill of autonomy was important, particularly those who may experience disempowerment in other aspects of their lives (Questions 22 and 24). The documentary *Darkon* contains interviews with LARP participants, who believe a form of power or autonomy is imbued upon them when role-playing (Davis, Meyer & Neel, 2006). This "power" was perceived as being unavailable to them in the "real world" (Davis, Meyer & Neel, 2006). Whether or not this is the case for the survey participants is uncertain, yet tentatively the freedom to make choices and possess player autonomy may partially explain *D&D*'s prevailing popularity.

Intellectual liberations offered by the game were a secondary theme. Participants deemed the game to have inspired "curiosity and contributed to learning"; helped another at "school and work" as they learned "how to keep an audience interested"; "increased" one participant's "interest in reading immensely, basically starting [their] academic life"; "broadened vocabulary, intellectual pursuits, [their] sense of adventure"; taught "organized imagination", making one participant a "better writer and storyteller"; and taught collaborative techniques to "work out conflicts" (Question 22). The third theme illuminated the creative and philosophical freedoms nurtured through *D&D*: "*D&D* is the only [game] that really, truly allows you to use your imagination"; it is a game where "almost anything is possible. I still remember *D&D* adventures I played through 30+ years ago." Other players described the "unlimited scope of the game, the freedom to do what you want"; "freedom to explore and the necessity for imagination"; "the novelty within our group, and the shared storytelling experience that goes beyond any other game I've played" (Question 23). Open-endedness and experimentation were additional factors relating to perceptions of "freedom": *D&D* "is the iconic game for fantasy role-playing. Once you understand the rules, you can use that understanding to play in any number of imaginary worlds"; "*D&D* doesn't have an end, and it can be whatever you want it to be"; "the improvisational aspect of roleplaying a character within a fantasy world is unlike any other";

D&D is a practiced space where "creativity is encouraged and rewarded. The game is as good as you want to make it rather than just following a designer's plan" (Question 23). The game provided a participant with "opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise", while players often enjoyed tailoring the rules: "[the rules are] what you make of it, and they can be changed or altered as time goes on" (Question 23).

In these ways participants enjoy the liberating benefits of the game. *D&D* offers the perception of *theoretically* infinite choice, compared with video gaming, which only allows pre-programmed options (La Freniere, 2007). Of course the game may only ever be "free" to a point. The game is not truly "limitless", as the fantasy world is bound by the imaginations of the DM and the players (Fine, 1983). Despite the limitations imposed by reality, games have a powerful potential to facilitate compelling and absorbing experiential play for participants (Harviainen, 2012; White, Harviainen & Boss, 2012). One explanation is a resonant narrative in any medium is interpreted as a virtual reality; human brains are able to focus in on a poignant story, shutting out the "real-world" in the process (White, Harviainen & Boss, 2012). Through analysing survey data, it is apparent a substantial portion of participants perceive the practice of *D&D* to contain increased feelings of autonomy and freedom. Contrasted with these perceived freedoms are the potential pitfalls that have been historically associated with *Dungeons & Dragons.*

6.4 Adverse Affects of Participation

The participant survey was purposely designed to unearth and investigate adverse experiences associated with gaming – particularly with *D&D.* Academic literature is prolific in reference to addiction, overstimulation, and engrossment in mainstream gaming (McQuade, Gentry & Colt, 2012). It was therefore imperative to determine whether participants self-identified with any of these outcomes in their gaming. An additional motivation was to ascertain participants' experiences of the well-documented controversies shadowing the history of *Dungeons & Dragons* (Ewalt, 2013; Peterson, 2012; Tresca, 2011). A summary of these controversies was provided in Chapter 2, section 3. In spite of this cultural "baggage" it is apparent from the findings participants continue to enjoy the game.

Participants were asked "have you experienced any adverse or unwanted effects from your involvement with *Dungeons & Dragons*?" 40.43% of survey participants answered "yes". Although roughly 60% of participants did not identify any "adverse or unwanted" experiences, the remainder comprise a substantial percentage of the sample. Of the portion that answered "yes", 44.44% identified spending "too much time on the hobby" (Question 26). 38.88% acknowledged "negative experiences with other gamers/groups". 33.33% experienced stigma associated with *Dungeons & Dragons* — being classified as a "Satanist", "member of the occult" or generally felt the influence of moral panic during the 1980s impacted them in some way (Question 26). A smaller portion of participants confirmed they had been classified as a "nerd" through their involvement with *D&D.* At 11.11% each, the remainder of participants had either

"experienced an addiction or obsession" with *D&D,* or spent "too much money on *D&D* books or related accessories" (Question 26).

No specific question ascertained participant definitions of "addiction". Subsidiary survey answers indicate the nature of these perceived addictions however. Participants could select "up to two" responses most applicable to their respective situations. It would be reasonable to assume an association between those experiencing "an addiction or obsession" and those professing to spend "too much time on the hobby". Logically, and by inference, those addicted or obsessed would probably spend significant portions of time on *D&D.* This is the nature of addiction (McQuade, Gentry & Colt, 2012). Combining these two responses would amount to 55.55% of the total responses. If participants who identified spending "too much money" on the game were also included, this would amount to 66.66% of total responses. While combining these three responses is slightly tenuous, there is a clear correlative relationship between the three — making this observation at least superficially justifiable. That is, an addicted or obsessed player would, by definition, spend copious amounts of time on the hobby, and depending on the nature of the addiction, may spend "too much money" too. Of course, it is not likely this percentage would amount to 66.66% of total responses, but an argument of correlation can be made, suggesting higher levels of preoccupation with the game than initially suggested.

Although it is speculative to conclude *why* some participants are drawn into addictive cycles of gaming, examining academic explanations of addiction can proffer some possibilities. McQuade, Gentry and Colt believe the enjoyable experiences of gaming, when coupled with in-game rewards, may contribute to the development of addiction (2012). Woods (2012) and Kuss (2013) maintain game mechanics partially explain the addictive qualities of a game. Mechanics act to reinforce player engagement: initiating, developing, and maintaining continued gaming habits (Kuss, 2013). Cumulative reasons for addiction include the gameplay, intellectual challenge, overall enjoyment, and the re-playability of a game (Woods, 2012). Kuss affirms these reasons, adding "achievements", "socialising", and "immersion" are added reasons for players to get addicted (2013, p.126). Finally, escapist motivation — an intrinsic aspect of *D&D*'s immersive experience — is "predictive of addictive play" (Kuss, 2013, pg. 126). That is not to say practices of escapism result in addiction, or that escapism is necessarily "unhealthy", but that some possessing escapist preoccupations may become addicted. Words and themes associated with "escapism" were prevalent throughout survey data, suggesting these theories are applicable in a practical sense, and particularly to the study of *Dungeons & Dragons.*

Stewart Woods postulates a distinction between those who game for occasional distraction versus those who invest heavily in a game (2012). Woods refers to the latter as the "hobbyist" — a gamer who may spend considerable portions of their leisure time on game-related activities (2012). Even when hobbyists are not playing the game, their time may be consumed with "strong attraction" to other aspects of the hobby (Woods, 2012, pg. 146). The hobbyist, though passionate, is not necessarily addicted. This is in keeping with the approximate numbers presented in the survey: 44.44% of responses suggested spending "too much time" on the hobby while only 11.11% of those responders explicated an addiction (Question 26).

Therefore it is argued a significant majority of participants fit the category of "hobbyist gamer" rather than "addict".

Hobbyists have typically been associated with nerd or geek culture. This is reflected in relatively recent television shows like *Freaks & Geeks* and *The Big Bang Theory* where the "geeks" play *D&D* (Apatow, 2000; Lorre, Prady & Molaro, 2013). As David Ewalt frames it:

> To be fair, this prejudice has some root in reality. The game does tend to attract fans of fantasy literature, mythology, mathematics and puzzles — in other words, nerds. (2013, p. 26).

Substantial portions of participants claim to have experienced the effects of this stereotyping (Question 26). Survey data is unable to explain the anecdotal experience of being classified as a "nerd", yet it is significant to note its occurrence in wider popular culture — in television and other media. Other participants identified being labelled a "Satanist", or "member of the "occult" through their involvement with *D&D.* Of those who answered question 26, 33.33% of survey responses could relate to this experience: a significant percentage. The surveyed sample had, on average, been playing multiple decades, so it is inconclusive whether these stigmas continue to prevail today. What *can* be concluded from this data, and certainly within the collective ancestry of *D&D,* is the prevalence of certain participatory stigmas — often with negative connotations (Questions 25 & 26; Bowman, 2010; Ewalt, 2013; Peterson, 2012).

In sum a significant portion of participants have experienced adverse affects associated with their involvement in *Dungeons & Dragons.* This includes: addiction or obsession with *D&D*, negative experiences with other gamers, excessive money spent on gaming materials, or a variety of stigmatic identifiers. While these experiences appear largely negative, participants clearly continue to enjoy the game, suggesting the benefits outweigh any adversities.

6.5 Engrossment and Identification

Participants were asked "does creating fictitious identities appeal to you in *Dungeons & Dragons?*" 91.8% responded "yes" (Question 18). For discursive purposes, the five most popular survey rationales are reproduced here:

1. I like immersing myself in the game world: creating a character is the best way to do that.
2. I enjoy mythology, history, folklore and/or fairy tales. D&D allows me to explore this through a created identity.
3. I enjoy being challenged, using my skill as a player to overcome obstacles.
4. It is a form of escapism — it is fun and distracts me from reality.
5. I enjoy imagining backgrounds or stories for the characters I create.

All five responses indicate strong identification, imagination and immersion within the game. Players who "enjoy being challenged, using [their] skill as a player to overcome obstacles" may experience role-playing immersion and identification to a lesser degree. This type of player can essentially play himself or herself within the game environment, treating the game as a challenge rather than an immersive role-playing experience in a fantasy world (Fine, 1983). Players who identify more personally with their character — creating a persona or identity external to their own — are more likely to set aside their own "reality" during the game in favour of their character's, and are immersed to a greater extent. Harviainen describes the engrossment process within role-play-based gaming as "boundary control": the systems preserving the illusion of "game-reality" (2012, pg. 506). Through implementing systems such as these, a greater level of role-playing engrossment arguably exists, compared with engaging in the game as a form of problem solving (Fine, 1983). Both Bowman (2010) and Harviainen (2012) are interested with the immersive and ritualistic properties prevalent in role-playing games, indicating transcendence beyond a mere "game". As the game transforms into a cultural or ritualistic expression, a space develops in which a variety of emotions and experiences may occur.

Strong emotion associated with in-game immersion is purportedly a fairly common experience for role-players, though prevailing stigmas dissuade players from admitting to cathartic experiences (nordiclarptalks, 2013). Survey data reported varying congruence with this theory. Generalising that players seek emotion or catharsis within *D&D* is only tentatively suggested, as there was no explicit evidence to support this. Many participants did identify with the immersive aspects of *D&D* however. A selection of participants viewed the escapist nature of *D&D* to be primary motivation for creating and enacting imagined identities. It could be argued keywords such as "freedom", "enjoyment" and "escapism", prevalent throughout the survey, may be viewed as expressions of emotion or catharsis. It is inconclusive whether discussion of emotion was limited in the survey due to participant embarrassment or stigma, or whether its importance is irrelevant or of little interest to *D&D* players.

"Bleed", a term coined by Emily Care Boss, refers to the transference of emotions between the player and their character (nordiclarptalks, 2013). Bleed can occur at two levels: either emotion from the player's "reality" seeps into the game world, affecting the character's emotions; or the emotions experienced within the game by the character are transferred back to the player, affecting his/her emotional state in the "real world" (Nordic Larp, 2014). *Dungeons & Dragons* games are not traditionally centred on eliciting "bleed", as some role-playing games are wont to do. There is no mention of "bleed" in any *D&D* rulebooks. While "play for bleed" (Nordic Larp, 2014) is atypical of *D&D,* it is not indicative of a complete absence of emotion or "bleed" either. When considering some of the historic controversies and allegations surrounding the game, particularly relating to the intensely immersive experiences purportedly occurring for certain players (Peterson, 2012), it is likely "bleed" occurs to some degree. While prevalent words in the survey — such as "immersion" — may suggest a high level of emotional buy-in, the extent of complete immersion in the game-world is disputable. Gary Fine, progressing sociologist Erving Goffman's framing theory, posits full immersion is generally not possible within role-

playing games — rather participants ebb and flow in their immersion of the game (1983). In this sense, while players may actively seek an alternate reality it will be experienced in bursts, rather than a sustained and completely immersive experience (Fine, 1983). Although player immersion cannot be absolute in the game world or with the persona that one has created, the partial immersion experiences can still be powerful, as a particularly engaging game permeates the membrane between fantasy and reality (Fine, 1983; Nephew, 2006; Harvianen, 2012).

6.6 Conclusion

It seems clear that participants are drawn to *Dungeons & Dragons* because it is "fun". Alongside this initial argument is the acknowledgement that additional factors contribute to experiences of "fun". Becoming engrossed, identifying with the game, experiencing pockets of boredom, enjoying play, experiencing freedom, and navigating the adverse effects of participant were all factors that contributed to understanding participatory notions of entertainment. Within overall "fun" experiences, participants may still experience moments of boredom, which is largely an experience subjective to the individual player. Engrossment and identification assist in explaining the enjoyment players report — suspending reality in favour of the collective fantasies of the group. Some participants possess escapist or cathartic motivations, which may result in powerful immersion within the game world. Play for the adult indicates a separation from "mundane" adult roles, and the adoption of socially acceptable outlets for creativity, self-expression, fostering relationships with others, and immersion into other realities. This expression of play permits certain freedoms of a psychological, physiological, philosophical, intellectual and creative nature. Alongside the benefits of participating in *D&D* are certain potential detrimental outcomes: stigmas relating to the hobby, spending too much time or money on the hobby, or developing addictive tendencies towards the game. Despite the adverse effects experienced by some participants, the overall sentiment is that the game is enjoyable and immersive. Lastly, it has been suggested an often unspoken motivation for playing role-playing games are the potentially powerful emotive experiences that may be present within some games. Although it is not conclusive whether this was the case for the participants of this survey — or of *D&D* players in general —there is enough academic research and explicit survey data to suggest this may influence some players' participatory practices. The following chapter explores fantastic genre representations within *Dungeons & Dragons.*

CHAPTER 7: FANTASY

Stealing the gem had not been easy, but it was done. Rastus had grown up in the slums. Since childhood, he had become adept at subterfuge and trickery — born out of necessity. His methods were varied — a quick flick of the wrist, the light feet of a footpad, sneaky fingers, and an odd assortment of wires and lock-picks. But his best asset was undoubtedly his personality. He had a way of changing reality to fit his devious purposes — it was almost magical.

7.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore participant notions of fantasy within *Dungeons & Dragons*. The transmutative and "magical" properties of fantasy are discussed in section 7.1, particularly in relation to narrative, immersion, and world building. Section 7.2 discusses conceptions of "good", "evil", ethics, morality, and player choice. Section 7.3 argues some players enjoy gaming styles departing from mainstream *D&D* fantasy, but all groups continue to negotiate their own boundaries and preferences. The antecedent and continued influence of "sword & sorcery" literature on *D&D* fantasy is observed, as some participants expressed their preference for this trope of fantasy. Finally section 7.5 provides concludes this chapter.

7.1 Transmutative and Magical Realms

Defining genre can be a problematic task due to constantly shifting compositional parameters — often translated culturally. James Walters, citing Attebery, describes genre as "fuzzy sets"; genre is broadly defined, and often genre boundaries are vague and transitional (Walters, 2011, pg. 2). When defining "fantasy" Walters inevitably returns to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy — defining this work as "the title of quintessential fantasy" (2011, pg. 3). This is due to the scope and impact of Tolkien's work, but also its prolific popularity (Peterson, 2012; Walters, 2011). *The Lord of the Rings* is an appropriate reference point for this chapter, due to the historicity associated with the trilogy and its influence on *Dungeons & Dragons.* It is contended within this chapter that participants go beyond this literary inspiration however, as other experiences of fantasy must be acknowledged — particularly the "sword & sorcery" vein of fantasy. Being specific about participant definitions of "fantasy" is not the focus of this chapter; rather it is acknowledged fantasy remains broad and malleable.

Many participants professed their enjoyment of "popular fantasy fiction", "mythology, history, folklore", and "fairy tales" (Question 19). Within *Dungeons & Dragons* the enactment of these interests occur through a created identity and the escapist nature of the game (Bowman, 2010; Question 19). Plank and Alpers suggest "popular" fantasy literature enables:

> escape into worlds whose structure is simple while its backgrounds are complicated and mystical or magic, and in which a strength and ability to assert [oneself] are imputed to the reader which [they do] not possess in reality. This may…serve as an explanation why

> [fantasy] must be seen within the social matrix and not in isolation as a discrete body of literature. (1978, p. 19).

There are observable similarities between fantasy literature and *D&D.* Narrative is predominant in both mediums, offering moments of escapism to the consumer. Some participants referred to narratives within *D&D* as "storytelling"(Questions 17, 21, 22, 23, 24 & 30). There are distinct narrative differences between the two mediums however: the *D&D* player is an active protagonist rather than a passive consumer. Novels and other literary works with a predefined plot do not allow the reader to extensively alter the narrative. Role-playing games tangibly differ from fantasy literature in this regard because players *can* wildly subvert predefined "plots" (Cover, 2010). Due to narrative variability and non-stasis within *D&D* frameworks, it could be argued player choice is greatly amplified beyond what a reader of fantasy literature may typically experience. *D&D* fantasy worlds are constructed communally through player input. The ability for players to affect and alter the gamed environment in a meaningful way is a core purpose of the game (Fine, 1983). Players described their impact on the gaming environment as an ability to "explore" in a space where "everything is possible" and "truly use imagination" (Question 23). The word "imagination" was abundant throughout survey data, often referencing world-building, narrative freedom, and enabling "creativity" not otherwise prevalent in the participant's day-to-day schema (Questions 16, 22, 23, 24, 29, 30, 31). This level of effect on "the world" helps explain the possibilities for identity absorption. Since the advent of *D&D*, players have discussed their characters' fantastic experiences in the first person perspective (Peterson, 2012): "I found a magic sword". Harviainen would identify this as player pageantry, and Fine would suggest this occurrence denotes player belief in the fantasy world (Fine, 1983; Harviainen, 2012).

Player choice can have a meaningful effect on the fantasy world: "I cannot explain it! It is a living and breathing world that you can experience, shape, control, escape, conquer! You can do anything and it is a blast" (Question 23). The ability to manipulate the game environment provides a contrast to other games that "have bounds in terms of scope and actions" (Question 23). One participant viewed the liberties within the game more conservatively, compared with the frequent perception player choice was effectively limitless:

> *D&D* is such a free form thinking activity that it spurs creativity, risk taking, and accommodates all people. You have to be an expert at nothing but using your imagination and creativity. *There are rules, but they allow great latitude.* (Question 23)[Italics added].

While there was discrepancy whether one can truly "do anything" within the fantasy worlds of *D&D*, participants widely reported the broad narrative leniencies available as players (Question 23). The fluidity of the *D&D* system encourages and enhances personal and collective fantasies, allowing narrative immersion into fantastic, mythological, pseudo-historical and folkloric worlds (Questions 18 & 19).

The notion of limitless choice reflects the "mystical or magical" themes ubiquitous within the fantasy genre. Fantasy literature and film attempt to interpret and represent things synonymous with magic — the impossible, marvellous, wondrous and miraculous (Furby & Hines, 2012). Fantasy enables vision to see the world in a different way; it acts as a mirror, reflecting our dreams and visions, transmuted in fantastic reproduction (Furby & Hines, 2012). In other words, it becomes "a joy to abandon the mundane for the fantastic" (Question 24). The magic of fantasy may then be viewed to contain transmutative properties, transporting a person from one "reality" into another "fantastic" reality. This speaks to the motivation of playing *D&D.* One participant described their desire to "write and immerse myself in a fun magical world" (Question 30). Another enjoyed "building or participating in an immersive world and constructing a history for my characters through play" (Question 24). A repeated motif within the fantasy genre is a metaphysical and interactive relationship between humankind and the universe, or some unknown power (Plank & Alpers). Within *D&D* a "metaphysical" relationship occurs between the Dungeon Master and the characters:

> [I enjoy] making up a world and sharing it with others. I feel part of something bigger than myself, but in which I still have some degree of autonomy and over which I still have some degree of control. (Question 24).

Players are transported into the personal fantasies of the DM, actualised by participants' personal preferences and phantasmal projections of reality. This is why *D&D* is optimally shared among "like-minded" participants (Question 21). Collective fantasies may be concreted in reality, reflect abstractions and fragmentations of reality, or draw inspiration from spiritual ideologies of contemporary or archaic influence:

> A ten-centimeter long lizard can thus become a ten-meter long fire-spitting dragon, a stone idol an actual demon, a hurricane a thinking entity. Witches' brews, magic wands, incantations, gods and demons are in this transformation for the most part projections of functions which can also be accomplished in reality through labor and means of production. (Plank & Alpers, 1978, p. 20).

Fantasy blends the tensions between the bizarre and the mundane, the magical and the natural, the monster and the human, the phantasmagorical and reality. As "reality" is permuted the fantasy consumer becomes immersed, but the outside world will inevitably intrude (Fine, 1983; Questions 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 30 & 31). Despite "reality" penetrating the porous surfaces of imagination, humanity appears to have an abiding attraction to the magical and transmutative qualities of fantasy. Fantasy assists communities to construct, re-construct and retell their mythologies (Bowman, 2010). The fantasy world reflects reality — and vice versa — continuing to offer the participant a meaningful escape. According to one survey participant:

> Communal storytelling and shared experiences have always been at the root of cultures and society. It is through the medium of *D&D* that we are allowed in essence to create our own mythology and epic tales that will last lifetimes. (Question 23).

The use of the word "allowed" is curious, suggesting the suitability or social acceptability of *D&D* as a cultural pastime. This participant has recognised the perpetuation of cultural manifestation through the outlet of "mythology" and communal storytelling. Furby and Hines submit a similar sentiment: "we all indulge in fantasy of some kind. Fantasy is the oldest form of fiction, found in cultures across the world, and has remained a chief fictional mode" (2012, p. 1). The ability for humanity to explore resonant narrative patterns and fantastic archetypes is one explanation for the pervasive and recurrent interest in fantasy (Bowman, 2010). Notions of Joseph Campbell's "monomyth" or the "hero's journey" mirror the "epic tale" identified by the above participant (Bowman, 2010; Question 23). It is within these heroic tales that the individual is transmuted at a personal level, being transformed from "untested" to "heroic". The hero's journey is reflected in *D&D*; the protagonist must confront and defeat a dangerous foe — a dragon, a magical beast, or another embodiment of evil (Bowman, 2010). For the hero to overcome the shadow, they must confront, and come to terms with its destructive power (Bowman, 2010). When "evil" is overcome the hero is elevated to a position of worthiness, poised to lead their community and provide a new sense of hope (Bowman, 2010). From a Jungian perspective vanquished "evil" may represent aspects of self an individual considers "fearful", "disdainful" or "frightening" (Bowman, 2010, p.14). In this sense, there is a therapeutic element to the enactment of *Dungeons & Dragons*; players are able to overcome anxieties and concerns in a safely gamed environment. Overcoming challenges and foes was a repeated reason that participants enjoyed playing *D&D,* suggestive of a cognitive or psychological satisfaction (Questions 19, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31). Through these mythologies, narratives, and challenges, characters are transmuted from nameless individual to vanquisher of the shadow. The characters' journey is a narrative of survival as they quest for power and wealth on the road to heroism.

7.2 Morality and Ethics: "My Lawful Good Paladin Kills the Chaotic Evil Witch"

Notions of "good" and "evil" are a recurring theme throughout fantasy tropes, and one adopted within *Dungeons & Dragons.* Although participants did not explicitly discuss the dichotomy of "good" versus "evil", depictions of morality and acceptable gaming behaviours were prevalent throughout the survey (Questions 15, 21, 24, & 30). By default the fantastic worlds of *Dungeons & Dragons* presume an antediluvian battle of "good" versus "evil" (Littmann, 2014). Representations of this primordial conflict are mechanised through the alignment system, first introduced in the original texts of *D&D. Men & Magic*[2] presents three "alignment" options: "law" inferring goodness and order; "chaos" inferring evil and disorder; and "neutrality" inferring a

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[2] *Men & Magic* being the player's booklet for original *Dungeons & Dragons.*

balance between the two (Gygax & Arneson, 1974, p. 9). Later editions expanded the alignment system to include expressions of "good" and "evil" — a trend continued to the current iteration of *D&D* (Mearls & Crawford, 2014). It is the player's task to determine a suitable set of ethics or morality for their character. One player enjoyed "imagining how [their] character might live and act" within the fantasy world, suggestive of this process (Question 30). The rules presume players will create an alignment for their character, cleaving to goodness, neutrality, or evil. Players can define their character's moral disposition further by determining their commitment to lawfulness, neutrality, or chaos. This allows players to create a character with a reasonable variation "moral" nuance — theoretically informing appropriate character actions within the world.

One participant disassociated himself from certain themes that may arise within a *D&D* game. He expressed his disapproval of "racism" and "slavery", making a conscious observation to avoid these things within a game (Question 15). Clear thematic distinctions between "good" and "evil" are preferable for some players, enabling transparent moral boundaries within the game. Slavery is not a permitted practice if one is "good"; therefore slavery is "evil". The notion of setting "boundaries" within the fantasy world appears to be a consistent practice for participants:

> I enjoy immersing myself in fantasy worlds and cultures. I enjoy real world cultures as well, but *D&D* provides a fun way to explore other places and cultures through the *simpler lens of fantasy*. Unlike role playing a real world culture *you set the boundaries for fantasy worlds.* (Question 24)[Italics added].

It is apparent this participant values the immersive qualities of fantasy. The malleability of *D&D* to adjust "boundaries" and view cultures and places through the "simpler lens of fantasy" is an important divergence from the "real world". One advantage of a "simpler lens" is the ability to construct crystalline binaries of "good" and "evil" within the fantasy world. This enables characters to differentiate between "right" and "wrong".

The high fantasy of J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* elucidates clear moral distinctions between "good" and "evil". Tolkien's literary work offers the reader a twentieth-century commentary on the relationship of good and evil, the significance of community and friends, the overarching order of existence, and the uniqueness of the individual (Furby & Hines, 2012). These relationships are paradigmatically observable within *Dungeons & Dragons*. Tolkien's influence on *Chainmail* and *D&D* has been widely acknowledged, making this observation unsurprising (Bowman, 2010; Cover, 2010; Peterson, 2012; Tresca, 2011). By default, characters in *D&D* are aligned with the greater good, positioning them in opposition to "evil". Those within the "fellowship" are supported by their party, and support their companions in return — using their personality, skills, and powers to confront and overthrow malignant forces (Tresca, 2011). Throughout forty years of *D&D*, characters have continued to be positioned as heroic, using teamwork and cooperative play to overcome "evil" — a notion prevailing to the

current edition (Mearls & Crawford, 2014c). Keywords of "teamwork", "cooperation", "camaraderie", and "collaboration" were recurrent within survey data (Question 23), suggesting a mirroring trend between the survey participants and wider *D&D* fantasy paradigms.

The influence of Tolkien's fantasy tropes, and *D&D*'s prescribed alignment system, enables and encourages distinct taxonomies of monsters, creatures, and opponents. *D&D* players are effectively offered legitimisation to kill "evil" monsters or NPCs (Littman, 2014). Two participants were vocal about their enjoyment of destroying monstrous foes:

> I like spending time with my friends pretending to kill owl bears. (Question 30).

Another said:

> I get to spend hours bonding with people and killing dragons. (Question 24).

Tonally there are hints of facetiousness within these responses. Nevertheless these responses allude to the acceptability of "killing" within the paradigms of the game. The permissiveness of this behaviour materialises as a perk or attraction for these players. Ethically there is scant difference between "slavery", vehemently shunned by one participant, and the gleeful "killing" the latter participants embrace (Questions 15, 24 & 30). Within the game, ethics are purely mechanical: "killing" is permitted, encouraged, and even rewarded by granting characters experience points (Gygax, 1979; Mearls & Crawford, 2014a). Slavery remains a detestable practice, while killing does not. Stylistically this approach to "killing" could be likened to the "murderhobo", informally defined as:

> A term used (originally pejoratively, but occasionally affectionately) for the player characters in RPGs…The term arises due to the fact that most adventuring characters and parties are technically homeless vagrants, generally living on the road and sometimes in temporary accommodation, and the default solution to problems faced by the typical adventurer boils down to killing things until the problem is solved or treasure is acquired. In many games killing things and taking their stuff is simply the order of the day, all morally acceptable and proper, either because that's all the players are interested in doing or all the GM [Game Master] can come up with. (1d4chan, 2015).

Conceptually the "murderhobo" has received minimal academic attention. The facetiousness of the "murderhobo" concept is acknowledged, viewed primarily as a comedic commentary on role-playing games rather than a literal style of play. Yet the analogy gains relevance, when players can use alignment as a dictate to justify killing NPCs or monsters on a whim. Vague conceptions of morality may be appealing to certain players, especially those who view the game as a "fun" outlet (Questions 24 & 30). As the two participants above imply, killing monsters *is* fun. For some participants "killing" monsters and "getting loot" was a primary

motivation for playing (Question 24). In these games, "good" and "evil" can be entirely objective; alignment is simply a game mechanic used to distinguish between friend and foe, rather than a granular system of meaning or an advanced ethical framework. Within fantasy role-playing games morally reprehensible acts can be enacted by players with little "real world" repercussion, making the lure of escapism additionally compelling (Fine, 1983). In this sense, the game becomes an acceptable outlet to vent frustrations and emotions.

Conversely Miles and Hess contend *D&D*'s alignment system can be utilised as a tool, creating interesting dynamics within the game (2014). In reality, character treatment of an imaginary enemy has few ramifications; however from a philosophical perspective the matter is germane (Littman, 2014). Fantasy is a reflection of reality: player attitudes demonstrated when combating "evil" may mirror attitudes demonstrated towards combating "evil" in "reality"(Littman, 2014). A prime consideration for players then, is the extent to which in-game morality is important within their games; it may not be. Therefore, players negotiate the "right" course of action for their characters — whether that is informed by the objective "good" and "evil" of the alignment system, or enacted through a more nuanced exploration. Bowman seems to agree with this assertion, for:

> such explorations offer several benefits for participants. The player can emotionally – and, sometimes, viscerally – experience alternate modes of consciousness and stories that differ from those of their mundane existence. Role-players can practice personality aspects, many of which may be archetypal in nature, and can then objectively view the distinction between their own Actual identity and the performed identity. This enactment process allows the individual to decide to either adopt such traits or to avoid them, depending on his or her response to the events and emotions in-game. (Bowman, 2010, pp. 144-145).

Qualitatively this mirrors research data. One respondent broached a discussion of character exploration:

> …I am the Dungeon Master, and my storytelling and world design have been well regarded for many years. My particular group of players enjoy roleplaying over roll-playing[3] and the level of world immersion I provide allows them to fully explore aspects of their character and in a sense themselves without judgment or recrimination. One must be comfortable in their own skin and self-aware of their own moral, spiritual and intellectual selves. My comfort and self-realization is fully displayed and unclouded, thereby extension allowing my players to feel a sense of comfort within themselves, the game and our shared experience. (Question 21).

[3] "Role-playing" infers playing the role of a character to determine in-game outcomes, while "roll-playing" infers rolling dice to determine in-game outcomes.

This response provides a stark contrast to the preceding responses, where killing monsters was a vital source of enjoyment within the game. This participant indicates cognisance with his "moral, spiritual and intellectual" conduct within the game: the exploration of character and self was afforded particular focus. For hobbyists consciously or subconsciously entering the game world as an immersive experience, the game can become arguably broader if the exploration of morality, ethics, philosophy and identity are taken seriously. Alternatively — or in counterpart — the game may be approached purely as a "fun" outlet, necessitating little moral or ethical exploration. Participant survey results suggest a combination and overlapping of two game styles: games where nuanced explorations of morality and ethics take place, and others where moral binaries are entirely objective.

7.3 Alternative Interpretations of *Dungeons & Dragons* Fantasy

The remainder of this chapter explores deviations of mainstream *Dungeons & Dragons* fantasy. Participants extensively discussed the necessity for their gaming group to contain sufficient levels of comfort, synergy, like-mindedness, and trust (Questions 17, 20, 21, 23 & 24). These group elements appear essential for the exploration divergent fantasies — particularly as 89.36% of participants described themselves as being "comfortable" to "very comfortable" within their groups. An additional requirement for some participants was the explication players must not "judge" or "recriminate" others within the group (Question 21). Purportedly this allowed participants to explore their characters and themselves to a fuller extent (Questions 17 & 21). These discussions of non-judgement suggest a style of play, or the inclusion of certain elements, that may not gel with all participants. Mentioning this specifically infers these participants may have been subjected to "judgement" or "recrimination" in the past. Finding a game where participants can express themselves without fear of judgement appears to be cherished, especially as *D&D* is platform where personal fantasies are shared within a group. One participant described his games as being a safe environment for participants to explore themselves — stemming from his own "self-realization" and self-comfort (Question 21). Ostensibly this participant does not "judge" or consider his participants to be deviant, even if these explorations run counter to socially acceptable behaviours. It is suggested these types of games permit players a more genuine exploration of self, when compared with the traditional fantasy schema. Rationale for this conclusion stems from the inherently looser moral structures and nebulous boundaries, which players may test, challenge, or negotiate.

What are divergent expressions of fantasy? While some *D&D* fantasy is whimsical and light-hearted, other mythoi hew to darker and grittier depictions of worlds, men and monsters (Mearls & Crawford, 2014). One participant discussed his especial interest in the "atmosphere" of earlier *D&D* (Question 15). Parsing this response could indicate a preferred "atmosphere" must be shared by participants for an optimised gaming experience. The notion of shared "experience" or game "style" was recurrent throughout survey data (Questions 15, 21 & 23). One participant described his desire to "create and share my stories in the milieu of fantasy or sword & sorcery

with those who truly appreciate my efforts" (Question 24). *D&D*'s fantasy is a unique pastiche, being greatly inspired by the sword & sorcery tales presented in Pulp fiction magazines of *Weird Tales, Amazing Stories,* and *Astounding Science Fiction* (Peterson, 2012). Moods of "sword & sorcery" fantasy are varied. The Cthulhu mythos of H.P Lovecraft relies on a sprawling and destructive confrontation with the unknown, the protagonist's realisation of humanity's insignificance, and their precarious or uncertain place in the universe (Lowell, 2004). Lovecraft's protagonists clash with Joseph Campbell's monomyth. Campbell's hero/ines typically emerge victorious from their confrontation with tribulation and evil. Lovecraft's tales offer no such solace to the reader, perverting Campbell's mythic cycle and subverting mainstream fantasy tropes. Within this "realm of myth" only "sorrow, insanity, and death" prevail, perpetuated by the knowledge and "truth" of "humanity's insignificance in the universe" (Lowell, 2004, pg. 48). Themes arising in Lovecraft's work hint at the necessity and wholesomeness of civilisation and order (Howard, 2005), yet due to encroaching prodigious entities, societal order is hopelessly threatened. These threats occur at the personal level of the protagonist, or universally by the various unspeakable and abhorrent monstrosities encountered in Lovecraft's literature. Conversely the protagonists in Robert E. Howard's "Conan the Barbarian" short stories spurn civilised society, deeming barbarism's inevitable victory against civilisation (Howard, 2005). Both literary examples illustrate a divergence from mainstream fantasy tropes, yet are reflected as expressions of fantasy in the participant survey, and in *Dungeons & Dragons*' early literary inspirations (Gygax, 1979; Peterson, 2012; Question 24).

"Sword & sorcery", while departing from mainstream fantasy, permits a style of world building and exploration preferable to some players. As one player describes it, "*D&D* can be whatever you want it to be" (Question 23). Consequently, certain *D&D* communities have reconstituted their games to reflect these preferences. *Astonishing Swordsmen & Sorcerers of Hyperborea* [*AS&SH*] is an example where the implied fantasy style of *D&D* has not been entirely accepted; instead the system has been developed around a sword & sorcery-inspired milieu, while remaining reflective of the *Dungeons & Dragons* rules (Talanian, 2012). Thematically the malignance, depravities, and horror of Lovecraft, Howard and Clark Ashton Smith's weird tales are prevalent within the *Hyperborea* setting (Talanian, 2012). Despite the gritty contrast to the default *D&D* universe, *AS&SH* essentially retains the *D&D* alignment system (Talanian, 2012). The world around the characters may be grim or even hopeless, yet there remains a semblance of morality players can choose to navigate. This moral "greying" offers players an additional level of explorable nuance; their world lacks the strong and objective contrast between "good" and "evil" a traditional game of *D&D* typically contains. Through these fantastic deviations, *D&D* systems can be altered substantially, offering "the flexibility to try anything you can imagine" (Question 23). One participant described the usefulness of synthesising fantasy, history and mythology, allowing "people to riff off each others' ideas and share an experience" (Question 23).

Synthesising these tropes allows divergent *Dungeons & Dragons* experiences, enabling conscious departures from its inferred fantasy. Geoffrey McKinney's *Carcosa* and Zak Smith's *A Red & Pleasant Land,* published by *Lamentations of the Flame Princess,* are two examples where

the authors have consciously departed from fantasy traditions, steering towards synthesised settings (McKinney, 2011; Smith, 2014). As a "*Weird Science-Fantasy Horror Setting"* for a *D&D*-styled game:

> Carcosa is not Tolkien, high fantasy, or mainstream fantasy. It is equal parts horror, science-fiction, and swords & sorcery. It is H.P Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness,* Robert E. Howard's "Worms of the Earth" and "A Witch Shall be Born," Lin Carter's "Carcosa Story about Hali, " and Michael Moorcock's "While the Gods Laugh". (McKinney, 2011, pg. 2).

Within Carcosa the three-pronged Law, Neutrality, and Chaos signifiers of *D&D* remain. Characters are instead distinguished by their service to the "Great Old Ones", rather than traditional concepts of "good" or "evil" (McKinney, 2008, pg. 7). In turn Zak S. describes "Voivodja" or the "Land of Unreason" — an amalgam of Transylvanian vampires and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (Zak S., 2014). *Carcosa, A Red & Pleasant Land,* and *Astonishing Swordsmen & Sorcerers of Hyperborea* embody the flexibility of a *D&D* game where "anything is possible" (Question 24). Participants are able to engage with the "unlimited scope of the game", and the "freedom to do whatever you want", in essence making the game their own (Question 23 & 24).

Bowman describes fantasy as being a "safe, controlled space" for the expression of the psyche and an outlet for players to develop alternate identities (2010, pg. 9). Paradoxically divergent fantasy themes may appear less than safe. Although these worlds are often grim, hostile, or horrible, game mechanics provide a secure framework for participant exploration (Bowman, 2010). This is due to the vicarious, yet immersive nature of role-playing. Safety must be available for all of those at the table. One participant reasonably concluded "our group includes [an] 8 year old, so some behavior and language is off-limits", while another's "group consists of young family members that are new to the game, so I have to watch what I say and how I run the game" (Question 21). Games are tailored and moderated by players to be "suitable" for those they game with. Where possible the players collectively negotiate the content and the levels of "grim reality" present within any given campaign (Question 24). Social contracting ensures the safety of all participants. Divergences illuminate the different ways people enact their shared fantasies, especially those departing significantly from the assumed *D&D* setting. Divergences from mainstream fantasy make player's experiences with *D&D* more personalised than the default setting may allow, suiting a diverse range of gaming tastes.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed participatory expressions of fantasy within *Dungeons & Dragons.* It has been argued fantasy contains transmutative properties, allowing participants to access "realities" not otherwise possible or probable in reality. Players enact the age-old heroic

"monomyth", negotiating concepts of "good" and "evil". The primary mechanic for this exploration occurs in *D&D* through the alignment system. Participants can adhere to traditional notions of morality, or choose to explore more nuanced, nebulous, and shifting notions. While the alignment system within *D&D* may assist some players, other settings abandon, dilute or reconstitute these signifiers to simulate divergent fantasy worlds. Although these deviations may subvert mainstream notions of fantasy, it is contended these are valid participatory expressions of fantasy, and are useful for those who adopt them. Chapter 8 discusses the profound influence of community on the *Dungeons & Dragons* game.

CHAPTER 8: COMMUNITY

Through his many contacts, Rastus finally found a buyer for the gem. The locale for the exchange was established: the sewers beneath the city. It was a nasty place. He would need to search various alcoves, tunnels, and nooks to find the rendezvous point. It was a big task ahead, but Rastus felt confident. It would pay handsomely in the end.

8.0 Introduction

This chapter, drawing on participant discussion, explores the transpiration of "community" within *Dungeons & Dragons*. Section 8.1 provides a synoptic overview of how participants value "community" within their respective *D&D* games. Section 8.2 provides a broader discussion of the emergence, ubiquity, and evolution of Internet technologies, and their effect on the practice of playing *D&D.* Section 8.3 explores the influence of community at a personal level, along with the way friendships, relationships, and notions of belonging are fostered through gaming communities. This chapter concludes with section 8.4, exploring the effects of nostalgic memory on participant perceptions of the game — and consequently the various communities participants belong to, or pursue.

8.1 Participant Valuation of Community

At its core *Dungeons & Dragons* is a communal game: cooperative, collaborative, and involving multiple participants (Bowman, 2010; Fine, 1983; Tresca, 2011). As suggested in Chapter 3, communities form through shared commonality (Booth, 2009; Cohen, 1985; Erickson, 1997; Hillery, 1955). Communities exist and fluctuate through shared boundaries or codes – sometimes being conscious to the membership, sometimes unconscious or seemingly invisible (Cohen, 1985). Spoken or unspoken codes provide the group with order, expectations, and a common understanding of group and individual values (Cohen, 1985). Collective meaning within a community can be forged through symbolic ritual or rites of passage, through which individual identities can be influenced and formed (Bowman, 2010; Cohen, 1985; Erickson, 1997; Fine, 1983; Goffman, 1982; McKay, 2001). "Community" is defined to include the aforementioned aspects; however it would be assumptive to suggest survey participants shared an identical definition of community. Consequently, player perspective of "community" will be explored throughout this chapter.

When asked "is community important to you as a player of *Dungeons & Dragons?*", 59.18% of participant answered "yes". Only two participants chose not to answer the question. While a majority of participants answered "yes" it was anticipated the overall percentage would be higher, considering the communal conditions required for a tabletop session to take place (Bowman, 2010; Fine, 1983). This answer may initially appear misleading — it would appear a significant portion of survey participants did not particularly value community. Upon closer inspection the word "community" was persistent throughout other survey answers, revealing its

importance for participants (Chapter 5). Question 17 asked: "if community is important in *Dungeons & Dragons* please explain why/how". This inquiry elicited some specific and compelling data to supplement the original question (Question 17). Unpacking these results revealed greater degrees of "community" valuation than was initially suggested. Survey data is subsequently analysed informing the focus of this chapter.

8.2 Online Communities and Digital Hybridisation

Arguably, the broadest representations of "community" were participant's online game-related experiences. Due to pervading Internet technologies, gamers are able to connect globally (Chee, Vieta & Smith, 2006; Hjorth, 2011; Woods, 2012). Evidence of globalised gaming habits were reported within the survey; as one player mentions:

> Most of my gaming now is done online, and all but one of my current players I met through the online *D&D* community. Without them, I would probably not be gaming right now. (Question 17).

The above quotation encapsulates the usefulness of an online presence, providing the participant with an opportunity to play, where otherwise such opportunity may not exist. An online presence reflects substantial deviance from pre-Internet, when finding other players was primarily confined to one's geography, available print publications, conventions, and networking abilities. Another survey participant stated: "without community there's no game. There's no discussion of the rules to keep people interested during the long gaps in play that many people currently experience, there's no way to find new players, no PbP, etc" (Question 17). Both responses value wider connectivity within their gaming habits. The first response broadly refers to "the online D&D community". The second response indicates an online format of gaming called "play by post" — generally run from forums and mostly textual in approach. "Play by post" is functionally divergent from tabletop, Google+ Hangouts or Skype formats. The latter include an audio and/or visual component the former lacks. Both participants appear to value online relationships in facilitating gaming habits, allowing them to contribute to online communities. Another participant reported: "…even Internet contacts can be useful for sharing ideas and material" (Question 17), insinuating an experience of "community" peripheral to the immediate gaming experience. In this sphere the game is discussed, debated, and "ideas and material" are shared among fellow online enthusiasts. Discussions of this nature occur even when a game is not being undertaken. This level of investment is suggestive of the "hobbyist" gamer: those who spend significant time on their hobby outside the immediate gaming experience (Woods, 2012).

Contrastingly some participants devalued online community: "if by community you mean social friendships, aka the people at the table you play the game with then yes. If by community you mean the online bickering over rules community then no" (Question 17). This comment highlights the difference between interacting with "friends" and "people at the table",

versus online spaces where "bickering" has been witnessed. Preferring the former conception of community, this participant has little interest in "online" community membership. Duly, he makes his preference for "friendships" in a tabletop setting abundantly transparent. Where some participants prefer the ideologies and practiced ritual of online communities, they do not fit this participant's preferred communal paradigm. The preceding comments demonstrate a division between those who embrace online communities, and those who avoid them (Question 17).

Computer role-playing game [CRPG] and tabletop role-playing game [TTRPG] markets coexist non-competitively, sharing a similar fan-base (Dancey, 2000). One participant astutely identified his own transition from TTRPGs to online gaming:

> Playing PnP [Pen & Paper] D&D got me hooked on the Dungeons & Dragons: Online MMO [Massively Multiplayer Online], which I wasted 2 years and $1500 on. I certainly don't blame PnP for any of that, I consider the MMO to be related in terms only, the gameplay and experience is obviously a totally different thing. (Question 22).

A similar symbiosis occurred for an *EverQuest* player; TTRPGs existed simultaneously to his passion for online role-playing games (Chee, Vieta & Smith, 2006). Internet technologies permit various forms of RPGs to occur and thrive via social media and electronic gaming, though the tabletop format remains a "totally different thing" for this participant. MMOs are designed with communicative utilities — primarily chat functions — and are thereby social, encouraging communal interaction (Chee, Vieta & Smith, 2006). Contrariwise this participant perceives the "gameplay and experience" of tabletop *D&D* to be "obviously" differing. What this obviousness entails is uncertain; one possibility is the "obvious" person-to-person interaction necessary for a purely tabletop role-playing game (Fine, 1983). The two gaming mediums are "related in *terms* only". Both are role-playing games and both are named "*Dungeons & Dragons*", sharing appellation rather than gameplay experience. The communal experiences to be found within both games are intrinsically "different". While digital and tabletop mediums differ, participant feedback and industry research suggest a wider role-playing community enjoy both dually (Dancey, 2000; Question 17; Question 31).

Blending digital and non-digital modes of gaming is becoming more common. One participant described their appreciation for digital technology coupled with an adherence to person-to-person gaming:

> I am enjoying the beginnings of electronic tools for gaming (online character sheets, campaign wikis, virtual tabletops, etc.), and would like to see technology continue to make the game a more immersive experience while still allowing the humans at the table to have the unlimited freedom that video games don't provide. (Question 31).

Flexibility of digital technologies have enabled "humans at the table" to game differently from pre-Internet *D&D*. Despite the conveniences of these tools, this participant confesses a desire to

continue gaming with humans; technology is supplementary and enhancive, rather than focal. In a wider sense technological spectacles have changed the nature of traditional TTRPGs substantially. Web 2.0 technologies facilitate "participatory, cross-platforming and collaborative media" (Hjorth, 2011, pg. 48). Emergent role-playing game formats incorporate new media and collaborative methods of participation (Tresca, 2011). Including online or digital technologies within one's games does not appear uncommon or undesirable, yet select participants obviously perceive inimitable disparities between "video game" formats and the "unlimited freedom" of tabletop *D&D* (Question 31). Traditional perspectives maintain a visceral and intuited discrepancy between digitality and the "real-world" (McCallum-Stewart, 2014). Participant responses echo this sentiment — not because digitality is undervalued, but rather it does not have the same gamed potency. The enactment and composition of "community" in this context acknowledges digital technology, but technology remains subsidiary to the person-to-person interaction integral to the *D&D* experience.

Contrastingly some participants primarily use digital tools and Internet applications such as Roll20 or Google+ Hangouts to enact their role-playing game hobbies (Roll20, 2014; Google, 2015). Through blended media, analogue and digital hybridisation can be achieved (Hjorth, 2011). Participant references of "electronic tools" may insinuate hybridised gaming technologies (Question 31). The "transformative effect" of Internet tools enables convenient methods of role-playing, as fan communities negotiate blending "the ephemeral and the material" (Piatti-Farnell, 2015, pg. 104). Hybridisation of *D&D* is not uncharacteristic, unsurprising, or unrepresentative of other forms of gaming. Styles, platforms, and genres blur and overlap — characteristic of the propensity for technology to stratify and integrate throughout global societies (Hjorth, 2011). Hybridised gaming experiences are not purely "analogue", nor are they purely "digital" — instead involving varying elements of each. Technological applications such as Skype or Facebook assist with communication, the creation of community, and the facilitation of digital gaming experiences. As of July 2015, the Facebook page "Tabletop One Shot Group" had more than 2600 community members; most games were conducted using online tools (Tabletop RPG One Shot Group, 2015).

Survey data analysis indicates many participants are supportive of assistive digital technologies, even if technologies cannot yet provide "the unlimited freedom" or communal interactions of a TTRPG (Chapter 5; Question 31). As another participant described:

> I'm still waiting for the virtual tabletop that I envisioned in the eighties. We're getting closer, but still have a ways to go (4e looked like it would deliver, but that fizzled). (Question 31).

A discrepancy is illustrated between the current conventions of gaming and the "virtual tabletop". The latter is not yet satisfactory. Everything else appears to have "fizzled" in contrast. Another participant discussed his preference for the development of…

> Some sort of virtual reality interface that other players could all share the same game world. Basically just a visual tool to help roleplaying and imagination. (Question 31).

Like the preceding participant, this participant notes the underdeveloped "virtual reality". Developing new technologies may introduce new gaming possibilities, but players sharing and participating collectively in the game world appears to be of prime importance. Technology exists to assist imagination rather than replace the communal tabletop interaction. This technological assistance is not particularly exclusive to *D&D*. Larissa Hjorth describes the affect "the realm of Web 2.0 has had", causing a "major impact, not only upon how games are played (i.e. increasingly networked such as MMOGs) and shared, but also upon how notions of community, collaboration, identity and authorship are conceptualized and practiced" (2011, pg. 32). Hjorth expands by querying whether the Internet should be viewed as a "network society", or whether it is more accurately conceptualised as a series of communities (Hjorth, 2011, pg. 51). Ubiquitous online inhabitation and the widespread development of online communities are inseparable to the uptake of online gaming (Hjorth). Given the global propensity towards Internet-based activities it would be unusual if emergent technologies had not impacted conceptions of *D&D* communities. As various participants have already described: they have.

Levels of technology may vary between game sessions and within the same group. The general availability of these technologies — which are often free of charge — may make the decision to include technologies entirely unconscious, yet representative of wider socio-cultural paradigms. Despite the permutation of digital technology it is pertinent to consider the "immersive", "escapist", and "communal" person-to-person interactions available to participants within a traditional tabletop *D&D* format (Question 17). It evokes an inquiry into whether digital representations can equitably capture the imagined worlds to the same extent as their analogue counterparts. Participants appear divided on whether these technologies effectively match the experience of playing with others in-person. It appears a palpable distinction remains — interpersonally and experientially — between online gaming, and person-to-person gaming experiences.

Notwithstanding these differences, it has been argued both forms are simply that — different. Prevailing attitudes rooted in popular consciousness have frequently bestowed sub-value to online worlds compared with the greater social acceptance of offline worlds (Piatti-Farnell, 2015). This perception is being increasingly challenged, resulting in a more equal assessment of the two worlds (Piatti-Farnell, 2015). Additionally, it can be contended all communities are effectively "imagined" by their members; thus an online or offline social grouping cannot have any greater or lesser "reality" or validity than the other (Chee, Vieta & Smith, 2006, pg. 154). When summarising participant commentary on the varying value of online versus offline gaming and communities, suspicion must be exercised. It cannot be said one type of community — whether online or offline — is of inherently greater or lesser value. Rather, the participant appears to measure the overall worthiness of a format subjectively, and in self-reference to their own preferences.

8.3 Community at a Personal Level: Friendship, Relationship and Belonging

Participants consistently insisted the indelible value of community within a gaming context, reminiscent of Fine's position fantasy gaming is a "social world" (Fine, 1983; Question 17). Chee, Vieta, and Smith argue social interactions are the building blocks of a community (2006). Drawing on theorist James Carey's demarcation of community, Chee, Vieta and Smith argue the words "communication" and "community" have an intrinsic etymological similarity (2006). Fundamentally, community could be perceived as a spirit of openness and the "will-to-communicate" (Chee, Vieta & Smith, 2006, pg. 160). The narrative prominence of *D&D* suggests the game must be propelled by dialogue and discussion between players — inherently communicative (Cover, 2010; Shank, 2015). If this premise can be accepted, definitions of *D&D* communities can be very broad, occurring in both online and offline spheres. At its core, narrative and the game experience should be perceived to be a communal phenomenon:

> *D&D* is inherently a community effort. A DM needs players and vice versa. This can be seriously only achieved [by] in-person interaction, stressing the need for community. (Question 17).

Another stated:

> *D&D* is a niche hobby, so the community is the only way to find players. (Question 17).

Both responses were united in their belief "community" was an integral component within the *D&D* experience. Two other participants asserted an even greater measure of community within the game: "*D&D* is nothing without community", and "without community there's no game" (Question 17). All four responses are augmented by the unified belief "community" is inseparable from *D&D.* Arguably, communities form due to shared commonality (Booth, 2009; Cohen, 1985; Erickson, 1997; Hillery, 1955). "Community" continues to be observable within *D&D* when the intrinsic commonalities shared by *D&D* participants are considered: all enjoy the same game. For one participant "gathering with people of similar interests and expectations" provides a "level of comfort" (Question 17). Sharing similar interests, expectations, and gathering with like-minded people ostensibly creates feelings of "belonging" (Question 17). In *Gaming as Culture,* Williams, Hendricks and Winkler assert fantasy gaming has rather "fluid" boundaries: players feel an affinity or interpret a shared commonality with other fantasy gamers (2006, pg. 2). Anthony Cohen would suggest these participants share similar communal "codes" (1985). Sharing communal codes can influence the depth of relationships. Survey data reflects this notion — the emotive affinity toward other role-players can vary from close friendships to mere acquaintances:

> I've played in games with strangers from the very beginning, but nothing compares with the feeling of camaraderie achieved by playing in a campaign for months or years with the same group of players. (Question 17).

Here a distinction is made between playing with "strangers" and with cultivated relationships, where "camaraderie" has been developed. One participant refused to play with strangers at all, playing with others "only on the most personal level. I've only ever played with friends at our homes, never at a gaming store" (Question 17). An allusion that the game is a sacred space appears to be made. The cultural significance of interacting "only on the most personal level" infers a ritualistic practice, which only the select are invited to attend. One player believed *D&D* to be "necessarily a social game and can't be played alone. It is best with good, close friends" (Question 17), while another thought "*D&D* has always been a social event best enjoyed face to face with friends" (Question 17). The pertinence of friendship is again iterated, as is the preference for person-to-person gaming rather than online or at a gaming store. The final response indicates gaming may take place anywhere, though the insistence of playing with friends infers gaming within a home rather than a public space.

Question 20 asked "how comfortable do you feel within the current group you game with?" Multi-choice answers ranged from "very comfortable" to "very uncomfortable". 59.57% of those responding felt "very comfortable" within their gaming group. 29.79% felt "comfortable", 6.38% felt "fairly comfortable", 2.13% felt "neutral" and "uncomfortable", while 0% felt "very uncomfortable" within their group. The overall sentiment indicates most participants feel comfortable within their groups — a factor that is presumably important (Question 20). Participants were asked to what they attributed their comfort or discomfort. Prevailing themes were: friendship, family, longevity of relationships, and safety — all involving aspects of trust and respect (Question 21). Close relationships and friendships appear concomitant with *D&D,* proportional to one's long-term gaming habits. Gamers may begin playing with strangers and develop friendship over time, or opt to play with pre-existing friends and family. These participants clearly value personal friendship in their gaming experiences. Contrastingly games lacking satisfactory levels of friendship may choke participant role-playing practices. Rather than satisfactory exploratory experiences facilitated through friendship, these games are likely to remain surface level explorations. As Bowman suggests:

> We consistently engage in forms of play that encourage us to move beyond our individual sense of identity and inhabit a new mental space. (2010, pg. 47).

Inhabiting a new "mental space" can occur when participatory motivation stems from expressing one's creativity and imagination (Bowman, 2010). This desire may be to "validate one's own existence and to establish cohesion with reality", "even if that fails to correspond to with the common cultural consciousness" (Bowman, 2010, pg. 47). Identity explorations within *D&D* are socially and culturally situated. Consequently communal experiences of friendship and belonging

assist with validating one's identity. As suggested in the previous chapter, provided the game feels safe for participants, *D&D* remains a useful outlet for identity exploration.

8.4 Nostalgia and Community

58.82% of survey participants believed "nostalgia" influenced their opinion of *Dungeons & Dragons* (Question 14). Keywords relating to "community" and "nostalgia" included: friends, memories, enjoyment, and fun (Question 15). Explanations were diverse, but many participants believed the edition played during their youth formed and informed the communities they now belong to or identify with (Question 15). Nadia Seremetakis describes the complex process of nostalgic memory, occurring as a "montage of…impinging fragments" and proposes "the numbing and erasure of sensory realities are crucial moments in socio-cultural transformation. These moments can only be glimpsed at obliquely and at the margins, for their visibility requires an immersion into interrupted sensory memory and displaced emotions"(1993, pg. 2). Seremetakis indicates the fragmentary nature of memory. Piecing together and examining memory fragments can morph one's socio-cultural state — but this process is problematic due to the decay of memory. Memories are emotively remembered and require accessing, but they become somewhat oblique or inaccurate over time, transmuting or dissolving. These considerations are mirrored within survey data where:

> Much of the enjoyment of dungeons and dragons comes from shared jokes and memories with friends. A lot of actual game sessions are actually slow and boring, but the memories are of the exciting bits and the inside jokes. (Question 15).

Seremetakis would propose this response is indicative of "displaced emotions" (1993). Cognitively, remembrances of "the exciting bits" are preferred, while the "slow and boring" memory fragments are minimised. Historic games are remembered for their positive elements: pleasant "memories" and friendships. Notably, this particular participant is self-aware of his predisposition to exalt the exciting memories above the duller ones. Another participant made similar linkages between nostalgic memory and community:

> My friends and I had so much fun playing back in those days. It's fair to say that many of my most clear memories from those days involve playing *D&D*, and the adventures we had playing the game. (Question 15).

Although this participant describes remembering "those days" with "clear memories", Seremetakis would argue his response is remembered through an "oblique" historic lens, as he fondly remembers these events (Seremetakis, 1993). Rather than minimising the validity of participant memories, such an analysis highlights the selective and fragmentary nature of memory. It is not contended participant memories are wrong or invalid, rather that the positive

experiences are exemplified. Corresponding to this notion is the suggestion of Gillespie and Crouse: evaluate the relationship between past and present, and connect the two.

> The constructed past, or an artefact that symbolizes the constructed past, is stabilized, idealized and simplified – but not simple. Nostalgia is highly selective and glosses over the complexities and inequalities of the past. The nostalgic past represents a refuge from the present. (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012, pp. 443-444).

In addition to being a "refuge from the present" — or a temporal escapism — nostalgia must be viewed in light of the rapidity and flux of a digital society; mirroring collective feelings of being awash amongst the ongoing changes and uncertainties (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012). Memories of friendships and "good moments" (Question 15) are therefore static and non-transitional anchors for participants. Where present consciousness may be uncertain or transitory, the past is not:

> How can one not be influenced by memory and nostalgia? My memories of *D&D* are my most fondly remembered, as I am reminded of all those people that have impacted me and for those whom I have impacted through the gaming table and shared experiences. (Question 15).

A primary theme is the nature of the reciprocal gaming relationship: the valuable synchronicity between one's cherished memories, and those with whom the memories were made. Participant comments make it clear the past — or nostalgia — is to be celebrated rather than spurned. It would be disingenuous to assume most participants are unaware of their glorification of the past. Rather, it appears the notion of nostalgia is an inspiration for the present: "memories of past games inspire me to try and recapture those good moments" (Question 15). Jameson would suggest an attempt to "recapture" the good moments is futile: the moment is forever gone (1969). Nonetheless the stability of memory affords certain present benefits. Players can belong to communities which offer cultural stabilities — especially those retaining the feel or aesthetic of childhood or yesteryear. As Gillespie and Crouse would suggest, people are selective — simplifying the complexity of their nostalgic memories. While it may be acceptable to infer the participant "glosses over" the complexities of the past, anecdotal research remains credible because it is experiential. Participant recollections while valid should not be oversimplified or unquestioningly accepted by the researcher, yet the nostalgic lens through which humanity gazes should not be ignored. Although a memory may be nostalgic it also does not render the memory incorrect; thus the complexity of nostalgia. Obviously communal experiences of *D&D* have made a profound impact on participants' memories. Participant responses suggest coexistence between community and nostalgia: a constant and fluxing renegotiation of the past and present.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the compositions of "community" associated with *Dungeons & Dragons*. Survey data revealed "community" was vital for participants. While this value was not immediately evident when asked directly, there was much discussion on its merits throughout the entire survey (Chapter 5). Constructions of community assume myriad shapes, forms and meanings. Whether one indulges in online gaming, or strictly adheres to gaming with friends in non-digital spheres, manifestations of community are equally valid and experienced. Hybridised play straddles liminality between digital and non-digital worlds, and is a satisfying combination of gaming for an assortment of survey participants. Participants appeared to prefer one medium above another, though irrespective of medium, fantasy gaming comprises an inherently social world, being highly communal in nature. Survey participants described their gaming communities as fostering experiences of relationship, friendship, camaraderie, comfort and belonging. Nostalgic memory guides present-day conceptions and assessments of *Dungeons & Dragons,* influencing current participatory practices. The following chapter, Chapter 9, explores the past and present editions of *Dungeons & Dragons*, and describes participant projections for the future.

CHAPTER 9: EDITIONS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

At the rendezvous Rastus appeared confident and nonchalant, though his eyes scoured the area for danger. The gem was handed over, and the fat merchant pulled out a thick piece of glass to examine closely. "This is a fine specimen indeed! Unfortunately I will not be paying you for your labours. You are here alone, and it does not suit me to pay you little man." Rastus felt a wave of fury. Surprise was on his side he decided. With one deft movement, the gem was clipped from the merchant's pudgy fingers, and back into Rastus'. Rastus snatched the payment he was owed, and disappeared into thin air.

9.0 Introduction

This chapter explores participants' *Dungeons & Dragons* edition preferences. Section 9.1 acknowledges the divisions within *D&D* fan communities, colloquially referred to as the "edition wars". Section 9.2 identifies the participants' favoured editions, providing participant rationale for the popularity of certain editions. Section 9.3 explores the influence of nostalgic memory associated with various editions and experiences of *D&D*. Finally section 9.4 analyses the current and future directions of *D&D*.

9.1 Edition Wars

For decades, publishers of *Dungeons & Dragons* have continued to release new rule systems and gaming materials. While this practice provides fans with ample gaming materials, it has the additional effect of fracturing existing customer bases (Ewalt, 2013). When a new edition is released, portions of the larger community are "left behind" — preferring to continue with previous rule systems they enjoy and are familiar with (Ewalt, 2013, pg. 204). *Dungeons & Dragons* communities have become manifestly fragmented, eventuating in what has been known as the "edition wars" (Ewalt, 2013, pg. 204). Part of the fracturing process may be attributed to the flexible design of *Dungeons & Dragons.* Since its inception, *D&D* has encouraged players to use their imaginations, adapting the system to suit their own purposes (Gygax, 1979; Peterson, 2012). As an accepted ethos, this notion has prevailed to the current edition of *D&D* and has stimulated players to create their own worlds and rules (Mearls & Crawford, 2014). Fracturing processes are visible within the survey: an observable survey trend indicated each subsequent edition is played and enjoyed less than its precursor. Given the diverse plethora of systems and rules introduced since 1974 this trend is scarcely surprising. Consequently participants purported a wide variety of reasons for preferring certain editions (Questions 10, 11, & 12).

Wizards of the Coast [WotC] published the 3rd edition *Dungeons & Dragons* in the year 2000. Contemporaneous and subsequent to its publication a segment of role-playing gamers have largely disregarded products offered by WotC (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012). This segment of the wider community favours earlier editions of *D&D* (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012). A number of participants voiced their own preference for earlier styles of *D&D*: "I've played so long and seen

styles change over and over again. I liked the playstyle of my earliest games and so I want to see it supported" (Question 15). One participant attested the desire to have WotC provide "reprints/print on demand of all older [*D&*D] products" (Question 31). Although WotC has made a collection of these "older" products newly available — in both print and PDF — some participants prefer the offerings of "The Old School Renaissance" [OSR]. The OSR emerged as a niche of fandom preferring older editions and styles of playing *D&D* (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012). One participant described his desire for the game to "steer closer to its roots", which aligns with the OSR's philosophies (Question 31). OSR communities began producing content for older-styled games — even producing new "unofficial" versions of *D&D* known as "retroclones" (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012, pg. 445). The purpose of retroclones and associated OSR products are to mirror or refine pre-2000 *D&D* and TSR products (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012). As one participant asserted:

> Retro styles from the 1970s and 1980s and 1990s are often much more cool than today's overproduced entertainment media". (Question 15).

When 4th edition *Dungeons & Dragons* was released in 2008, many disgruntled fans migrated to a fan-produced version of *D&D* named *Pathfinder* (Bulmahn, 2009). The purpose of *Pathfinder* was to streamline, clarify, and refine the familiar 3rd edition *D&D* rules (Bulmahn, 2009). A number of *Pathfinder* fans partook in the survey, expressing their preference to play "*Pathfinder* or *13th Age*" (Question 11), and one describing *Pathfinder* as his "preferred dungeons and dragons" (Question 12). Evidently, these fan-created emulations contain a substantial level of appeal and authenticity, being viable alternatives to *D&D.* Products of the OSR and *Pathfinder* are frequently released free of charge. This suggests a philosophical departure from the ethos of corporate control exercised by TSR — the previous owner of *D&D* — whereby profitability and sales were of essence, rather than dissemination of free materials and ideas perpetuated by fandom (Peterson, 2012).

Acrimony towards WotC remains, possibly due to this historical ethos. One participant described his desire for the game to return "back to 1e and 2e [older editions] and for wotc to burn" (Question 31). Another participant was less vehement:

> The game has too many cooks in the kitchen and it's become a game designed by a committee, driven by the marketing department, and has essentially lost its soul to the corporate machine. I'd like to see them have more real interaction with the players, and the game mechanics built upon a more solid foundation. Even 5th edition has several fundamental design flaws to its design that's going to cause a lot of problems down the line. (Question 31).

Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) argue purposeful collaboration between producer and the fan is essential in actualising commercial growth. The notion of "participatory culture" may

be applied to response above; the participant perceives the need for the corporation to have "real interaction with the players", as opposed to appearing a soulless enterprise (Jenkins, Ford, Green, 2013; Question 31). Grassroots communities may be a preferred option for these participants — barriers between fan and creator are typically minimal, and many "unofficial" *D&D*-related communities do not rely on monetary transactions or corporate ownership of ideas to the same extent:

> I like the way that the game has progressed in the hands of the fans and players more than the directions it has been taken by the corporate owners of the IP. I would like to see it continue to flourish as a fan-driven endeavour. (Question 31).

Some corporations struggle with grassroots fandom practices — as these practices are generally assisted by online communication, facilitating casual and immediate sharing (Jenkins, Ford & Green 2013). Comparatively, in *D&D*-related communities gamers, bloggers, forums, fanzines, and publishers are the prime outlets for promulgating materials (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012). Due to immediate interactions facilitated by the Internet, grassroots creators consequently have an immediate level of connection with the subcultures to which they belong, offering a distinct advantage over the vast and potentially impersonal networks larger corporations must navigate.

In 2012, due to the substantial community fragmentation, Wizards of the Coast determined to create an edition that would gather *D&D* fandom under one "official" umbrella (Ewalt, 2014). In the latter stages of 2014, 5th edition *Dungeons & Dragons* was released after being playtested by more than 175,000 fans (Meals & Crawford, 2014). Akin to the directions of the OSR and *Pathfinder*, WotC provided the 5th edition *Dungeons & Dragons* "Basic" rules free of charge, downloadable in PDF format (Wizards of the Coast, 2015a). Collaborative processes are suggestive of players "becoming part of the game production process – a trend embraced by the industry" (Hjorth, 2011, pg. 44). These decisions appear to be motivated by a collaborative inclusiveness between fan and corporation, important for developing relationships. According to WotC's website "the launch of fifth edition D&D has been a resounding success" (Wizards of the Coast, 2015b). While it is expected of a corporation to announce their successes, and while the truth of such an assertion is beyond the scope or motive of this chapter to explore, the survey research presented in Chapter 5 occurred in a timely manner. Conducted in September 2014 after the 5th edition *D&D Starter Set* and the *Player's Handbook* had been released, it was an apt moment to capture fan commentary on the editions they enjoyed. The remainder of this chapter will analyse participant survey data with greater specificity, in an attempt to analyse the preferred editions and directions of the game favoured by this sample of players.

9.2 Edition Preferences

When inquiring into participant preference, only "officially" produced editions of *Dungeons & Dragons* — published by either TSR or Wizards of the Coast — were options within the survey

questions. The purpose of this design was to provide a greater level of specificity to the research. Within this portion of the survey, a primary purpose was establishing which editions participants favoured. Participants were asked which edition of *D&D* they played when first introduced to the game (Question 9). Chapter 5 provides the fully graphed answers to this question, while the two dominant answers are provided here. A total of 33.33% of participants were initially introduced to the game with *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* [*AD&D*]. Second in popularity was the *Dungeons & Dragons Basic Set* [Holmes]: 15.69% of participants. Most began playing *D&D* between 1979-1984, while an even broader sample of players began between 1973-1988 (Question 8). Between 1973-1988 is roughly commensurate to the era of original *D&D* [*OD&D*], *AD&D,* and *Basic* (Gygax & Arneson, 1974; Gygax, 1977; Gygax, 1978; Gygax, 1979; Holmes, 1977). The historical mainstream proliferation of *D&D* broadly matches the 1979-1984 timeline (Peterson, 2012), suggesting alignment between the survey data and "reality". The popularity of John Eric Holmes' *Basic* set was curious as it fell outside the 1979-1984 category — it was released in 1977. The timeline of *Basic* does fit within the wider band of 1973-1988 however. One explanation for its popularity was its original purpose: it was designed as an introductory set, apparently fulfilling its purpose (Holmes, 1977). Participants were asked "how long have you been playing *D&D*?" 60.79% of participants had been playing between "26-35+" years (Question 7). Answers corresponded with the dominant age groups of those surveyed, as most participants were aged between 36-49 years (Question 5). Assuming the credibility of these responses, it is possible to conclude participants enjoy *D&D* as a long-term or lifetime pursuit. An additional suggestion is a significant — if not dominant — portion of *D&D* players began playing early editions, and have played extensively — now aged between 36-49 years.

Participants were asked: "what edition of *D&D* have you played the most?" (Question 10). In order of popularity the results are provided below:

1. *AD&D* — 33.33%
2. *AD&D* 2e — 25.49%
3. *D&D 3rd edition* — 19.61%
4. *D&D* 4th edition — 13.73%
5. *OD&D* — 1.96%
6. *D&D* 5th edition — 1.96%

Anomalously original *Dungeons & Dragons* [*OD&D*] was represented by a low percentage of participants, seemingly opposing the theory that each subsequent edition is enjoyed and played less than its precursor (Ewalt, 2013). This discrepancy can be explained historically by the early years of the game, when mainstream proliferation had not yet occurred (Peterson, 2012). This connotes a much smaller fan-base compared with later periods of the game's prominence. Lower percentages of participants playing relatively recent editions — 3rd, 4th, and 5th editions — can be explained by their shorter period of existence. Newer editions have lacked equal playing time compared to vintage editions. Despite the aforementioned anomalies, the universal trend

appears to match the observations that every released edition fractures the existing fan-base further (Ewalt, 2013).

Participants were asked why they had played this edition above others. Although answers were elicited from a multi-choice selection, two answers prevailed in popularity: "[the edition] is familiar and we've played the same system for years" and "the rules are easiest/preferable to the way I play" (Question 11). The first answer suggests habitual and long-term gaming patterns based on familiarity, while the latter speaks to the importance of gaming styles, discussed in the previous chapter. A related question followed: "what edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* do you enjoy the most?"(Question 12). The purpose of this question was to acknowledge the edition played most frequently might not necessarily be the most enjoyable. Unexpectedly the most "enjoyed" edition was *Dungeons & Dragons* 5th edition — despite the *Starter Set* and *Player's Handbook* being the only available products at the time (Question 12). It is premature to determine whether this response is authoritatively representative of the broader *D&D* community, or whether this trend may be attributed to media hype for the new product range. Conducting a subsequent survey within the next few years, with a larger sample, would more accurately determine an objective pattern. Notwithstanding these observations, a tentative conclusion is that there is substantial community interest in 5th edition presently. Mapping sustained long-term popularity of the 5th edition is a matter for future investigation. The second most "enjoyed" edition was the consistently popular *AD&D* — with 27.45% of participants favouring this edition (Question 12). This is not surprising given the prevailing popularity of this answer throughout the survey. The third most enjoyable edition was *AD&D* 2e attracting 19.61% of participant responses, while the remaining edition choices were substantially lesser (Question 12).

In sum, findings suggest a long-term lifestyle choice to play *D&D*. The editions participants played when they were introduced to the game varied, though were generally reflective of a timeframe between 1973-1988. The significant popularity of *AD&D* between 1977-1988 is reflected within these participant responses. Participants consistently lauded *AD&D,* although 5th edition surpassed it regarding player enjoyment. Due 5th edition's brevity of existence it would be too much of an assumption to assert it is an empirically more enjoyable game; however 5th edition is proving popular among survey participants.

9.3 Nostalgia and Edition Preference

Previous chapters have argued communal experiences, participant conceptions of fantasy, and preferred gaming styles can be powerful determinants in the formation of gaming identities (Bowman, 2010; Nephew, 2006; Waskul, 2006). Extending this discussion further, there exists a close relationship between nostalgia, edition preference, and the associated gaming communities a participant chooses to belong to — similarly influencing notions of identity negotiation (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012). A thematic presence within survey data was the distinct relationship between edition preference and nostalgia. Sean Scanlan suggests:

> A nostalgic image may be eidetic or it may be blurry. Its objects or catalysts can be ineffable, forever lost, maddeningly not there, or uncannily never-was. Nostalgia is often secondary or epiphenomenal, yet it can also be Proustian and epiphanic, generative and creative. (2004, pg. 8).

In other words, memory can be sharp or unfocussed. Memory can be unutterable, inexpressible, or ephemeral. Nostalgic memory may be perceived as a secondary or subsidiary expression, being cued from everyday events and spurred by recollections. Nostalgia can provoke past remembrances and memories, generate ideas, and invoke novel creativity. Some *D&D* communities have an intrinsic relationship with "remembered" editions of *D&D* (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012). A substantial portion of participants identified nostalgic influence on their perceptions of edition choice. These sentiments were not isolated or unique; rather they were a persistent reporting:

> 1st Edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons is a horrorshow of overcomplicated rules, and I throw probably half of them out anyway. I likewise freely steal rules from other editions that I think will work better. Yet I still choose 1st Edition AD&D as my preferred chassis…primarily because it evokes the memories and atmosphere of when I first got into gaming, and the heyday of D&D in general. It has cachet…and when you houserule as much as I do, that matters more than the actual rules you're starting from. (Question 15).

One participant stated "nostalgia for sandbox gaming of my youth influenced my choice of edition" (Question 15), while another described his enjoyment of the artefacts associated with *D&D* — an essential element of viscerally-remembered nostalgia:

> I always enjoy reading the books, even just for fun. I haven't been around them as long as most of the other players of 1E [*AD&D*], but I am very attached to my books. I consider them to be some of my most valuable possessions. (Question 15).

Positive remembrances of 3rd edition were professed:

> [Nostalgia is] easy to identify with initiation of the game and the fun I had as a younger kid. The rules, feel, and look of the game at that point (in my case 3rd Ed. In 2000) deeply influenced my opinion on what I think *D&D* is and ought to be. (Question 15).

Contrastingly, one participant held disdain for 3rd Edition and later editions:

> Just like commercial music, television, movies, comics, sports events, concerts, newspapers, magazines --- anything "produced" is more overproduced as time goes on. I think that the art, writing and rules of *D&D* from 3.0 [3rd Edition] to present-day has appeared overproduced in art & writing & rules. (Question 15).

Evidently, there are significant and subjective discrepancies between player valuations of a particular edition. Superficially at least, the nostalgic evocation associated with a particular edition greatly influences one's estimations of its merits. Some participants described this as an "atmosphere", "memories", or "feel", while others revered the physical artefacts and the connotations associated with a particular edition. Memories of gaming appeared a repeated influence for some participants. One wished to "recapture [his] youth – to some degree" (Question 15), another wanted the game to "bring in young players, to recapture that sense of wonderment vicariously" (Question 31). Finally one participant noted the manner in which "the game brings your childhood stories and fantasies to life" (Question 15). The habits and rituals associated with an edition were also important: "it gives me a sense of something that is right, or proven to work", "the way you first play a game becomes the 'right' way to play the game for you. Any change makes it something else, and therefore bad/wrong" (Question 15). This sense of being "right" is described by Fredric Jameson as the "aura" of memory made manifest as:

> Mysterious…objects become visible. [T]he objects of aura represent…the setting of a kind of utopia, a utopian present, not shorn of the past but having absorbed it, a kind of plentitude of existence in the world of things, if only for the briefest instant. (1970, pg. 64).

The "briefest instant" of nostalgia is sought and witnessed within the words of these participants: "memories", "recapture", "wish", "childhood", "wonderment", "fondly", "right". These words contain a temporality or historicism — a seeming absorption of the past, while seeking a "utopian" re-enactment within the present. These attempts do not appear to be a minimisation of the past, but rather an attempt to celebrate and reclaim it, if however fleeting and elusive such an attempt may be.

Artwork and writing style can be a major determinant in edition preference for players: "I have a nostalgic reaction to the artwork and writing in some older *D&D* materials. However, while nostalgia is nice and all, it's only a minor influence; it's not the main reason I play the editions of *D&D* that I play" (Question 15). This participant identifies the nostalgic influence of "older *D*&D" artwork, while maintaining that additional reasons exist for his edition preferences. Greg Gillespie and Darren Crouse examine the artwork of *Advanced Adventures,* an OSR product that appeals to "specific genre and period-inspired aesthetic codes and their subcultural rules of application", being reminiscent of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* artwork from the 1970s and 1980s (2012, pg. 442). Gillespie and Crouse refer to this aesthetic appeal as being a "retroscape" – a product appealing to historical and aesthetic ideologies to sell a contemporary product (2012,

pg. 446). Artwork of different editions carries social codes and iconography, reflective of an era and containing nostalgic meaning for those who remember:

> TSR artists in the 1980s drew adventurers as bumbling treasure seekers whose go-for-broke attitude meant starving monsters never went hungry…an approach reinforced in AD&D modules and rulebooks such as the Monster Manual (Gygax, 1978 [sic]) and Dungeon Master's Guide (Gygax, 1979). Careless adventurers could expect their tomb-robbing careers cut radically short in the clutches of a ravenous beast or mechanical trap. The sense of adventure, greed, and the pluckiness of low fantasy dungeon delvers kept them coming back for more. Understood in this context, the cover artwork of most TSR modules often provided a quick laugh at the expense of the old-school adventurer. (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012, pg. 448).

Paradoxically these early-era pieces, or more recent OSR offerings reflective of an earlier era, are juxtaposed with newer-edition renditions:

> This humorous self-reflexivity no longer exists in the current Fourth Edition of the game published in 2008. Instead, the haughty heroes of 4E carry little equipment, possess skill with magic and blade, and exude a sense of effortlessness that the old-school adventurer never attained. (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012, pg. 448-449).

Clear divergences between artistic styles are evident, and for players with an affiliation for vintage styles of *Dungeons & Dragons*, a nostalgic reaction associated with certain artwork may occur. It appears nostalgic memory strongly influences some participants — this memory being associated with certain *D&D* editions or time periods. An additional contention relates to the historic pattern of community fracturing based on edition preference. This process is likely caused — at least in part — by the nostalgic division of *D&D* players, which are often grouped by edition preference and cultural memory. A final exploration of this chapter observes participant insights into the current "state" of *D&D*, acknowledging future projections for the game; a game segmented into myriad sub-communities, yet united in the broadest sense: a shared passion for a game named *Dungeons & Dragons.*

9.4 Current and Future Directions for *Dungeons & Dragons*

Participants were asked: "where would you like to see the game progressing currently/in the future?" Some participants were excited by 5th edition: "I think the current edition is the best one yet. I would like to see it stick around for a long time", "I like the idea of keeping the game more rules light, as they've done with 5E" (Question 31). One participant was positively optimistic:

> I'm very excited about fifth edition, it seems like a very positive set of changes. I would like to see a robust set of digital companion tools for game planning and at the table assistance. (Question 31).

Some responses included implications for the wider *D&D* hobby, noting the potential influence of 5th edition:

> I'd really like to see a resurgence in popularity. I'd love to be able to play in a group that met at least monthly (my current group meets 2-3 times a year currently). I'm not sure if 5E [5th edition] will be able to help with that at all, but I'm hopeful (I haven't spent much time with 5E as of yet and don't really have an opinion on it ATM [at the moment]. (Question 31).

And:

> I'd like to see the fifth edition consolidate gamers behind one edition and ultimately result in an over all increase in the numbers of role players as a gaming hobby or past time. (Question 31).

These players' desires align with the ostensible motive of Wizards of the Coast in creating 5th edition: consolidating players under one edition (Ewalt, 2013). A shared desire between the publishing corporation and a selection of fandom is noted — both parties working towards bringing existing players together, and recruiting new players to the hobby. One participant decided the game is heading "exactly where it seems to be going. 5th edition seems to be bringing back that elusive nostalgia that I feel many of us are striving for once again" (Question 31). An apparent optimism exists for 5th edition, and what it could achieve for the wider *D&D* community. For some participants this edition signifies a return to nostalgic roots: for others it could perpetuate the growth of the hobby, offering a robust and "rules light" system. Although many survey participants seems satisfied or excited by 5th edition, and the future of the hobby, a comparable number of participants were decidedly ambivalent or even disdainful regarding the current and future state of *D&D*. This was an overt pronouncement at times: "I don't care", "the future of the game/hobby means nothing to me" (Question 31). Others were less vehement:

> *shrug* I don't need progress. The game I play is already mostly dead; but I have all the books, and as long as I have people willing to play what I run, I don't need anything else. (Question 31).

> No need, I have the version that I like, with my houserules being tailored for it to fit my way, and create my own areas, groups and dungeons. I have what I need, how it progresses doesn't affect me. (Question 31).

Citing the flexibility of the game, some participants deemed "progress" unnecessary. Existing systems allow participants ample options. Creating "houserules" — a method of adding, altering, or removing official rules — enables the remaining participants to design highly customised games, tailored specifically for their enjoyment. As Dennis Waskul suggests:

> Players use a complex system of rules to craft a fantastic universe for fantasy action. In practice, however, rules are less regulatory and more a set of conventions and guidelines that provide a structure for exquisite detail. In other words, rules are used as gaming resources rather than gaming limitations. (2006, pg. 22).

Besides playing an edition for numerous years, players have adjusted the "guidelines" to the extent a new edition is effectively worthless compared with the high level of customisation to which they are used. As suggested earlier in this chapter, some players gravitate towards a particular edition due to its familiarity and ease, sometimes to the point of zealousness:

> I could care less where it "progresses", since that way lies garbage. The Original 1974 Dungeons & Dragons is The One True Game and I am only interested in playing and reffing it and introducing others to it. (Question 31).

This participant was noticeably vocal about his strict adherence to "The One True Game", whereas other participants described the game as deviating from a traditional framework — evolving towards a "video game" paradigm: "today's editions strike me as too video game like and munchkinesque" (Question 31). Another shared similar thoughts, expanding on their perspective:

> My biggest disappointment in the way the game has been progressing is that it has strayed far from its roots. At one time, the game was geared toward simulating historic fantasy literature, and entailed risk and challenge. Recent editions seem more geared toward simulating fantasy video games, and the PCs are more powerful and less vulnerable. I would like to see the game steer closer to its roots (Question 31).

The comment about "roots" may refer to the wargaming scene from which the hobby was birthed (Peterson, 2012). Earlier editions — and the retroclones of the OSR — are closer in spirit to the "roots" of the game, and are an obvious preference for these participants. Contrastingly, participant commentary on the interconnectivity between *Dungeons & Dragons* and video gaming has been observed within other research (Cover, 2010; Johnson, 2013; Peterson, 2012).

Ironically, while some participants were adamant tabletop role-playing games and video games should remain independent formats — or more specifically, that the mixing of medias was not preferred — a distinct portion of participants saw the future of *D&D* heading in a digital direction.

> I think the digital age may be the end of *D&D* as we know it. I think the long time gamers are too set in their ways to allow the game to grow and change with the times. (Question 31).

This response demonstrates either a witnessing, or an awareness, of gamer objections towards including digital technology within *D&D* games. As discussed in chapter 8, mixing technologies is inevitable within the digital age (Hjorth, 2011). As stipulated, the perpetuation of the tabletop gaming format is in the hands of hobbyist games; obsolescence is not likely in the immediate future, provided the fan-base remains cohesive (Woods, 2012). In a tabletop sense "the end of *D&D* as we know it" is unlikely. On the other hand, if this participant is suggesting certain communities will primarily favour digital hybridisation in their enactment of *D&D*, this alternative appears to be likely, if not already actualised.

> I feel the game really needs to embrace the world of electronics and digital media better. Tablets, laptops, and video screens are all so common now that it seems like an untapped resource. (Question 31).

Thematically, including technology within *D&D* was a recurrent prediction for the future. Another participant propelled this notion further, envisaging "full VR [virtual reality] immersion at some point. [The] game has not even begun to tap into the potential of computing to supplement the game itself" (question 31). It is uncertain whether the game will evolve into a virtual reality, or endure as a distinctly tabletop game indefinitely. Evidence throughout the survey would suggest a distinct and pervasive undercurrent of digitalism.

Predictions for the future of the game transcended the merits of certain editions, or the inclusion of digital elements; a variety of responses were included pertaining to game mechanics.

> While it never – and probably should never – leave its class based system, I would like to see the way people perceive classes change into something less rigid. (Question 31).

The "class" is a fundamental design choice within all editions of *D&D*. Class is essentially a profession or skillset associated with one's character (Tresca, 2011). Seeing the game evolving into something "less rigid" appears to be a desirable option. A different participant proposed the notion of diverse game settings:

> I would like to see more diversity in the settings. (Question 31).

Dungeon Masters are encouraged to create their own unique fantasy worlds, or adopt published settings aligned to their individual taste (Mearls & Crawford, 2014). Balfe contends published campaign settings are "not only designed to be played but also to be read as exotic 'travelogues'"

(2004, pp. 76-77). Fantasy settings are constructed and informed by societal and cultural discourse, thus social and cultural issues may become embedded within fantasy texts (Balfe, 2004; Plank & Alpers, 1978). The participant quoted earlier has identified his desire for "more diversity" in presumably published settings. Whether that means "diversity" in a wider societal or cultural context, or a desire for more imaginatively diverse settings is uncertain. Alongside these systemic and mechanical considerations were comments relating to the wider philosophy of *D&D*. Fundamentally a selection of participants wished the game to be more "popular". One participant wished for "a wider player base" and for greater social acceptance, while another expressed desire for "a popular game that most people play and can talk about" (Question 31). Finally, two players expressed their desire for the game to remain a broadly entertaining or enlightening mode of play.

> As long as the game remains fun to play, I'll be happy. That really is my only requirement. (Question 31).

> As long as the game continues to embolden the meek, grant strength to the weak and bring greater understanding towards self-realization and understanding then I would be happy. (Question 31).

Similar philosophical considerations were recurrent throughout the data and discussed more thoroughly in Chapters 6- 8. These final comments are pertinent to the desires players hold for the future of their game. Conclusively, player opinion was widely varied. There was one transcendent thread however: a love for *Dungeons & Dragons.*

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has drawn attention to the range of communities, both "official" and fan-driven, existing within wider *D&D* fandom. In addition to fracturing fan-bases with each new edition of *D&D,* the vitality and growth of grassroots communities such as the OSR and *Pathfinder* has been acknowledged. Further, the impact of digital technologies in enabling various fan communities to emerge has been maintained. Player preference for specific editions of *D&D* has been demonstrated using survey information. Consistently, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* was a favoured choice among participants, while 5th Edition *Dungeons & Dragons* was the most enjoyed. Alongside these findings was an exploration of nostalgic influence upon players, noting the prominence of memories and experiences associated with particular editions of *D&D*. Aesthetically and viscerally, certain iconographies, artwork, and gaming artefacts hold a prominent importance for players. Finally, the current and future positioning of the hobby was discussed, using participant responses to investigate the directions of *Dungeons & Dragons.* The following chapter concludes this thesis, outlining the key findings.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

Rastus munched an apple. The ordeal was over. He had sold the gem, amassing a tidy sum for his troubles. Gold jangled in his pockets. Although it had been hard work it was finished. Rastus smiled, revelling in a job well done. He sat, pondering his next surreptitious project.

10.0 Introduction

This chapter concludes the major themes and findings of this research. It aims to bring attention to the socio-cultural impact of this study within popular culture, gaming subcultures, and perpetually evolving digital practices. Rather than dismissing *Dungeons & Dragons* as a mere "game", the findings herein have indicated broader significances for participants. Section 10.2 explains the inevitable limitations and restrictions of this work, illuminating areas where future research may be undertaken. Section 10.3 concludes the major findings and significances of this thesis. Section 10.4 provides a final conclusion.

10.2 Limitations, Restrictions, and Avenues for Future Research

Various limitations are present within this research. Notions of gender were left largely unexplored. Survey data indicated 100% of participants identified as male. Although unrepresentative of a balanced sample, these results suggest partial congruence with historical patterns of RPG participatory practices (Dancey, 2000; Fine, 1983; Peterson, 2012). Another limitation of the online survey was the limited pool of 51 participants. This is in sharp contrast to other related surveys involving thousands of participants (Dancey, 2000). A larger sample may have resulted in female participation. Ample evidence exists of female participation within role-playing games (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2015; Bowman, 2010; Dancey, 2000; Cover, 2010; Ewalt, 2013; Fine, 1983; Jacobsen, 2014; Peterson, 2012). Further research would be useful to investigate gender dynamics within 5th edition *D&D*. 5th edition attempts to update the game's previously binary perceptions on gender:

> You can play a male or female character without gaining any special benefits or hindrances. Think about how your character does or does not conform to the broader culture's expectations of sex, gender, and sexual behaviour. (Mearls & Crawford, 2014, pg. 121).

Presumably these efforts reflect a desire among the publishers to attract egalitarian balances of male and female gamers, and those identifying with minority expressions of sexuality or gender. These developments evoke a call to attain additional knowledge and explore these issues further.

Morality and ethics within *D&D* were discussed in chapter 7. It would be useful to explore how these notions impact participatory practices and decision-making within the game. These pragmatic and philosophical dynamics would add to existing bodies of knowledge.

"Fantasy" remains a liminal and subjective notion. Fantasy allows participants to metaphorically explore other worlds and realities — sometimes reflective of current cultural concerns. The effect of *D&D* fantasy on wider popular culture could be examined by mapping past and present literary influences. This knowledge would indicate the potency and malleability of fantasy within wider game studies. Additional research in this area would be beneficial. Chapter 9 discussed the emergence of fan-driven movements like the Old School Renaissance [OSR]. Earlier editions of *Dungeons & Dragons* have largely inspired the cultural products of the OSR. Many OSR sub-communities are located in online spheres — particularly on Internet forums and Google+. These fan communities create a multitude of new gaming materials. Given the nature of this current research — which primarily focussed on "official" editions of *D&D* — undertaking future research of the OSR movement would prove useful. To date the OSR has received cursory academic attention at best (Gillespie & Crouse, 2012).

10.3 Conclusions of Research and Significant Findings

This research has been guided by two key questions: "How important is the idea of community when playing *Dungeons & Dragons*?" and "What is appealing about constructing fictitious identities within the group, actualised through notions of play?" These questions have been explored in detail throughout this thesis. The essential and intrinsic value of community for *D&D* participants was explicit throughout the survey data. *D&D* communities are composed of myriad shapes, forms and meanings — occurring as participants gather around a physical tabletop, game online, or enact hybridised games. Nostalgic memory was a powerful influence on how participants perceived community. Regardless of the method and practical application through which *D&D* was enacted, community fostered significant relational aspects.

Fandom practices within *D&D* were explored, acknowledging both "official" and fan-driven communities and identities. Digital technologies are potent vehicles for promoting fandom practices and disseminating information. Fan communities often form due to shared edition preferences and commonalities. Participants are drawn to *D&D* because it is entertaining and enjoyable. The game is engrossing; participants identify with their characters and suspend "reality" in favour of fantasy. These fantasies occur in a collective sphere, making the game an intrinsically social expression. Some participants enjoy the game for its escapist or cathartic elements. This may explain the powerful and immersive experiences within the game world. Constructing and exploring fictitious identities enable adults to separate from "mundane" reality. Adult players can self-express, employ creativity, foster relationships, and enjoy alternate realities through created fictitious identities. Play affords freedoms to the participants. Within imagined fantasy spaces, participants can create an idealised persona and explore "limitless" worlds. This acts to satiate improbable or otherwise inaccessible curiosities. Fantasy worlds are transmutative, allowing participants a real sense of freedom as they explore collective fantasies. Notions of "good" and "evil" can be explored, or players can navigate ambiguous notions of morality and ethics. Some players adhere to their preferred editions — such as *Advanced*

Dungeons & Dragons and 5th edition *Dungeons & Dragons* — while others branch out, trying new editions and amalgamating digital technologies within their games. Future areas for development lie within the increasing rise of digitalism within the role-playing genre.

10.4 Final Conclusion

This thesis has explored pertinent research topics relating to participatory practices within *Dungeons & Dragons.* It has ventured beyond initial conceptual enquiries, developing tangible conclusions to the questions: "How important is the idea of community when playing *Dungeons & Dragons*?" and "What is appealing about constructing fictitious identities within the group, actualised through notions of play?" It has been strongly contended that *D&D* transcends the superficialities associated with a "game". Participants have a powerful engagement with the game, as evidenced throughout the discussions. These engagements transmute participatory experiences into broader realms of purpose and meaning. The game facilitates the continual formation and negotiation of community and identity — demonstrating its wider socio-cultural applicability. The ability and appeal to engage with substantial identity exploration is clearly observable within *D&D* practices. This is explained through the departure into shared fantasy worlds — offering participants accessibility into divergent paradigms of reality. These playful explorations have a lasting effect in the "real world". Finally, participants develop and enjoy a strong sense of community through their long-term gaming relationships. Regardless of whether these communities are enacted in "online" or "offline" spheres, these spaces endow participants with substantial benefits — belonging, acceptance, and a shared sense of "fun".

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APPENDIX I: GLOSSARY

Various terminologies, abbreviations, and colloquial vernacular have been used within this study. The following glossary is provided to clarify these usages.

AD&D — *AD&D* typically refers to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* — an edition of *D&D* published between 1977-1979. Authorship of the core *AD&D* game is credited to Gary Gygax. This product line was ended in 1989 with the release of *AD&D* 2e (see below).

AD&D 2e — *AD&D* 2e refers to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition.* 2nd edition was published in 1989 and continued until 2000 when 3rd edition was published. Authorship is credited to David Cook.

Campaign — A campaign is an ongoing series of *Dungeons & Dragons* sessions (see "session" below). A campaign may be episodic, linked by an ongoing narrative, or it may constitute multiple unrelated adventures.

CRPG — CRPG refers to a "Computer Role-Playing Game".

D&D — Within this thesis *Dungeons & Dragons* has been frequently abbreviated to *D&D.* This is not a convention peculiar to this thesis, but is used within the wider hobby to refer to the game. As an abbreviation within this thesis "*D&D*" is used in a broad sense, referring to any and all editions of *D&D* unless otherwise specified.

D&D Basic — This refers to the *Dungeons & Dragons Basic Set*, edited by Dr John Eric Holmes in 1977. *D&D Basic* was a boxed set containing rulebooks, an adventure or dungeon geomorphs, and polyhedral dice or chits.

D&D BECMI — This refers to *Dungeons & Dragons Basic, Expert, Companion, Masters, and Immortals* boxed sets. The editorship of these works is attributed to Frank Mentzer. BECMI was a revision and expansion of B/X (see *D&D* B/X below).

D&D B/X — B/X refers to *Dungeons & Dragons Basic/Expert Set,* edited by Tom Moldvay, David Cook and Steve Marsh. The Basic and Expert sets were published in 1981, and were a revision of *D&D Basic* (see above). Each boxed set contained a rulebook, polyhedral dice, and an adventure.

D&D 3rd Edition — *Dungeons & Dragons* 3rd edition was published in 2000 by Wizards of the Coast. Authorship of the core rulebooks is attributed to Monte Cook, Jonathan Tweet and Skip Williams. 3rd edition was a revision of *AD&D* 2e.

D&D 4th Edition — *Dungeons & Dragons* 4th Edition was published in 2008 by Wizards of the Coast. Authorship of the core rulebooks is attributed to Mike Mearls, Stephen Schubert, James Wyatt, Rob Heinsoo, Andy Collins, and Bill Slavicsek.

D&D 5th Edition — *Dungeons & Dragons* 5th Edition was published in 2014 by Wizards of the Coast. Authorship of the Starter Set and core rulebooks is attributed to Mike Mearls and Jeremy Crawford.

D4 — A d4 is a pyramidal dice with four sides or faces. When rolled a d4 is capable of generating a number between 1-4.

D6 — A d6 is a cube, or square-shaped dice with six sides. It is the dice most commonly used within board games and gambling games. When rolled, a d6 is capable of generating a number between 1-6.

D8 — A d8 is an eight-sided dice. When rolled a d8 capable of generating a number between 1-8.

D10 — A d10 is a ten-sided dice. When rolled a d10 is capable of generating a number between 1-10.

D12 — A d12 is a twelve-sided dice. When rolled a d12 is capable of generating a number between 1-12.

D20 — A d20 is a twenty-sided dice. When rolled a d20 is capable of generating a number between 1-20.

D100 — A d100 is often referred to as a "percentile" dice. When two d10s are rolled, a number between 1-100 can be generated. One dice is read as "tens" and the dice is read as "ones". For example, two d10 are rolled, the results are 8 and 4. This could be interpreted as 84.

DM — A "DM" refers to the "Dungeon Master". Early iterations of *D&D* referred to the DM as the "referee", while other role-playing games refer to the DM as "Game Master" [GM] or Storyteller. The DM is responsible for arbitrating the game, narrating events and populating the world with places, people, creatures and things.

LARP — A LARP refers to a Live Action Role-Play. A LARP is a role-playing game in which fictitious characters are physically assumed and enacted. Players frequently dress in era appropriate garb, and create props. This varies from *D&D* significantly where play is confined to participant's imaginations, or the implementation of miniatures, illustrations and maps, rather than enacting the game physically.

MMO — See "MMORPG" below

MMORPG — A MMORPG is a "Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game". A MMORPG is a role-playing game occurring in an online space. Often hundreds to thousands of users participate on a server simultaneously. Popular examples include *World of Warcraft*, *Dungeons & Dragons Online* and *Lord of the Rings Online.*

OD&D — This refers to *Original Dungeons & Dragons.* OD&D was published in 1974, with authorship credited to Gary Gygax and David Arneson.

OGL — The OGL refers to the Open Gaming License. The OGL was created by Wizards of the Coast in conjunction with the release of 3rd edition *D&D.* The OGL assisted fans with creating and publishing their own materials free of legal repercussions.

OSR — The OSR refers to the Old School Renaissance. It refers to a collective of gamers, writers, publishers, bloggers, artists, and fans who prefer pre-2000 editions of *D&D.* The OSR originally began as a means to create *D&D* products without fear of lawsuit, using the OGL (see above).

NPC — This is an abbreviation of Non-Player Character. A NPC is generally any character not enacted by a player. NPCs are frequently controlled by the DM, although sometimes a player will control an NPC.

PC — PC refers to a Player Character. A PC is any character in a *D&D* game created and controlled by any player excluding the DM.

PNP — An abbreviation of Pen & Paper Role-Playing Game. Within this thesis a PNP is typically referred to as a "tabletop role-playing game".

RPG — An abbreviation of Role-Playing Game.

TSR — The previous owner and publisher of the *Dungeons & Dragons* franchise.

TTRPG — An abbreviation of Tabletop Role-Playing Game.

Session — A session is a single game of *Dungeons & Dragons.* A session typically lasts between 2-6 hours. Multiple sessions can constitute as a "campaign" (see above).

WotC — Wizards of the Coast, the current owner and publisher of the *Dungeons & Dragons* franchise.

APPENDIX II: RAW SURVEY DATA

This appendix presents the raw Internet survey data. Participant spelling mistakes and grammatical errors have been left unamended. In cases where abbreviated or colloquial responses have been submitted, liberties have been taken to expand these words or phrases within square brackets, to clarify meaning and context to the reader.

Question 2 responses.

Respondent	Date of Birth
1	01/31/1981
2	07/04/1976
3	10/31/1975
4	11/20/1976
5	01/11/1974
6	03/10/1972
7	11/22/1982
8	09/01/1964
9	05/31/1977
10	05/12/1989
11	07/04/1971
12	11/21/1966
13	08/01/1975
14	02/23/1970
15	04/17/1956
16	06/18/1977
17	01/01/1970
18	05/17/1978
19	01/11/1971
20	09/09/1962
21	10/24/1967
22	12/15/1971
23	06/01/1995
24	08/05/1968
25	01/07/1976
26	06/17/1967
27	07/18/1987
28	08/30/1971
29	10/05/1975
30	10/18/1962
31	08/24/1970
32	05/20/1974
33	10/01/1965
34	04/26/1983
35	07/13/1996
36	07/24/1979
37	03/03/1978
38	05/08/1969
39	05/23/1977
40	01/24/1971
41	07/15/1971
42	01/09/1967
43	08/23/1964
44	05/23/1978
45	08/09/1974
46	01/13/1986
47	04/29/1969
48	06/15/1992
49	04/30/1978
50	05/13/1968
51	08/02/1977

Question 9, 10 criteria:

1. Other – Please Specify
2. Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition (Crawford & Mearls, 2014)
3. Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition (Wyatt, Mearls, Schubert, Heinsoo, Collins, 2008)
4. Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition (Cook, Tweet, Williams, 2000)
5. Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition (Cook, 1989)
6. Dungeons & Dragons Basic/Expert/Companion/Immortals (Mentzer, 1983)
7. Dungeon & Dragons Basic/Expert (Moldvay & Cook, 1981)
8. Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (Gygax, 1977)
9. Dungeons & Dragons Basic (Holmes, 1977)
10. Original Dungeons & Dragons (Gygax & Arneson, 1974)

Question 11 – "Other responses"

please specify" responses

1. The majority of my D&D playing was early on. I just haven't played as much of any later edition simply due to less available time.
2. It was what existed when I had the most free time to play. I prefer pathfinder, or 13th age.
3. I am primarily the Dungeon Master, however, question 10 specifically underlines "played". Hence, when I actually played rather than run so to speak, it was 2nd Edition.
4. I played it while it was the most recent edition, and during this time played more often than other periods.
5. I played more in those days than I have in aggregate since then.
6. It was the longest running edition while I was a player.
7. Longest timeframe that I played in
8. It was the latest edition at the time, and was what most of those who played played.
9. The massive number of options, rules, and granularity within the edition
10. It's been out a long time & happens to be the one I have played the most. That doesn't make it a favorite. Just the one with the longest run.

Question 12 – "Other responses"

Other (please specify)

Pathfinder is my preferred dungeons and dragons, fifth edition seems very promising

I enjoy all editions equally.

Question 13 – 'Other responses'

Other (please specify)

The latest edition harkens back to nostalgic influences yet with a modern ruleset [5e]

It seems to have captured some of the best qualities of prior editions and added some good new stuff.

I convert and use material from all editions.

The number of options of the system. I like options. Lots of them.

Question 15 responses

Response #	Responses
1	Memories of past games inspire me to try and recapture those good moments.
2	It gives me a sense of something that is right, or proven to work.
3	1st Edition Advanced Dungeons & Dragons is a horrorshow of overcomplicated rules, and I throw probably half of them out anyway. I likewise freely steal rules from other editions that I think work better. Yet I STILL choose 1st Edition AD&D as my preferred base chassis...primarily because it evokes the memories and atmosphere of when I first got into gaming, and the heyday of D&D in general. It has cachet...and when you houserule as much as I do, that matters more than the actual rules you're starting from.
4	I always enjoy reading the books, even just for fun. I haven't been around them as long as most of the other players of 1E, but I am very attached to my books. I consider them to be some of my most valuable possessions.
5	Much of the enjoyment of dungeons and dragons comes from shared jokes and memories with friends. A lot of actual game sessions are actually slow and boring, but the memories are of the exciting bits and the inside jokes.
6	Simply because my friends and I had so much fun playing back in those days. It's fair to say that many of my most clear memories from those days involve playing D&D, and the adventures we had playing the game.
7	Because I realized I liked the old rules better than the newer ones.
8	Nostalgia for sandbox gaming of my youth influences my choice of edition.
9	Most of my D&D playing has been AD&D between 1975 to 1990. I've played all editions up to and including 4E, but only with AD&D have I experienced 12 or more hours per session and playing regularly with up to 15 people at the table!
10	How can one not be influenced by memory and nostalgia? My memories of D&D are my most fondly remembered, as I am reminded of all those people that have impacted me and for those whom I have impacted through the gaming table and shared experiences.
11	Nostalgia is just another way to say "something I liked when I was younger." Something that I liked as a child should be worth liking now.
12	It's easy to identify with initiation of the game and the fun I had as a younger kid. The rules, feel, and look of the game at that point (in my case 3rd Ed. In 2000) deeply influence my opinion on what I think D&D is and ought to be.
13	past good experiences are fun to remember.
14	I have very fond memories associated with playing with my friends.
15	It's what I grew up with, a lifetime of good memories, created lifelong friends, artwork appealed to me as an adolescent
16	When I have tried playing other role playing games, I generally find myself preferring to play D&D instead.
17	I have a nostalgic reaction to the artwork and writing in some older D&D materials. However, while nostalgia is nice and all, it's only a minor influence; it's not the main reason I play the editions of D&D that I play.
18	Love the evolution of the game, both forward in terms of expanding upon the original concept and how the latest version is returning to some it's earliest roots.
19	Many of my best memories are of games I ran in high school.
20	Same reasons and way that nostalgia influences everything with pleasant memories.
21	Because I've played so long and seen styles change over and over again. I liked the playstyle of my earliest games and so I want to see it supported.
22	Nostalgia mostly affects me negatively. There are a lot of themes that exist in D&D that I'm not particular approve. Like racist, slavery and the like.
23	Wish to recapture my youth - to some degree.
24	D&D will always remind me of a more care free time in my life. It always conjures up memories of epic

	characters and adventures with family and friends. The ability to tell a good story and present information in a descriptive and imaginative way has served me well in my career. I learned a lot from D&D-all while having a lot of fun.
25	The way you first play a game becomes the 'right' way to play the game for you. Any change makes it something else, and therefore bad/wrong.
26	Just like commercial music, television, movies, comics, sports events, concerts, newspapers, magazines --- anything "produced" is more overproduced as time goes on. I think that the art, writing, and rules of D&D from 3.0 to present-day has appeared overproduced in art & writing & rules. Retro styles from the 1970's and 1980's and 1990's are often much more cool than today's overproduced entertainment media.
27	The game brings your childhood stories and fantasies to life.
28	How can it not? I grew up playing it.

Question 17 Responses

Response #	Responses
1	Most of my gaming now is done online, and all but one of my current players are people I met through the online D&D community. Without them, I would probably not be gaming right now.
2	Without community there's no game. There's no discussion of the rules to keep people interested during the long gaps in play that many people currently experience, there's no way to find new players, no PbP [play by post], etc.
3	Sense of belonging to a group of like-minded fans
4	D&D is inherently a community effort. A DM needs players and vice versa. This can be seriously only be achieved in-person interactions, stressing the need for community more than, say, Call of Duty
5	D&D is a niche hobby, so the community is the only way to find players.
6	I've played in games with strangers from the very beginning, but nothing compares with the feeling of camaraderie achieved by playing in a campaign for months or years with the same group of players.
7	D&D is nothing without community. D&D offers cooperative storytelling that will impact each participant involved; much like communal stories shared by various cultures.
8	There is a level of comfort that comes from gathering with people with similar interests and similar expectations from a game.
9	D&D is necessarily a social game and can't be play alone. It is best with good, close friends, but even internet contacts can be useful for sharing ideas and material.
10	I like the "shared experience" between players that can happen without their ever having met. I enjoy the collaborative nature of group interaction during play.
11	Only on the most personal level. I've only ever played with friends at our homes, never at a gaming store.
12	If by community you mean social friendships, aka the people at the table you play the game with then yes. If by community you mean the online bickering over rules community then no.
13	The game is cooperative in nature, which appeals to me more than competitive games.
14	It's inherently a social game.
15	I think it is a great place to share Stories, and experiences that happen, and to help improve everyone's fun
16	There is a shared bond between people who have played D&D before. Almost like an insider's club of sorts.
17	You need players, and it's fun to discuss
18	I find the sharing of ideas and experiences between like-minded players of D&D to be valuable.
19	I only enjoy playing with friends
20	Without others to share with the game becomes an exercise in navel staring.
21	I very much enjoy sharing my campaign, experience and opinions with like-minded people online.
22	Getting good ideas from other creative people using the same ruleset and materials

23	One of the major reason that I play D&D over other games is how popular it is and how easy it is to find people interested in playing. It is also important to me to be able to have other that are interested in what I'm interested in that enjoy the same hobby I enjoy.
24	Creates a shared experience and allows players to interact in a scocial context (have fun together).
25	D&D has always been a social event best enjoyed face to face with friends.
26	DM's don't run games with other DM's, so we need another way of discussing how things are run in our own individual games.
27	Community is a potentially baggage laden term for it. Believing that in general most roleplayers understand more about themselves than most non-roleplayers, I feel TTRPGs [Tabletop role-playing games] enrich our thought processes and abstraction capabilities, and I wish to foster such positive things in others.
28	It's an inherently communal game. It doesn't work well on your own.

Question 20 Expanded answer choices

Table 3.9

Number	Answer Choices
1	Very comfortable – I can express myself freely. I'm relaxed. I can choose any action within the game and not feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. I feel respected and valued.
2	Comfortable – I can express myself. I can generally choose any action within the game and not feel too embarrassed or uncomfortable. I generally feel respected and valued.
3	Fairly Comfortable – For the most part I can express myself. Sometimes I feel inhibited. There are some actions I would not choose to do within the game, as I'm not sure how others would react. I generally feel respected or valued, although sometimes I feel less valued or respected.
4	Neutral – I usually can express myself, but I do notice that I am reserved or sometimes uncomfortable during the game. Sometimes I feel respected by the group, other times I feel disrespected.
5	Uncomfortable – I don't trust the people I game with. I don't feel comfortable expressing myself. I am very hesitant in the actions I choose. I often feel like I'm not valued or respected by my group.
6	They suck - I'm never playing with them again!

Question 21 Responses

Response #	Responses
1	They are all close friends and family.
2	Not sure
3	My players have demonstrated to me that they respect me and enjoy my game, and I currently respect my players and trust them after seeing them play over a period of a few years.
4	I've known and played with them for many years.
5	They're my friends and we're having fun playing an inherently silly game.
6	Comfortable because they are my friends.
7	Like-minded people who don't judge because we're all middle-aged but still play a form of make-believe.
8	I don't really care what others think
9	They are my friends and we are accepting of each others style.

10	Age differences
11	Long time friends
12	The maturity level of the group allows us to just relax and have fun, though typically the sessions are a mere four hours and over before we know it.
13	My current group is made up of friends and coworkers. We all spend a fair amount of time together. Beer or other drinks make people open up more.
14	Similar ages, ethnic group, and interests.
15	Long time friendship.
16	I attribute this sense of comfort to the fact that I am the Dungeon Master, and my storytelling and world design have been well regarded for many years. My particular group of players enjoy roleplaying over roll-playing and the level of world immersion I provide allows them to fully explore aspects of their character and in a sense themselves without judgment or recrimination. One must be comfortable in their own skin and self-aware of their own moral, spiritual and intellectual selves. My comfort and self-realization is fully displayed and unclouded, thereby extension allowing my players to feel a sense of comfort within themselves, the game and our shared experience.
17	Some are longtime friends, some are new, and I have yet to get used to them
18	All the members of the group I currently play are friends I have had for many years. We've pretty much all grown up together.
19	Been friends for 30 years
20	Our group has existed, with many changes, for almost eight years, and several of my family members have taken part.
21	How long I've known the people I play with (4-14 years)
22	The fact that my current group consists only of me.
23	Long time friendship.
24	They are close friends and good people.
25	Maturity
26	They are my friends and i put together the group
27	We've been friends for over 20 years (because of D&D)
28	I've known my gaming group for a few years and so we are pretty good friends.
29	I play D&D with people I like, and they also tend to like the same kind of D&D experience as I do.
30	My ability to get along with others.
31	Lack of familiarity with other players.
32	Known them since childhood
33	Our group includes and 8 year old, so some behavior and language is off-limits.
34	This is the one place in my life where I can fully express myself, use all of my skills and talents and intelligence. This is the one place where I don't have to dumb things down for those around me.
35	I meet most of the people I have played with at a casual meetup and was comfortable with them prior to deciding to game together. I am able to playing with people with a similar level of investment into the game as me.
36	Familiarity and friendship.
37	Current group mainly consists of my children.
38	Primarily, adherence to long standing traditions.
39	A group of friends with generally compatible personalities. Different, but compatible.
40	There is a real feel of camaraderie amongst most groups I've played with... Plus we are mostly friends.
41	My current group consists of young family members that are new to the game, so I have to watch what I say and how I run the game.
42	Longevity of the group
43	R E S P E C T
44	Playing with close friends.

Question 22 Responses

Response #	Responses
1	It has helped inspire my curiosity and contributed to my learning.
2	Now it gives me something to do with my daughter.
3	It helped me make my best friend, got me through some very rough parts of my life (probably helped me avoid suicide when I was a teenager), and served as a vital creative outlet in my life.
4	A HUGE one. Playing PnP [Pen & Paper] D&D got me hooked on the Dungeons and Dragons: Online MMO, which I wasted 2 years and $1500 on. I certainly don't blame PnP for any of that, I consider the MMO to be related in terms only, the gameplay and experience is obviously a totally different thing.
5	Many of my oldest and dearest friends I met through D&D and gaming in general.
6	I've made friends through D&D. It continues to consume my free time and money.
7	I have been an avid reader of fiction.
8	Life-long friendships, great memories of games played long ago.
9	It helped me in my school and at work. As a DM, I learned how to keep an audience interested.
10	Most of my friends are at least tangentially related to the fact that I play D&D. Either by association, or tabletop gaming in general.
11	Met a lot of great people over the years
12	Kept a good group of friends together
13	Early on, it was a way to connect with a wide assortment of mostly older people (I was twelve) who were quite intelligent. Later, upon becoming a DM, it was an important creative outlet.
14	Nothing other than an opportunity to bond with coworkers I normally wouldn't have spent time with.
15	Increased my interest in reading immensely, basically starting my academic life.
16	It's a hobby I've been able to keep as physical illness took away sports and rigorous fitness training.
17	A tremendous impact that mere words and writing are incapable of conveying. D&D has broadened my vocabulary, my intellectual pursuits, my sense of adventure, my passions and provided friends both old and new. Psychologically speaking, the outlet provided via roleplaying has helped to develop a sound and secure emotional coping capacity.
18	It brought some friends back
19	The D&D game came around just when I was starting to read and appreciate fantasy literature. The two go hand in hand with me. And between writing for the game and reading for enjoyment, I learned to be a better writer and storyteller. It also sparked in me an interest in medieval history, which is a big part of my life today.
20	None.
21	Most of my friends have come from sharing the hobby, and my general interests have largely been an outgrowth of my early exposure to fantasy.
22	It's hands down my favorite hobby. I've been able to sustain deep friendships that might otherwise not have lasted as long.
23	It had a large impact in the sense that it taught me methods of _organized imagination_ early in my life.
24	Learn to work collaboratively with people, how to work out conflicts, etc, also additional creative outlet, stress reliever.
25	It has honed my imagination and acts as a stress reliever.
26	Makes all my career choices unsatisfying because I wish I were doing something related to RPGs.
27	I have been happier. I have seen my friends more often it is my favorite hobby
28	As mentioned, lifelong friends and a lifetime of fun memories
29	It has consumed a large part of my free time. It has helped contribute positively to my analytical skills and creativity.
30	It helped shaped my reading habits, my interests, and my friends. Like any time consuming and lifelong hobby would, my involvement in D&D probably had a lot of impact (not just actively, but in "opportunity

	cost" -- I wasn't out playing tennis or doing something else).
31	It's fun, but it's still just a game.
32	IT inspired me to approach challenges as something to overcome not run away from.
33	It is impossible to say. I have been playing for over half of my life, and I would rather be immersing myself in the game than doing almost anything else. My vocabulary, my math skills, my social skills, and my imagination have all benefited greatly from the collaborative storytelling that is the game.
34	It provides the release for the creative side of me that is valued no place else in life. Here I am free to be the best that I can be, something that can not be found in any job.
35	I have meet many people that I would never have met otherwise. I have also become more open minded through my interaction with a diverse group of people.
36	Made friends, stimulation of imagination and creativity, improved vocabulary, historical knowledge, lots of great memories
37	Learn about history. Met friends. Improved my communication abilities. Expanded my horizons.
38	I have learned alot of things both related to realworld history as well as managing groups of people and speaking in front of people
39	The game taught me the value of a good story and how to teach, motivate, and lead people.
40	It has allowed my creativity to flow and grow.
41	Given me many hobbies, such as painting minis, designing dungeons, writing stories, creating programs and others.
42	Very little, its a game and stays that way
43	It's one of my main hobbies. I play it with friends and family. Like a game night, poker night, fantasy football league, etc.
44	It's provided countless hours of fun and imagination.

Question 23 Responses

Response #	Responses
1	The freedom to explore and the necessity for imagination.
2	I really don't know. I just know that I end up playing it more than all other RPGs put together.
3	don't have any experience with other role-playing games, but compared to video and board games (which I have a fair amount of experience in), D&D is the only one that really, truly allows you to use your imagination (Minecraft being the only possible exception I can think of).
4	The old editions were the gold standard for fantasy roleplaying - other old systems tried but were much less elegant in their mechanics. Newer editions are mostly benefiting from the nostalgia of the older editions as the game mechanics themselves are worse than a lot of other games out there these days.
5	If you mean how are roll playing games different than other games, then they are tremendously different. Very few other games are collaborative and creative in the same way. Most don't have a continuous story which lasts for years. I'd you mean how is dungeons and dragons unique compared with other roll playing game, then I guess it's the only one that used thac0.
6	Love Vancian Magic.
7	The fact that almost anything is possible, limited only by your imagination. If I play a boardgame, I'll probably forget all about it within a month. But I still remember D&D adventures I played through 30+ years ago.
8	Hundreds of spells!
9	It is a nearly universal translator of games. Most have either played some edition of it or at least know something about it.
10	it's given me opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise

11	Personal nature of the game, at a tabletop, at a fixed time every week, for decades.
12	The improvisational aspect of roleplaying a character within a fantasy world is unlike any other (except its imitators).
13	Creativity is encouraged and rewarded. The game is as good as you want to make it rather than just following a designer's plan. Unpredictability of players keeps things entertaining.
14	You can do anything you want. Other games have bounds in terms of scope and actions.
15	It is the iconic game for fantasy role playing. Once you understand the D&D rules, you can use that understanding to play in any number of imaginary worlds. Though editions change, much stays the same, enough so that D&D is like an evolving language. Once you've become conversant, it's easy enough to pick up on different dialects, be they a groups unique houserules, or updates of a new edition.
16	Communal storytelling and shared experiences have always been at the root of cultures and society. It is through the medium of D&D that we are allowed in essence to create our own mythology and epic tales that will last lifetimes.
17	The rules are what you make of it, and they can be changed or altered as time goes on.
18	D&D doesn't have to end, and it can be whatever you want it to be.
19	The vast amount of Lore and the novels.
20	It adds the creativity of writing fiction to the thrill of a challenging game.
21	The absolute freedom of imagination, the novelty within our group, and the shared storytelling experience that goes beyond any other game I've played.
22	The opportunity for continuity, whether that is in the form of characters or the "game world" environment, or both
23	Open ended, team, cooperative, no losers.
24	The cooperative story-telling.
25	At this point? Nothing.
26	I cannot explain it! It is a living and breathing world that you can experience, shape, control, escape, conquer! You can do anything and it is a blast.
27	Vs. non-RPG: The imagination, the role playing, problem solving, the limitless possibilities Vs. other RPGs: The flavor, the inconsistent rules, the primitive system, it's style influenced by so many fantasy authors
28	The system and game mechanics feel pretty unique, even across the editions. Other games don't really feel right, possibly because D&D was my first real role playing game experience.
29	At one time it may have been unique (being the first "true role playing game" that was published, as far as I know). I wouldn't say it's particularly unique, these days.
30	It's the first RPG. All RPGs are basically the same. Mechanics, rules and settings are different, but it all breaks down to telling the DM what you want your character to do, and he/she adjudicates the results.
31	Comrades in arms. More of a "we are all in this together" style of play.
32	Less now than there used to be. But D&D contains many aspects and monsters that other games cannot have, and these are old friends to me now.
33	It is unique in not only allowing full use of your imagination, it requires it. Only above average minds are capable of participating in D&D, if you are not exceptional you not only can not play D&D, you would not enjoy it if you did.
34	Simply put. Its popularity.
35	Amount of people playing it/community, volume of supplementary material
36	It can be immersive. It is a social game, allowing people to riff off of each others' ideas and share an experience. Synthesizes fantasy, history and mythology.
37	The flexibility to try anything you can imagine
38	D&D is such a free form thinking activity that it spurs creativity, risk taking, and accommodates all people. You have to be an expert at nothing but using your imagination and creativity. There are rules, but they allow great latitude.
39	The medieval world has such a charm and the fantasy world setting makes it richer.

40	The unlimited scope of the game, the freedom to do what you want.
41	Its more story oriented and doesnt have to end at a set pace
42	Me.
43	Imagination and depth.

Question 24 responses

Response #	Responses
1	Spending time with friends and exercising my imagination.
2	Building both characters and a world
3	Watching the PCs enjoy a hard-fought victory.
4	That's a really hard question. I can't think of any one thing in particular. (also it's time for me to go to bed so I'm not going to put much thought into it right now - sorry!)
5	The familiarity and uniqueness of the monsters mostly these days. I can't say I've particularly enjoyed a game of D&D since 2nd edition though due to how much the gameplay and advancement has changed from its original roots.
6	Long running inside jokes with friends. Getting loot.
7	The people I play with.
8	The fact that literally anything is possible, anything can happen. Two different groups can be presented with the exact same adventure scenario, and it will play out completely differently with each one.
9	The D&D lore and folklore.
10	It's an outlet for my creative storytelling nature, which I cannot express normally. 9/23
11	just playing with the others in the group - it's about friends
12	Getting together with friends
13	Roleplaying! It's such an amazing form of self-expression and is such a joy to abandon the mundane for the fantastic.
14	Flexibility. Most games put you into a defined role or story. Dungeons & Dragons allows you to expand on either.
15	Building or participating in an immersive world and constructing a history for my characters though play.
16	I enjoy immersing myself in fantasy worlds and cultures. I enjoy real world cultures, as well, but D&D provides a fun way to explore other places and cultures through the simpler lens of fantasy. Unlike role playing a real world culture, you set the boundaries for fantasy worlds. There is only as much "grim reality" as you wish.
17	I began roleplaying with D&D, so it will always be my first love so to speak. I want to create and share my stories in the milieu of fantasy or sword & sorcery with those who would truly appreciate my efforts. My enjoyment comes from seeing, hearing and feeling the joy I have been able to bring to others through my work.
18	I get to spend hours bonding with people and kill dragons.
19	From the player's side, I enjoy problem solving - finding a solution to a difficult situation by creatively using the resources at hand. From the DM's side, I like building worlds, and building stories, and revealing those stories to the players through their role in events taking place around them.
20	Character progression
21	It allows me to share a creative and challenging experience with my friends.
22	The shared experiences. The game doesn't mean much to me without the epic stories we tell and the laughter and enjoyment that ensues because of our mutual experiences.
23	Hard to say. I like to create and run games.
24	Getting together with friends, making jokes, rolling dice and having a shared experience.
25	Cooperative story-telling with good friends.
26	Creating characters.
27	Everything! Character Creation, Story telling, Lore, Theory-Crafting, The Social Aspect. What is there not

	to love?
28	Friends - they're great, like brothers Thinking, problem solving, creativity - I find these things extremely enjoyable
29	Role playing with other people. It seems like there is an endless variety to the way people can role play a character in different situations.
30	I enjoy playing the game with friends and seeing the game take on a life of its own. It's satisfying because it's a game, it's social, and it's a kind of creative endeavor that shared between more than one individual. Sometimes it surprises you, and that's almost always a good thing.
31	The dice. I've always liked the dice. Oh, and the maps.
32	Infinite imagination.
33	Making up a world and sharing it with others. I feel part of something bigger than myself, but in which I still have some degree of autonomy and over which I still have some degree of control.
34	Freedom! OD&D allows you to be completely free, to completely express yourself. The original version of D&D is truly The One True Game. All other games, all other versions are inferior in everyway. Only OD&D gives you total freedom to be yourself.
35	The easy with which you can find people to pick up and play. It makes for a game that you can easily meet new people.
36	Use of creativity, strategic problem-solving
37	I enjoy creating new scenarios, presenting those to players and having them romp through my imagination.
38	The flexibility. It allows you to stretch out and learn to be creative and try new things
39	Coming with ways to surprise those expecting traditional roleplay, because challenging both the other players and the game / dungeon master should be the goal for anyone truly devoted to the game.
40	Creating a world/scenario for the players. Constructing a story/adventure plot line and observing how players deal with various situations and challenges.
41	Creating dungeons with traps, monster encounters and unique magic items for my players to overcome, defeat and enjoy
42	Seeing how the players react to the world as given to them.
43	The problem solving
44	Creation & challenge. It's relaxing to design challenges for my players and engaging to watch them overcome them.
45	The ability to create my own fantasy world.

Question 29 responses

Response #	Responses
1	It helps keep me from becoming to serious and stagnant.
2	I wouldn't phrase the questions above quite that way. Roleplaying games offer me the opportunity to be spontaneously creative in a social environment. It has nothing to do with being child-like, it has more to do with being able to unbiddenly express ones-self creatively in an adult context where few opportunities to do so exist in typical adult social circumstances.
3	I mean, yeah, I guess. I'm pretty young still so I don't really have a good perspective on it I don't think, but yes, it does offer the opportunity, though I don't always take it. The opportunity is important to me because that's what D&D is all about - relatively complete freedom to do whatever you want. Of course that can go to many different extremes - "child-like" has many different possible meanings - could be imaginative, innocent, unencumbered (pun intended), but could also mean whiny, stubborn, etc.
4	Play is fun. I like fun.

5	I think it is important to look at the world, at times, through the eyes of a child. There is a need to look at things with a wonder of viewing things for the first time.
6	Because it helps keep real life in perspective. It's an outlet and break from the monotony of real life.
7	everyone needs to play from time to time - even adults
8	Generally, it's a great way to relieve stress, while also building relationships.
9	Allow me to quote C.S. Lewis who wrote, "When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up." The above quote is the very essence of retaining our immortal youth and sense of wonder. Never allow the uneducated or ill-informed mind to dictate what exactly "adult" means. It is nothing more than a chronological term applied to a human being.
10	Playing is a way to enjoy life. Spending time with friends and bonding over a common thing while being thoroughly entertained and amused is rewarding.
11	I don't associate playing with being child-like. Everyone needs to play at something, whether it is an amateur sport or a game or whatever, it fulfills a need to strive for success and take risks and be challenged without major consequences.
12	Most "fun" activities for adults are passive spectator events. D&D is participatory and requires spending time with friends.
13	That childlike sense of wonder brings about a very special emotion within ourselves that makes our experiences, both real and imagined, more meaningful.
14	Again, hard to say. I value imagination greatly, always have, and it is one venue for the expression of imagination.
15	Sometimes you just need an outlet to be goofy. Can't do it at work, or other have to be serious times.
16	It keeps me young at heart.
17	Because it's healthy and fun.
18	It is one of things i enjoy most. Everything i enjoy comes in a package gift wrapped and called D&D
19	It makes your life less stressful and more fun, keeps your mind sharp, helps me relate to my children
20	I try not to take myself or others too seriously, and after all it is just a game.
21	By child-like I mean unfetteredly creative. I feel like anything else is a waste of my brain.
22	Only a child plays with complete freedom, complete trust and complete enjoyment. Nothing is better than that!
23	It gives my the opportunity to be silly and express myself or think about things from a different perspective.
24	Need a form of escapism but, more importantly, I seek to recapture that sense of wonderment I felt as a child.
25	D&D allows me to keep in touch with the past while exercising imagination and creativity in a unique way.
26	Can't be a serious adult all the time, and drinking kills brain cells!
27	Play is like prayer. It's the poetry of the soul.
28	All fun and no play makes Jack a dull boy. It's true. Everyone needs some play time.

Question 30 responses

Response #	Responses
1	It is fun.
2	Fun
3	As a fun creative outlet.
4	Social cooperation in creating our own entertainment.
5	I have fun playing the game. It's also a good excuse to see some friends that I probably wouldn't see otherwise.

6	I like spending time with my friends pretending to kill owl bears.
7	Creating cool settings.
8	An enjoyable hobby, spent interacting with friends.
9	Entertainment.
10	Telling a story, either as the DM or through my character.
11	It's a rich, creative entertainment that I can enjoy with friends.
12	to have fun
13	Getting together with friends
14	Communal storytelling and pure fun!
15	I enjoy immersing myself in these imaginary worlds as entertainment. I enjoy imagining how a character might live and act in such a world.
16	Playing interesting characters and hanging out with friends.
17	The social aspect, spending time with friends while bolstering parts of my imagination that haven't been used in a long time.
18	I enjoy being creative, whether as a player or as a DM (I do both on a regular basis).
19	The desire to create
20	I enjoy thinking about characters and scenarios that will be fun for the whole table, and playing them out to see how they go.
21	For the mental challenges that need to be overcome.
22	Systematized collaborative group creation
23	Fun.
24	Have fun, relax
25	Having fun with my friends.
26	Storytelling
27	Fun
28	Socializing with others by role playing characters in a variety of situations.
29	Fun, friends
30	Having fun.
31	I like to read and use my imagination.
32	Excercise my left and right sides of my brain.
33	See all of my above answers.
34	Socializing with other gamers and getting into character.
35	The freedom to have fun with no restrictions and no hindrances.
36	Exercise of creativity, escapism, socialization with other creative people
37	Create scenarios and have others enjoy that which I have created.
38	The ability to create something that challenges the imagination of all that encounter it.
39	To have fun and tell a story
40	Relaxation and socialization.
41	It's a creative outlet.
42	To write and immerse myself in a fun magical world.
43	I like the game, and I like having something that my child and I both enjoy.
44	To have a fun time with people I care about.
45	The sheer fun of it, and the challenge of writing games.

Question 31 responses

Response #	Responses
1	I'd like to see it become more widely accepted.
2	I am liking 5th edition, hopefully it stays around a while

3	*shrug* I don't need progress. The game I play is already mostly dead; but I have all the books, and as long as I have people willing to play what I run, I don't need anything else.
4	The game has too many cooks in the kitchen and it's become a game designed by committee, driven by the marketing department, and has essentially lost its soul to the corporate machine. I'd like to see them have more real interaction with the players, and the game mechanics built upon a more solid foundation. Even 5th edition has several fundamental flaws to its design that's going to cause a lot of problems down the line.
5	I'd really like to see a resurgence in popularity. I'd love to be able to play in a group that met at least monthly (my current group meets 2-3 times a year currently). I'm not sure if 5E will be able to help with that at all, but I'm hopeful (I haven't spent much time with 5E as of yet and don't really have an opinion on it ATM).
6	I'm very excited about fifth edition, it seems like a very positive set of changes. I would like to see a robust set of digital companion tools for game planning and at the table assistance.
7	More maneuvers for Battlemaster. Less restriction on spellcasters with concentration.
8	A wider player base, and more socially acceptable.
9	As long as the game remains fun to play, I'll be happy. That really is my only requirement.
10	I like the idea of keeping the game more rules light, as they've done with 5E.
11	I'm still waiting for the virtual tabletop that I envisioned in the eighties. We're getting closer, but still have a ways to go (4E looked like it would deliver, but that fizzled).
12	just teaching more people how to play
13	Wider audience
14	As long as the game continues to embolden the meek, grant strength to the weak and bring greater understanding towards self-realization and understanding than I would be happy.
15	I think the digital age may be the end of D&D as we know it. I think the long time gamers are too set in their ways to allow the game to grow and change with the times.
16	Ultimately, some sort of virtual reality interface that other players could all share the same game world. Basically just a visual tool to help roleplaying and imagination.
17	I feel the game really needs to embrace the world of electronics and digital media better. Tablets, laptops, and video screens are all so common now that it seems like an untapped resource.
18	My biggest disappointment in the way the game has been progressing is that it has strayed far from its roots. At one time, the game was geared toward simulating historic fantasy literature, and entailed risk and challenge. Recent editions seem more geared toward simulating fantasy video games, and the PCs are more powerful and less vulnerable. I would like to see the game steer closer to its roots.
19	back to 1e and 2e and for wotc to burn
20	I am enjoying the beginnings of electronic tools for gaming (online character sheets, campaign wikis, virtual table tops, etc.), and would like to see technology continue to make the game a more immersive experience while still allowing the humans at the table to have the unlimited freedom that video games don't provide.
21	Wherever it leads
22	I like the way that the game has progressed in the hands of the fans and players more than the directions it has been taken by the corporate owners of the IP. I would like to see it continue to flourish as a fan-driven endeavor.
23	Exactly where it seems to be going. 5th edition seems to be bringing back that elusive nostalgia that I feel many of us are striving for once again.
24	The game doesn't need to progress. It's already what you make it.
25	I just hope the game continues to draw in more people so they can experience the same joy it has given me.

26	Go digital
27	A popular game that most people play and can talk about
28	I'd like to see the fifth edition consolidate gamers behind one edition and ultimately result in an over all increase in the numbers of role players as a gaming hobby or past time.
29	I don't need it to progress at all. AD&D has been just find for 35+ years
30	I'm not concerned about the game "progressing." It is what it is. People who like it can play it with their friends. That's good enough for me.
31	It's not up to me where it goes.
32	Full VR immersion at some point. Game has not even begun to tap into the potential of computing to supplement the game itself.
33	I think the current edition is the best one yet. I would like to see it stick around for a long time.
34	I would like to see more diversity in the settings. And more focus on new gamers, especially those new to the hobby.
35	I could care less where it "progresses", since that way lies garbage. The Original 1974 Dungeons & Dragons is The One True Game and I am only interested in playing and reffing it and introducing others to it.
36	Reprints/Print on Demand of all older products
37	Bring in young players, to recapture that sense of wonderment vicariously.
38	While it will never- and probably should never- leave its class based system, I would like to see the way people perceive classes change into something less rigid.
39	Remain stable and not get bogged down in power gaming options
40	Back to the simplicity/familiarity of 1st edition. Today's editions strike me as too video game like and munchkinesque.
41	No need, I have the version that I like, with my houserules being tailored for it to fit my way, and create my own areas, groups and dungeons. I have what I need, how it progresses doesn't affect me.
42	Official clarified rules on my edition.
43	I don't care so long as it continues.
44	I don't care.
45	Don't care. I don't support current editions, and I only play 1st and 2nd Edition. The future of the game/hobby means nothing to me.