

Dungeons and dragons: the impact of the fantasy tabletop role-playing game to you...

[Art & Culture](#), [Symbolism](#)



Abstract

Role-Playing Games are a type of game wherein players play as fictional personas and assume their characters to interact with a fictional setting. Tabletop Role-playing Games are games enacted through speech and spoken description, with the outcomes determined by the game's system and supervising player called the Game Master. Dungeons & Dragons is one of the most popular tabletop role-playing games wherein a group of player characters come together as adventurers in a fantasy realm that highlights adventure, combat, magic, cooperative puzzle solving, and collaborative storytelling. Because Dungeons & Dragons is a collaborative and social tabletop role-playing game that transpires in fantasy settings with rules that differ from reality, young women play Dungeons & Dragons as a form of escapism from a male dominated reality and immerse themselves in game worlds with female heroes for positive representation and empowerment as well as letting themselves collaborate and experiment creative ideas and solutions with others in fictional game environments all while gaining a positive and fun experience. The artwork depicts a four women playing D&D in the left and right paintings while the middle painting depicts their fantasy personas battling a giant dragon and monsters. The portrayal of the character personas are based off the game's interpretations and symbolize positive traits possessed by the characters. Elves are shown to be intelligent, ethereal, and beautiful. Dwarves are depicted to strong, courageous, and skilled warriors. Gnomes are commonly characterized to be delightful, vibrant, and excitable. Humans in D&D settings are innovative, diverse in

skill, adaptable, and ambitious and are used as gateway characters to relate ourselves to fantasy. The final output will be triptych painting in acrylic.

Keywords: Dungeons & Dragons, Tabletop Role-playing Game, Fantasy, Women

Introduction

A Role-Playing Game (abbreviated to RPG) is a type of game wherein players assume the roles of characters in a fictional settings and take responsibility of their roles within a narrative through acting or simulated decision making to advance the story or develop one's character. Role-Playing games take on many forms such as role-playing video games and live-action role-playing (Furniss, 2017). One notable type of role-playing game the researcher will focus on is the Tabletop Roleplaying Game. Tabletop Role-Playing games (sometimes referred to as pen-and-paper role-playing game) got its name from the fact it is traditionally played on flat surfaces, like a table (Just, 2016). A Tabletop Role-playing game is a form of RPG in which participants of the game narrate their characters' actions and let formal game systems, rules, and some self improvisation dictate the outcome of their actions. Unique to Tabletop games, they are enacted through speech and spoken description while playing under a set of rules (Furniss, 2017). In Tabletop games, one player called the Game Master (abbreviated to GM) guides the players through the game's world, surroundings, and inhabitants as well as determine the outcomes of the other players' actions with the help of the game system's rules.

Dungeons and Dragons (abbreviated as D&D) is a popular tabletop roleplaying game devised by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson first published in 1974 and gained immense popularity in the 1980s. It is still one of the most successful and most played tabletop games today, reaching 5 editions of the game with the 5th Edition Player's Handbook published in 2014. The main premise of the game is that a group of players create their own characters and come together as a group to travel for adventures usually set in a fantasy realm full of magic, creatures, dungeons, and interesting individuals to interact with. D&D uses the 20 sided-dice system and operates under the basic rule book depending on what edition one decides to play. While the standard rules of D&D that come with the player's handbook are important, Dungeons & Dragons' rules can be easily manipulated by the DM depending on how different group plays, creating one-of-a-kind experiences with each campaign (Just, 2016). Despite it existing and being popular since the 1980s, Dungeons & Dragons reached new critical acclaim and success starting 2014 with its 5th Edition Playbook, garnering 12-15 million people playing in North America alone in 2017, with sales growing 40% compared to 2016. D&D isn't just a successful game to play with friends in real life over a table, but it also sees success and communities in online spaces. Roll20 is a site dedicated to D&D that allows players to play the game no matter what part you are in the world, amassing 34, 785 games played using the Roll20 app in 2017 (Hall, 2017). Not only does D&D get success in games played, D&D is also a viable platform for narrative storytelling in new age media with people watching or listening to other people play the game rather than playing themselves. The Mary Sue writer Vivian Kane credits its ever-growing success in today's age

to the 5th Edition's focus on collaborative story telling and as such sees the rise of successful shows and podcasts dedicated to playing and telling stories through D&D like Critical Role, Force Grey, and The Adventure Zone just to name a few (Kane, 2018) (Conzett, 2017).

Though for all its success over the years, Dungeons & Dragons players have their share of negative views and stereotypes over the years, which are not entirely unreasonable. Dungeons & Dragons' community belongs in a sector of geek culture, wherein treatment of women in community is uninviting at its best. There are accounts of lack of positive female representation in Nerd Culture as well as sexist behavior against women such as sexualization and gatekeeping which is harassment of individuals, in this case women, claiming their interest of a movie, tv show, and/or game is only to impress men (Spies, 2016). Claire Cambell's research cites the Boston Theater Scene wherein it stated that the male demographic was the focus of D&D's earlier editions and throughout the 1980s as D&D grew popularity, negative stereotypes link to D&D players as awkward social-outcast type of teenage boys. Additionally, official published material by the creator of Dungeons & Dragons, Gary Gygax, included notes on what actions female characters were allowed (and subsequently not allowed) to do.

Eventually, Dungeons & Dragons as a franchise grew, acquiring more female players and more female staff members, soon even removing the penalties and draw backs to playing as a female character. Campbell cites a Vice interview with Jeremy Crawford, the lead designer and managing editor of D&D, stating that the 5th Edition of D&D credits 26 percent of design

contributors to be female compared to the 20 percent of the 4th Edition and the 12 percent of the 3rd Edition, as well as crediting the market and brand team to be three-quarters female (Campbell 2016). Women now make up 40 percent of D&D players in 2017, compared to the statistic of 20-25 percent in 2012, which Kane theorizes to be the effect of the availability of streaming sites presenting positive representation of female players as well as the female representation in D&D's staff and team. Though, while Dungeons & Dragons became more progressive through the years, here are still cases of female players experiencing sexism, with them being the end of a sexist jokes, unfair sexualization while playing, and sometimes outright being turned down from joining because they are women all stemming from a rather male-dominated background (Campbell, 2016).

Studies about the relationship of women and their relationship to the fantasy genre, extending to studies of their relationship to video games, role-playing games, tabletop games, and eventually academic articles about women's relationship to Dungeons & Dragons have been conducted in the past. However, though these studies are abundant, most of the focus on these studies were either about how the positives outweighed the negatives of playing D&D or how the researcher only interviewed older individuals who have been playing for years, focusing on women ages 30 and above. There has been a lack of studies about the relationship of D&D with younger individuals ranging the ages of those who attend college and who were not present when Dungeons & Dragons was first conceived.

The artist researcher has spent a good amount of years being interested in Dungeons & Dragons but has never engaged with it until late 2017 when listening to the hit D&D podcasts The Adventure Zone and Critical Role. The researcher has played D&D with majority of female players (only a handful of male players and few players who do not want to disclose their gender identity) and has observed that most players were near her age and have not participated in D&D games until recently as well as encountered people, often times women, who want to play D&D due to watching and listening to D&D related media but had their reservations about starting to play such as not knowing anyone else to play with, intimidating amount of rules, uncomfortableness of playing in male-dominated spaces, or not having the time to play at all. The researcher was then inspired to conduct her thesis based off her own experiences related to Dungeons & Dragons as well as learn the positive impact the game has had to women her age.

Statement of the Problem

The study aims to answer the following questions: How would the artist researcher collect data regarding the impact of Dungeons & Dragons in young women? What makes Dungeons & Dragons attractive to young women? Why do young women enjoy Dungeons & Dragons? What and how does Dungeons & Dragons positively impact the lives of young women? How will the artist researcher depict the thesis topic through painting?

Objectives

To gather research materials and data regarding women's relationship and history with the fantasy genre, tabletop role-play games, and Dungeons &

Dragons Conduct research by survey to collect data on young women's relationship towards Dungeons & Dragons. Conduct interviews for additional understanding and information on the thesis topic and art styles. To analyze collected data. To finalize expected output for artwork Prepare necessary materials for the output for artwork. Create the final output artwork that exhibits: A triptych painting with the left and right paintings depicting four women playing D&D The middle painting of the triptych depicting a fantasy scene with the four women's D&D personas battling monsters and a dragon Portrayal of character personas based off the game's interpretations and symbolize positive traits possessed by the characters.

Significance of the Study

The artist researcher believes that the study is significant in filling some gaps in knowledge about the relationship of the fantasy tabletop role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons specific to young women as well as show that playing Dungeons & Dragons has positive impacts on those who play. The artist researcher also aims to diminish the idea that Dungeons & Dragons is not inclusive of female players as well as aims to diminish the idea that the game is intimidating towards beginner players, which was a tactic used for gatekeeping interested female players.

Scope and Limitations

The research book will focus on what the fantasy genre and the tabletop role-playing game platform is and how it relates to how beneficial Dungeons & Dragons is to young women. The study will also research the different types of symbolism in what kind of characters women play in D&D and aims

to determine the characteristics of the fantasy figures to symbolize in the final output.

The research will only be limited to women of the ages of 18-25 that have played Dungeons & Dragons or has at least has experience or has sought entertainment from new-age media related to D&D such as live-streams, online shows, or podcasts. The research will only include a small breakdown of the Dungeons & Dragons rules to its most essential and will not tackle more complex rules included yet optional in the game. The research will seldom mention past D&D editions and will solely focus on the most recent edition of the game which is Dungeons & Dragons: 5th Edition Player's Handbook.

The artwork will be triptych painting of 3 panel canvases, the left and right panels being 4' x 2' while the middle panel is 4' x 4', making the whole piece 4' x 8'. The left and right panels are connected by hinges to the middle, allowing them to fold into the middle panel. The back of the three panels will be backed by varnished wood, with the middle panel depicting a D20 symbol in the middle to resemble a DM Screen.

The artist will use acrylic for the whole painting. The painting will depict four women playing D&D in the left and right paintings while the middle painting depicts their fantasy personas battling a giant dragon and monsters. The portrayal of the character personas are based off the game's interpretations and symbolize positive traits possessed by the characters, taken from certain descriptions in the official Dungeons & Dragons: 5th Edition Player's

Handbook. Elves are shown to be intelligent, ethereal, and beautiful. Dwarves are depicted to strong, courageous, and skilled warriors. Gnomes are commonly characterized to be delightful, vibrant, and excitable. Humans in D&D settings are innovative, diverse in skill, adaptable, and ambitious and are used as gateway characters to relate ourselves to fantasy.

The Feminist art theory was the primary theory due to the research paper's focus on female subjects. Representationalism was used as the artist researcher aims to convey images with an idea. Similarly, Symbolism is used as the artist aims to express the idea through images.

Art movements applied to the final thesis artwork are Semi-Realism and Surrealism. The artwork was inspired by multiple artists. The main composition was inspired by D&D cover artist, Tyler Jacobson. Color, environment, style influences, and creature designs drew influences from Filipino artists Froilan Calayag and Rodel Tapaya. The character designs were also influenced by online artists AB Illustrates and Carey Pietsch.

Definition of Terms

Role-Playing Game - A type of game wherein players assume the roles of characters in a fictional settings and take responsibility of their roles within a narrative through acting or simulated decision making to advance the story or develop one's character. Tabletop Role-playing Game - sometimes referred to as pen-and-paper role-playing game, enacted through speech and spoken description, with the outcomes determined by the game's system and supervising player called the Game Master. Game Master - The main supervisor that guides the players in the game.

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In charge of developing and narrating the world, surroundings, and inhabitants as well as determine the outcomes of the other players' actions with the help of the game system's rules. Dungeon Master - A term used for the Game Masters for games of Dungeons & Dragons. DM Screen - A Dungeon Master screen, a device used by the DM to create a line of separation from the other players and used to conceal quick references, guides, and secret notes from the other players' prying eyes. D20 System - The system of dice used for the game, which solves in-game conflict. The D20 system uses dice a 20 sided die, a 12 sided die, two 10 sided die, an 8 sided die, a six sided die, and a 4 sided die. The 20 sided die is the most important, the others only used for occasional circumstances. Sexism/Sexist - Prejudice or discrimination against one's gender or sex, mostly targeted against women. Genre - A category, relating to things such as music or literature or any other form of art and entertainment. Streaming - The transferring of data, most of the time video or audio data, through the Internet as an alternative of downloading large data files. Loading a video on YouTube is an example of Streaming. Live-streams - A live transmission of an even broadcasted over the Internet. Podcasts - Digital audio files uploaded on the internet for online listening or download. It is a medium for listening to episodic in nature, akin to those of radio dramas or talk shows.

The Feminist art theory was the primary theory due to the research paper's focus on female subjects and women's relationship to D&D, the artist sought to promote female subjects and display them participating in what is considered "traditionally male" roles by both playing a game that has a

male-dominated audience as well as them being represented as fantasy heroes.

Representationalism theory was used as the artist researcher aims to convey images with an idea. The artist uses this theory to create representational images of women. Similarly, Symbolism is used as the artist aims to express the idea through images. The portrayal of the character personas are based off the game's interpretations and symbolize positive traits possessed by the characters. Elves are shown to be intelligent, ethereal, and beautiful. Dwarves are depicted to strong, courageous, and skilled warriors. Gnomes are commonly characterized to be delightful, vibrant, and excitable. Humans in D&D settings are innovative, diverse in skill, adaptable, and ambitious and are used as gateway characters to relate ourselves to fantasy. The final output will be triptych painting in acrylic.

Art Movements

Semi-Realism was used as the artist aims to combine her art style that draws influences from comics and cartoons with realistic figures and elements while also keeping more "cartoon-ish" elements to the art style. Surrealism was used as the artist aims to paint a fantasy scene with imaginative subjects and imagery only possible through a fantasy setting such as dragons and the use of magic.