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Potential Applications of Drama Therapy in Table-Top Role Playing Games

Abigail Ankrom

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Murray State University Honors College

HONORS THESIS

Certificate of Approval

Potential Applications of Drama Therapy in Table-Top Role Playing Games

Abigail Ankrom

May/2023

Approved to fulfill the
Requirements of HON 437

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Potential Applications of Drama Therapy in Table-Top Role Playing Games

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the Murray State University Honors Diploma

Abigail Ankrom

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to define and propose potential applications of drama therapy techniques to table-top role playing games and suggest the possibility of using role playing games in a clinical setting. The thesis examines the history of drama therapy as well as the origin and mechanics of table-top role playing games, using the 5th Edition of Dungeons and Dragons as a central example. Overlap between drama therapy techniques and aspects of table-top role playing games is explored. The thesis culminates in a group of sample scenarios that could potentially be used to introduce difficult topics in an in-game, therapeutic setting.

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SECTION I: DEFINITIONS, ORIGINS, AND TECHNIQUES OF DRAMA THERAPY

Definition

According to the North American Drama Therapy Association, or NADTA, drama therapy is “the intentional use of drama and/or theatre processes to achieve therapeutic goals,” (“What is Drama Therapy?”). While seemingly unconventional at first glance, drama therapy puts emphasis on client involvement through activity, making it not only easier for client reflection (Bailey 2), but also more accessible for those who struggle with or cannot engage in talk therapy (e.g. nonverbal individuals). In fact, drama therapy has been noted to be suitable for a broad range of populations, including but not limited to those with developmental disorders, conduct disorders, and those with physical disabilities (Kedem-Tahar et al. 32). Drama therapy is further applicable for both younger and older populations, with reports of drama therapists using the practice to treat bereaved children, residents in a center for patients with dementia, and all ages in between (Curtis 185; Lin et al. 1).

To participate in drama therapy, one is not required to have a vast amount of knowledge about theatre or theatre processes (“What is Drama Therapy?”). Rather than being developed to serve those involved in theatre, drama therapy is deeply rooted in the idea that theatre approaches and techniques can be adapted to increase the overall mental well-being of most, if not all, people. These approaches and techniques will be discussed further later in this paper.

Because of its deeply rooted history in psychodrama, which will be discussed later in this paper, often the two forms are confused or misunderstood as two parts of one whole. While similar in that the two use some of the same techniques and basic theories, fundamental aspects of each differentiate the modalities of treatment. The greatest of such differences comes from the

overall philosophy of each method. In the case of psychodrama, understanding the psyche through the use of drama is the primary philosophy whereas in drama therapy the goal is the art being created through the use of the psyche (Kedem-Tahar et al. 29). This is not to say that drama therapists do not aim to help their clients heal through the use of drama, but rather to point out that the creation of art is a healing process in and of itself. Another major point of dissention lies within the objective of the respective sessions. In psychodrama the clients are encouraged to reenact situations from their personal lived experiences to reconnect to the emotions they felt at the time of those lived experiences. This pushes the client to directly confront the dilemmas in their personal lives in hopes of finding a resolution. In contrast, drama therapy pulls from the Brechtian concept of distancing. In sessions, rather than the clients acting out their lived experiences, drama therapists will encourage them to distance themselves from said experiences in order to prevent emotional distress during the session. This is typically done through role play, which will be detailed later in this paper. The goal in preventing clients from being “too close” to the material they are enacting is multifaceted. For one, clients enacting a scene tangential to one’s own lived experience as another role allows the client to gain new perspectives on said experience. In addition, the client is allowed to process and apply the scene work to their own lives without the emotional distress of facing them directly while immersed in an active scene. When working with a larger group, it stands to reason that others participating in or being audience to the scene will also benefit by applying the perspectives learned in the scene to their own lives.

Like other expressive arts therapies (art therapy, music therapy, dance therapy, etc.) drama therapy has a broad application relevant for numerous populations. This application only increases as modern drama therapists learn and adapt to the new age of technology. Johnson and

Emunah point out that in the same way movies and television evoke feelings from audiences, drama therapeutic processes are adaptable for the screen. Important aspects of drama therapy, such as “intimacy and proximity can be evoked through the close-ups on screen,” (32). They go on to add that new technological advances may provide underserved clients with opportunities to become involved with the practice (Johnson and Emunah 33). In addition, drama therapy is also rooted in social justice and change, with many drama therapists making it a priority to incorporate adequate discussion of a myriad of global issues such as discrimination and oppression into their sessions. The goal behind this being to introduce as well as reinforce positive change and acceptance within the members of the session. Drama therapy, as pointed out by Johnson and Emunah, may also aid in understanding the difference between one’s intended meaning behind their words and the impact those words have on other people and/or populations (Johnson and Emunah 34).

The significance of drama therapy lies not only in its accessibility but in its adaptability. Drama therapy takes many forms (e.g. puppetry, scene work, improvisations, storytelling, etc.) and is not limited by the confines of reality (this author is referring to dramatic reality, which once again will be discussed later in this paper). Through the studies of both psychological and theatre processes, the early influencers of drama therapy uncovered a gap in the therapeutic world and utilized their techniques to serve many populations who may have found talk therapy inaccessible to them. Although there is not much empirical data and research in this developing field yet, it seems that there is plenty of potential for growth as NADTA builds their growing inventory of relevant research material and suggests new areas on which the drama therapy research community can base their work (“Snapshot of Empirical Drama Therapy Research” 14).

Origins and Theories

Drama therapy is a relatively new practice, with NADTA being formed only approximately 45 years ago. While theatre has been used by many populations for centuries to evoke feelings of both actor and audience, the roots of drama therapy can be traced to Jacob Levy (J. L.) Moreno in the 1920s (Johnson and Emunah 5; Nolte 1). Psychiatrist and founder of psychodrama, J. L. Moreno was a peer and critic of Sigmund Freud and his idea of dream analysis, believing that real therapeutic benefit was unlocked by understanding the meaning behind the client's real life experiences (Goldberg 361). Moreno's ideas gained popularity in parts of the psychological community with the professional association created for psychodrama being established in 1942 (Johnson and Emunah 6). Psychodrama influenced and was the precursor to what are now referred to as the expressive arts therapies (Johnson and Emunah 6). These include music therapy, dance therapy, art therapy, and now drama therapy.

The North American Drama Therapy Association was founded by a number of early influencers in the field. Among them were Gertrude Scattner, who had previously used drama and theatre exercises with survivors of concentration camps after World War II (Johnson and Emunah 8-9), Elanor Irwin, who specialized in drama and speech therapy (Landy "Drama Therapy and Psychodrama" 93), Barbara Sandberg, Ray Gordon, and David Read Johnson, whose modern influences on drama therapy will be discussed below. Together they came up with ideas on how to qualify a person to become a drama therapist, and worked on making these qualifications required in early drama therapy degree programs.

Early influencers in the field of drama therapy paved the way for new, idealistic drama therapists, who hoped to create theories from which other drama therapists could learn and adapt. In this paper, focus will be drawn to three modern influencers in the drama therapy community:

David Read Johnson, Renée Emunah, and Robert Landy. Each of these individuals have created their own theoretical frameworks surrounding the drama therapeutic process and how that process should be followed during a drama therapy session.

The first modern influencer of drama therapy discussed in this paper will be David Read Johnson, who proposed the theory of Developmental Transformations. In developmental transformations, the client and drama therapist are focused on a spontaneous and improvisational experience that has no real structure. Instead, the action is to occur naturally and fluidly to allow for discoveries surrounding one's feelings, which are encouraged to be felt "through the body" as they come up in a session (Landy "Drama Therapy and Psychodrama").

Next to be discussed is the Integrative Five Phase Model of drama therapy, created by Renée Emunah. As Emunah puts it, "The Integrative Five Phase Model of drama therapy represents a developmental course of treatment, in which the therapeutic journey is paced and progressive, instilling a sense of gradual unfolding. Each stage paves the way for the next stage, spiraling a series of sessions towards deeper levels of play, intimacy, and self-revelation," (Emunah 3). These stages—in order—are as follows: Dramatic Play, Scenework, Role Play, Culminating Enactments, and Dramatic Ritual (Bailey 4). In dramatic play, clients begin their therapeutic journey by learning trust within a group setting. During the scenework phase, the clients expand their knowledge of dramatic practices. Next, in the role play phase clients make discoveries about their feelings in a fictional context. Then during the culminating enactments phase, clients address their own personal conflicts in a direct manner. Finally, during the dramatic ritual phase the group does a closing activity that could take the form of a public performance, private discussion, etc. (Bailey 4; Landy "Drama Therapy and Psychodrama" 99-101). It is important to note that these five phases are not all to be completed during one

session of drama therapy. Rather these phases could take multiple sessions each to complete, and some groups may not have enough time to complete all five phases (Bailey 4).

Finally, the last modern theory to be discussed is Robert Landy's Role Theory. In this theory, a person's experience is explained by the roles they take on in their everyday life. These roles are not fixed, and can change based on the lived experiences of a person (Landy "Drama Therapy and Psychodrama" 96). Landy also developed a role method which guides drama therapists through working with roles. The steps of this method in order are as follows: Invoking the role, naming the role, playing out/working through the role, exploring relationships of role to counterrole and guide, reflecting upon the role play, relating the fictional to everyday life, integrating roles to create a functional role system, and social modeling (Landy "Drama Therapy and Psychodrama" 98). Emunah's Integrative Five Phase Model integrates aspects of Role Theory and the two share a few common characteristics, however Role Theory strays away from Developmental Transformations in that it includes a debriefing discussion with clients at the end of the session. In Developmental Transformations, healing is fully achieved within the enacted reality (Landy "Drama Therapy and Psychodrama" 99; 102).

As the field of drama therapy grows, so too does the amount of drama therapists who are ready and willing to create meaningful change within clients' lives. The aim of drama therapy is not as simple as healing those struggling to overcome obstacles in their lives. Healing is one goal of drama therapists, but as the field progresses the objective widens to include the teaching and understanding of social justice issues and inclusivity among all populations. Drama therapy has great potential to help people understand their personal biases and privileges as well as identify and address inequalities in the world around them (Read and Emunah 34).

Techniques and Concepts

To effectively describe every concept and technique within the field of drama therapy would be a lengthy and daunting task. For the purposes of this paper, the techniques and concepts discussed will be limited to Role Play, The Dramatic Reality, Dramatic Projection, and Distancing. Each of these holds their own benefits and all can be present during a single session of drama therapy.

Beginning with role play, said concept would not be understood without first describing role itself. In drama therapy, role is considered to be a part of the self. Explained best by the creator of role theory, Robert Landy, “[Role] represents a part of a person rather than the whole personality. It holds certain qualities and serves certain knowable purposes within the lives of people,” (Landy “Chapter 4” 102). Roles can be given to one by oneself, others, or their society. For example, one’s gender identity, profession, religious affiliation, etc. Roles also affect how one acts in response to their surrounding context. Around friends, a person may display the role of confidant whereas in a school setting one may take the role of student. The roles in one’s repertoire are separate entities which comprise oneself, which is where a person derives one’s identity. In drama therapy, having a large repertoire of roles one moves through fluidly is a sign of a healthy relationship with oneself. This being said, there are times when one may become “stuck” in a role (Landy “Chapter 4” 106). An example of which can be seen after a parent has lost a child. The role of “mourner” may be acquired and remain the primary role no matter the context in which a person finds themselves. In this case, drama therapeutic intervention may be necessary. Through role play, a person essentially “tries on” different roles and mirrors the actions of those roles, in an attempt to understand new perspectives. In the case of the grieving parent, this person may be instructed to enact the role of “commemorator”. This person would go

on to enact the characteristics of said role in the context of a similar situation. Perhaps they would be in charge of planning a party to celebrate the life of someone's lost loved one, gathering stories of special memories they and others had with the one who is gone. The idea behind this exercise is to give the client a new perspective on their situation from a platform outside of themselves. In doing so, the client expands their role repertoire while also gaining the understanding that their identity has not changed because they experienced a tragic and traumatic event.

Next, consider the aspect of dramatic reality. This concept can be difficult to understand because it is contradictory in nature. Take, for example, the idea that the dramatic reality takes place in the present moment, however the present moment is malleable, and may be shaped by imagination. As Pendzik puts it, the dramatic reality is paradoxical (274) and meets at the crossroads of reality and fantasy pulling influence from both (273). The dramatic reality is constructed and maintained by the drama therapist with the acknowledgement and agreement of the client(s). The dramatic reality cannot exist without this agreement (Pendzik 275), as the clients and drama therapist must work together to conjure whatever their imagination brings forth. Dramatic reality does not conform to conventional time and space. Rather, it transcends both in order to allow the clients a safe space in which they may repeat or attempt new experiences in a non-linear fashion with little to no repercussions for their actions (Pendzik 274; Chapman 137). Within the dramatic reality, clients are afforded the opportunity to view situations from perspectives other than their own as well. This allows for clients to better understand obstacles they have faced during the course of their lives or how their own actions have effects on others around them. Dramatic reality can take many forms. For example, drama therapists may construct a theatrical enactment, ritual, or even a game. As Pendzik states, "provided that these

activities are performed within a context that takes into consideration the meta-reality they create, and in as much as this level is used for therapeutic purposes, they would definitely constitute a dramatic reality in drama therapeutic terms,” (273).

Dramatic Projection, as put by Bailey, is “the ability to take an idea or emotion that is *within* the client and project it *outside* to be shown or acted out in the drama therapy session,” (6). Dramatic projection may take the form of storytelling, puppet or mask play, role play as described above, etc. (“Step Toward Empirical Evidence” 6) and typically takes place within the dramatic reality. Dramatic projection differs from the idea of projection in other traditional forms of therapy. In traditional forms of therapy, dramatic projection is a defensive behavior subconsciously carried out by the client to avoid difficult emotions. In contrast, dramatic projection is encouraged and intentional in the drama therapy session because it allows the drama therapist to get an idea of what the client is thinking and feeling (“A Step Toward Empirical Evidence” 6). The importance of dramatic projection is not only to give an idea of what the client is thinking and feeling, but to allow the client to better understand and interact with their emotions at a safe distance (Landy “Chapter 4” 108).

As stated above, drama therapy draws from Brecht’s concept of distancing. In drama therapy, “distance” refers to the degree to which a client employs aspects of their own lives within dramatic play (Bailey 6). Unlike Brecht’s idea that feeling should be removed from thought in regards to the dramatic experience, practitioners of drama therapy believe there should be a balance between the two (Landy “Chapter 4” 111). Distancing is one of the most important aspects of drama therapy that must be inspected and adjusted frequently by the drama therapist because it impacts the inner balance of the client’s emotions. This means not allowing the client to become over-distanced or under-distanced from their sense of self or identity. In drama

therapy, those who are over-distanced are considered to be “stuck” in one role rather than being able to move fluidly from one to another. Their relationship with themselves is incomplete, as their role repertoire is simply too small (Landy “Chapter 4” 112), or they are not able to access other roles within their role repertoire. This indicates that the person participating in the drama therapy session needs to “take a step back (metaphorically speaking) and see the experience in a wider context,” (Bailey 6). In contrast, one who is under-distanced identifies with so many roles that they have lost their sense of self. Because they move so fluidly from one to another, they lose an overarching sense of identity (Landy “Chapter 4” 112) and have trouble connecting with the emotions tied to their roles and everyday lives. In the case of overdistancing, metaphorical scenarios may need to transform into scenarios closer to the client’s personal experiences in order for them to connect emotionally and work through the obstacles they are facing (Bailey 6). If distance is continually monitored and adjusted to the client’s particular needs during a given session, the client should be able to experience the session in a balanced emotional state, which allows them to effectively and rationally work through their obstacles.

Steps in Creating a Successful Drama Therapy Session

There is no “typical” drama therapy session on which to derive one’s own. Sessions may vary not only in length but in style, as the experience is highly individualized to meet specific group needs and expectations. For this reason, techniques used by the drama therapist may change between groups or even between sessions, an example of which would be using puppetry during one session and scene work in another. While both approaches remain valid, the needs of the group during any particular session ultimately inform the drama therapist on which approach would be most appropriate and/or beneficial for client progression. As such, it is important that

the drama therapist not only have a wide repertoire of techniques from which to draw in order to adequately meet needs of the clients, but also that they themselves continue to learn and expand their knowledge base of modern approaches. By doing so, the drama therapist ensures that their clients receive the best possible care. Furthermore, the drama therapist must acknowledge the individuals composing the group as individuals. The realization that each person within a group session has their own respective learning style and comfort level in a therapeutic setting keeps the drama therapist from continuously using the same approach from one session to the next.

When preparing for a session, the successful drama therapist must actively take into account the theoretical framework from which they base their techniques (Landy “Chapter 5” 126). Discussed above, for the purposes of this paper three theories were highlighted, however many other frameworks exist from which drama therapists may base their approaches (Johnson and Emunah 14-15). If a drama therapist neglects to prepare their session within the bounds of a particular theoretical framework, the clients’ progression may be stunted, as the drama therapist has not provided any room for growth. By simply conducting sessions with no therapeutic goal or theory by which to achieve said goal in mind, it stands to reason that sessions become redundant, and the clients leave with little to no advancement with the dilemmas they brought into the session with which to begin.

While drama therapists may use different theoretical frameworks on which to base their sessions, opinions only slightly differ between practitioners on the steps taken to ensure a successful drama therapy session. Approaches may differ, however a general structure is utilized by many drama therapists that contains three to four exercises to be maneuvered between naturally with the group. These exercises, in order, are as follows: the “warm-up”, the “action phase”, and the “closure” (Landy “Chapter 5” 127; Bailey 3). Some drama therapists also utilize

a “check-in” that precedes the warm-up (Bailey 3). During the “check-in” step clients are asked about their overall mood and any limitations they may be facing that will affect the drama therapy session. For some, the check-in may be incorporated into the warm-up phase.

In drama therapy, the warm-up is both physical and mental (Landy “Chapter 5” 128; Bailey 3). Physical warm-up may take on copious forms, such as stretching, acting exercises, or any such technique that may release tension from the body. The goal for physical warm-up is to prepare the clients’ bodies for any physical exertion in which they may participate within the next action phase. The mental warm-up is different from the physical in both technique and aim. Mental warm-up exercises are focused on relaxing the mind and preparing the clients to respond creatively to situations they may encounter during the action phase (Landy “Chapter 5” 128). Just like the physical warm-up, the mental warm-up may be executed in a variety of ways, such as meditation, improvisation, or imagery exercises. Warm-ups themselves, much like the drama therapy session as a whole, are only conducive to a positive session if they are focused towards the needs of the clients. As discussed previously, the drama therapist must have a large repertoire of techniques and exercises that can build clients up in preparation for meeting those needs during a session. If not, as stated before, sessions may begin to seem redundant and offer no real progression towards better well-being. The warm-up also offers insight into what the session will revolve around, as the drama therapist should always incorporate movement between phases of the session to allow for natural progression and fluidity to occur.

After the warm-up comes the action phase, sometimes also referred to as the drama therapy activity or main activity (Landy “Chapter 5” 129-130; Bailey 3). This phase consists of whatever activity or mode of conducting the session the drama therapist decides. Once again, there are a multitude of ways to go about conducting a drama therapy session that are dependent

on the needs of the whole group as well as the needs of each individual within the group. All of these activities take place within the action phase. The action phase likely involves or builds off of a piece of the warm-up, so as to move the group fluidly between parts of the session. The drama therapist may take an active or passive position in this phase, with some drama therapists choosing to lead or guide the group through a session and some acting as an observer providing minimal intervention. Whatever the case, the drama therapist needs to keep in mind the concept of distance as discussed in the previous section. If the drama therapist does not keep a balanced distance between themselves and the action being carried out during the action phase, they may find themselves mentally and emotionally affected by the happenings in the session. What is also important to mention is that there is not necessarily a traditional goal to reach during the drama therapy session. What that means is that while the drama therapist should have an overarching goal in mind for the group when going through sessions, they should not push the clients to reach projected milestones while in the midst of a session. Once again, the stress lies on fluidity of the session and letting the clients explore their feelings and mindsets through whatever medium they have constructed (e.g. game, improvisational scene work, etc.). The action phase utilizes the concept of the dramatic reality, which was also discussed above. Through the usage of the dramatic reality in the action phase, clients have a safe space to explore their feelings and work through issues with little to no repercussions for mistakes made. When issues are explored more thoroughly or when the group is nearing the end of their allotted time, the drama therapist should smoothly transition into the final phase of the drama therapy session: closure.

In the third part of the drama therapy session, the drama therapist and clients come together to reflect on what has happened during the session, discuss any new insights they have gained about their lives, and prepare themselves for returning back to the everyday world. For

many drama therapists, this is considered the most important part of the session, as when done improperly, the clients will be overwhelmed with what they have done in session and will either not be ready or will not want to go back into their everyday world (Landy “Chapter 5” 132; Curtis 189; Pendzik 277). It is important to keep in mind that closure in drama therapy is not aimed at fixing problems for the clients (Landy “Chapter 5” 132). Rather, it is a means of preparing them for the future. It is the drama therapist’s job to leave the clients in a “balanced state” before setting them off into the everyday world as well (Curtis 189), to ensure that they succeed in managing their emotions related to the session until they return for the next one. Like the previous phases of a drama therapy session, there are many ways to go about closing the session. Closure activities could be as simple as a conversation where clients can freely discuss what they observed and felt, it could be an entirely new activity focused towards applying what the client has learned into their everyday lives, or it could be just about anything in between so long as the clients leave ready to face the world outside the drama therapy setting.

When a drama therapy session is conducted properly, it can be an extremely rewarding experience for all involved. Because there is no “typical” session one could copy and paste into their own group, every session is unique and meets the individual needs of a particular set of clients. Because the sessions are meant to be conducted in a fluid manner, they are able to be manipulated any way the drama therapist feels necessary to benefit the group. A successful drama therapy session is one in which the drama therapist keeps all of these aspects in mind while also keeping in mind the needs of each individual within the group. As the drama therapist and client group move through each stage or phase of a session, they prepare themselves to face the day with new perspectives about themselves or particular issues, and should leave hopeful for what is to come in the future.

SECTION II: ORIGINS, MECHANICS, AND CONTROVERSY OF TABLE-TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

Origins

Although a pop-cultural phenomenon today, role-playing games, especially table-top role-playing games, did not come into the mainstream populace in their current form. For the purposes of this paper, table-top role-playing games will be discussed in terms of Dungeons & Dragons, a popular game thought of and created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, and a plethora of other collaborators in the 1960s-1970s. All-in-all, the creation of Dungeons & Dragons itself has had a long and complicated history, originating all the way back in the 7th century with the creation of what is now known as the first “Wargame” and the predecessor to modern chess, “Chaturanga” (Brief History of Wargaming 1).

As defined by NATO, wargaming is “a simulation of military operations using specific rules, data, methods and procedures, and is focused on player decisions that affect the sequence of events,” (“NATO”). Wargaming, as stated above, has been around for centuries. If you have ever played chess, you have played one of the oldest wargames in their history. However, although wargames have been around for centuries, their rules and purpose has changed drastically over the years.

From 1770 to 1830, two types of wargames were developed: symmetrical and situational. While both versions utilized one-on-one gameplay, symmetrical wargames typically began with both players having the same “tools” (number of game pieces, starting positions, etc.). In situational wargames, the game board could be altered in many varieties and players may not start with the same “tools” (Schuurman 444). The purpose of these wargames was to train young

military soldiers in strategic and tactical ways of thinking. This idea to train soldiers with wargames would last for over a century, and their utilization would spread internationally.

While wargames may have been conceived as early as the 1700s, arguably the most notable creation was a wargame known as “Kriegspiel”. The game was created after Reisswitz Sr., a former Prussian military officer, was removed from his position in the military after being defeated by Napoleon in 1806. Reisswitz Sr. used the next few years to develop Kriegspiel. It was offered for the King’s approval in 1812. Kriegspiel would later be adapted in 1824 by Reisswitz’s son, Reisswitz Jr., who included the usage of dice to signify random events happening within the game (Schuurman 450). This decision was likely influenced by another wargame creator, Opitz, who “observed that warfare cannot be imitated without the inclusion of chance..” (Schuurman 450). This shift from the traditional style of no dice caused a stir in the industry at the time, as some believed that random factors should not affect the outcome of the games (Schuurman 453). Also occurring during this time period was the encouragement of recreational wargaming in Prussia. This encouragement was state-funded and supported in order to raise spirits of both military and civilians after recent devastating losses in battle (Schuurman 446).

Prussian wargaming as a form of military training was used frequently for the next several decades. It became a preferred method of teaching, as rather than learning through lectures or textbooks, young soldiers could visualize and act out tactical strategies and plans. These wargames were typically overseen by a military officer of higher standing who would judge the game and act as a referee of sorts (Gannage 6). In the 1870s after defeating France in the Franco-Prussian War, many western nations examined the defeat and connected it to Prussia’s utilization of wargaming as training for their soldiers. This led to multiple western nations adapting and creating their own versions of wargames to use for the same goal (Grannage 6).

With the spread of professional wargaming throughout the west naturally came the spread of recreational wargaming. The first credited recreational wargame was developed by the author of *War of the Worlds*, H.G. Wells (Gannage 7). His book *Little Wars*, released in 1913, gave amateur players of wargames tips on how to succeed in the game and suggested different additions to play such as miniature figures to “represent respective forces” (Darlington 1). It is important to note that Wells was a pacifist, yet still created what is now known as “the wargamer’s bible” (Darlington 1). In the appendix of his work, he argued that his work was “merely a game” (Brief History of Wargaming 3) and was not to be confused with the training wargame *Kriegspiel* which had been sweeping international favor in the professional setting. In fact, Wells argued that his game was better than *Kriegspiel* because it let go of simulation in favor of imagination (Brief History of Wargaming 3).

The development of recreational wargames, to be known later as “hobby games”, was heavily criticized by those using professional wargames and vice versa. While professional wargames were thought “dull” and too similar to simulations of political gains, hobby games were criticized for not being close enough to a military simulation (Brief History of Wargaming 3). Both identities of the game kept developing, and although they were still referred to with the same name, separation between professional and hobby wargaming expanded greatly.

Although *Little Wars* was popular among readers, hobby wargaming never became mainstream until a few decades later with the release of Charles Roberts’ *Tactics* in 1954. This was the first recreational “board” wargame and was popular enough among players that Roberts established his own business called The Avalon Hill Game Company in 1958. From there, Roberts became one of the most well known creators of the modern wargame community, with members going so far as to refer to him as “the ‘father’ of modern wargaming” even after he

transferred ownership of his business to Monarch in 1962. (“Charles S. Roberts”). It would not be long before new, fresh faces took over the gaming industry, however.

Born in 1938, Gary Gygax always had a love of strategy games. By the time he was twenty years old, he was involved in a plethora of wargames with countless friends, some of which were not even present as play-by-mail games also grew in popularity. Unlike many of his friends, however, Gygax was creative in his approach to wargaming. Rather than simply following the printed rules of the game or clarifying confusing aspects of certain wargames, Gygax made up his own ways to play that he felt were more suitable (Wired and Kushner). This creativity of his and a few friends led to the creation of the International Federation of Wargaming (IFW) in 1967 (Charlotte). The group shared an urge to play and discuss their gaming with others, and went so far as to introduce and host the first Lake Geneva Wargames Convention, also known as Gen Con, in 1968.

Around the same time of IFW’s creation, another creative mind was in the middle of a revelation about the mechanics and foundational features of wargaming. Dave Arneson, in the midst of experimenting with a friend’s new cooperative wargame *Braunstein*, realized the potential for games centered around collaboration rather than one-on-one battle (Gannage 7). Arneson would take these ideas and later use them to create bigger projects.

Gygax and Arneson converged for the first time at the second annual Gen Con in 1969 (Charlotte). Even with reported clashing personalities, Gygax and Arneson took to each other quickly, and exchanged ideas about different projects on which both were respectively working. After much conversation, the two decided to collaborate on a large-scale project together in the future (Wired and Kushner).

The next few years would be pivotal in the overall development of both Gygax's and Arneson's careers. In 1970, Gygax formed the "Castles and Crusades Society", a smaller section of IFW players focusing on medieval battles (Grannage 7). Arneson was later a member of this group as well. In 1971, Gygax yet again solidified himself as one of the biggest names in wargaming by releasing his game *Chainmail* with co-creator Jeff Perren. *Chainmail* was a medieval reimagining of *The Siege of Bodenburg*, which featured single-character miniatures and supplemental fantasy elements such as dragons and elves. 1971 was also Arneson's year, as he developed and published his new game *Blackmoor*, and brought it to that year's Gen Con to share with Gygax and others (Wired and Kushner). Gygax greatly enjoyed Arneson's game and wanted to combine it with his own. The two discussed and began collaborating together yet again, using refined rules from Gygax's *Chainmail* and setting from Arneson's *Blackmoor*. After years of work, Gygax brought their game, *Dungeons & Dragons*, to the now well established Avalon Hill Gaming Company to release to the public. Surprisingly to Gygax, Avalon Hill showed no interest in their product because the game had no winner or losers (Wired and Kushner). As a result, Gygax, along with long time friend Don Kaye, founded Tactical Studies Rules (TSR) in 1973 (Charlotte) in order to publish the game on their own.

Although it was difficult due to the costs associated, TSR released 1,000 copies of *Dungeons and Dragons: Rules for Fantastic Medieval Wargame Campaigns Playable with Paper and Pencil and Miniature Figures* to the public in January of 1974 (Charlotte). The game included three booklets called *Men & Magic*, *Monsters & Treasure*, and *Underworld & Wilderness Adventures*. Within eleven months, the game was out of stock and another 1,000 copies had to be printed. Six months later in 1975, the game creators found themselves in the same situation as before, and this time opted to print double the amount of copies. These 2,000

copies sold within the year (Charlotte). During this time, TSR dissolved and formed a new company: TSR Hobbies, Inc. More printings were released, including supplemental material that was not necessary to play the base game, but added new aspects to the game for player enjoyment.

Over the next two decades, Dungeons & Dragons exploded in popularity. Along with more supplements, the game actually split into two different versions. “Basic” Dungeons & Dragons for the beginning player and “Advanced” Dungeons & Dragons for those who had more experience and would be able to understand the more complicated rules (Kennedy). By 1980, the game was so well received internationally that a new company, TSR Hobbies UK, Ltd., was established in the United Kingdom (Charlotte). Countless achievements were made by Dungeons & Dragons throughout the 80s and late 90s, but in June of 1997 Wizards of the Coast, a gaming company known for creating *Magic: The Gathering*, bought out TSR, taking Dungeons & Dragons with it (“Wizards of the Coast”). Wizards of the Coast and its properties were subsequently bought out by popular gaming company Hasbro in 1999, but Wizards remained a subsidiary. This was not the end for Dungeons & Dragons, however. In fact, Wizards of the Coast continued to develop the game, and created several editions and new material, all culminating in the most recent 5th edition of Dungeons & Dragons in 2014 (Charlotte).

Mechanics

While there are several important editions to the game, in this paper, “Dungeons & Dragons” will refer to the 5th edition of the game as created by Wizards of the Coast. Dungeons & Dragons is not a simple ready-to-play board game. Much time and effort is spent by all players to create characters within a long-running story typically called a “campaign”. Campaigns in

Dungeons & Dragons can last anywhere from a couple of weeks to just around forty years, the length of the longest running campaign to date (WIRED). Though this may seem daunting for a beginning player, world building, character development, and collaboration are all what make the game unique to individual player groups.

To begin, Dungeons & Dragons does not typically involve a board. It is important to make the distinction between table-top role-playing games and other forms of role-playing such as video gaming and Live-Action-Role-Play (LARP). Dungeons & Dragons is a table-top role-playing game, sometimes also referred to as a narrative role-playing game, “[meaning] that game actions are taken primarily through verbal declaration,” (J. H. Kim 1). Sometimes maps can be used to denote players’ position in battles, and notes are sometimes used by players to keep track of their actions during sessions of the game.

There are several types of players in Dungeons & Dragons, including the player character (PC), Non-Player Character (NPC) and Dungeon Master or Game Master (DM or GM). Different players have different purposes in the game. The PCs are typical players that usually control one character and act as them for the duration of the session. NPCs are characters that are controlled by the DM that can be used for many purposes including but not limited to; giving PCs adventure leads, helping or traveling with PCs in the game, or working against PCs to add tension to the game. Typically PCs will make some sort of connection with NPCs that shapes how they interact with them if they see them in the future. Finally, there is the DM. The DM interprets the rules of the game and does quite a bit of work in controlling how the game runs. They are responsible for controlling the NPCs along with any foes that the PCs may encounter during their adventure. They also are in charge of running battles and keeping the PCs on track with the overarching story of the game. The DM is more likely to succeed if they take good,

detailed notes about the sessions they run and keep track of PCs' interactions with the NPCs in the game (*Dungeon Master's Guide*).

As mentioned above, the Dungeon Master's job includes keeping the player characters on track with the overarching storyline of the game. This overarching story is either created by the DM or can be found in what are called "modules", which detail a specific story complete with NPCs, different locations, foes, and final bosses. Depending on the campaign and the style of the DM, the overarching storyline could be a vast quest taking the players months or even years to complete, or it could be a series of small missions that come back to affect the PCs in the future. There is some debate on how closely a DM should keep their players on the overarching story of the game, however the truth is that the story is moldable to whatever the DM thinks is best for their players, and what the players communicate back to the DM.

This communication along with the constant action of the players is what makes Dungeons & Dragons a collaborative experience. While the DM may be responsible for running the game, the players must also stay actively engaged and make decisions that shape the way in which they interact with the world and the way in which the world interacts with them. It is important to point out that Dungeons & Dragons is a cooperative game as well. With very few exceptions, players are expected to use teamwork to tackle obstacles, decipher puzzles, and fight foes. In the game, players have a variety of "classes" to choose from that award different skills to the players (*Player's Handbook*). These skills could be anything from stealth to magic-using to healing to brute strength. By utilizing these different skills in diverse situations, PCs can help one another in times of need and establish relationships between themselves and the world around them.

Now that the nature of both characters and the narrative structure of Dungeons and Dragons have been established, it is important to detail how the game itself is played. As stated above, Dungeons & Dragons is played without a board or pieces and players navigate the game by narrating their actions to the DM. In many cases, the DM will ask the player to roll dice to see if they can accomplish said action easily or at all. There are seven types of dice used in a typical Dungeons & Dragons game. Listed in order there is a 20-sided die, a 12-sided die, two 10-sided dice (one used for percentile calculations), an 8-sided die, a 6-sided die, and a 4-sided die. These dice are used in different scenarios, but the most commonly used in 5th edition would have to be the 20-sided die. This die is used to determine skill checks, “to-hit” rolls, and can be used to determine other random encounters throughout the game. For the average player, a set of dice is the only expense they will have to play the game, although a dice roller can be just as acceptable and found on websites or phone apps for free, which makes the game accessible for players.

After a player has narrated their character’s actions to the DM and they have rolled to accomplish those actions, the DM will then narrate back the effects of those actions onto the player. These effects vary depending on the nature of the original action carried out by the player, and also on whether or not the player succeeded in their roll for the action. To “succeed” in a roll in 5th edition means to roll higher than or equal to the Difficulty Class (DC) set for the action. For example, if the DC to pick a lock in a game was 10 and a player rolled a 10, they may pick the lock, but perhaps with some difficulty and could potentially make extra noise that could be heard by nearby foes. If a player rolled a 15, however, they may pick the lock with ease and without a sound. While in both cases, the player succeeded in their roll for that skill, different effects were established based on how high above the DC the player rolled.

One of the most important aspects of Dungeons & Dragons is role-playing. In this context, role-playing will refer to “portraying the personality, mannerisms, mimicry, and voice of a character,” (Paul Camp). Role-playing is critical to the game of Dungeons & Dragons because it allows players to communicate their intended goals or actions with the Dungeon Master. There is no wrong or right way to role-play, and everyone develops their own style of role-play over time. Depending on one’s comfort level, role-playing may look different among players at the same table. While some players feel comfortable springing into a new persona right away, speaking and acting as their character at the table, some more reserved players prefer to narrate their character’s actions to the DM without necessarily taking on the role themselves.

Because the comfort level of players may differ when it comes to role-playing, it is especially important for the Dungeon Master to design an experience for their players that caters to everyone at the table. This may take the form of leading more reserved players during conversation in-game so their input is taken into account or letting the more comfortable players take control of conversations with NPCs so they have more time to play as their characters. Due to the nature of the game and the possibility of violence or topics of a disturbing nature, the Dungeon Master should also take into account the backgrounds and preferences of the players in their campaign. To do this, many DMs use what are called “safety tools”. Safety tools are used to make sure the gaming environment remains a safe space for all players involved in the game. A common safety tool is what is known as the “X-Card”. Before a session of the game starts, the DM will place a card with an “X” on it in the middle of the table. If a scenario in the game comes up and a player feels uncomfortable, they will touch the card and the DM will end the scenario immediately. The player who touched the card is not obligated to share their reasoning for using the X-Card, and the game moves on with all players feeling comfortable (Gailloreto).

Other than the X-Card, there are multitudes of safety tools that can be utilized throughout a campaign. A clear discussion of what safety tools are applicable to a group should take place before the campaign begins, and frequent check-ins during sessions are suggested as well.

After taking part of a campaign for any length of time, players typically grow an attachment of sorts to their character. Once the campaign has reached its climax and the final battle has concluded, a few options are available. For some groups, they will end the campaign and create a new set of characters and begin again, or even join new groups with whom they can play. For others, characters are reused in a new campaign setting. If this is the case, the PCs typically face more difficult enemies and obstacles in the new setting. Either case is a valid option, and relies on communication between all players to make the decision.

Dungeons & Dragons is an accessible, collaborative game that brings together a collection of unique people with individual beliefs and values. For this reason it can be a rewarding experience for all players involved if done safely and with an understanding that working together and communicating with each other will benefit the collective group. These particular aspects of Dungeons & Dragons are what make the game so appealing to many groups, and the adaptable nature of the game is suited for just about any preferences that a group may have. The game is perfect for one searching for a sense of community, as after all is said and done and the campaign has ended, players typically walk away with a group of friends and many great stories to tell.

Controversy

Reaching the first peak of its popularity in the late 1970s, Dungeons & Dragons seemed a gaming force with which to be reckoned. Its reckoning came in the 1980s with what is now

commonly referred to as the “Satanic Panic”. While the Satanic Panic did not completely revolve around Dungeons & Dragons, some of the most notable frights during this time period were centered around the game and what it was supposedly doing to children and adolescents. The controversy surrounding Dungeons & Dragons can be clearly seen in four key instances; the disappearance of Dallas Egbert, the publication of *Mazes and Monsters*, the death of Irving Pulling, and the publication of *Dark Dungeons*, which will all be discussed further in chronological order.

The first key instance of the tides shifting against Dungeons & Dragons was catalyzed by the disappearance of Dallas Egbert, a student at Michigan State University. In August of 1979, Egbert disappeared from his dorm room leaving a note saying to cremate his body if it was ever found (Gannage 13). The public was immediately intrigued by the story, as Egbert was known as a “brilliant” student and was only sixteen years old at the time of his disappearance. Egbert’s parents were, as one would expect, terrified of the possible outcomes for their son, and hired a private investigator to help find him. This man claimed to be a “cult-deprogrammer” and theorized that Egbert had become confused and lost the difference between reality and fantasy as a result of playing Dungeons & Dragons in the steam tunnels below the university (Grannage 14). Word spread quickly through news headlines that the missing boy was somehow entranced because of the game and panic spread due to the perception that Dungeons & Dragons could cause harm to children and their mental health. The boy was found because he himself called the private investigator hired by his parents. He was not well mentally, but still very much alive after having been missing for a full month (Hall). The private investigator came out with a statement later that his theory about Egbert and Dungeons & Dragons had no basis to begin with, but at that point it was too late. Many people were frightened by the headlines they had seen about

Egbert, and to top it all off, a year after he was found he unfortunately died by suicide, which many still attributed to his minor affiliation with the game (Hall).

The next instance of public examination of Dungeons & Dragons was initiated by the publication of the book *Mazes and Monsters* by Rona Jaffe in 1981. *Mazes and Monsters* was a book turned movie inspired by what Jaffe had read about the Dallas Egbert case. The book involved four young college students partaking in the table-top role-playing game “Mazes and Monsters”. Over the course of the book, one of the characters suggests that the group go and play in the “forbidden caverns near campus” and one of the other players loses track of reality and believes that they have taken on the role of their character in real life, both hinting at the connection between Jaffe’s story and the Egbert case (“Mazes and Monsters”). Jaffe’s story became popular enough to be adapted into a movie starring Tom Hanks in 1982, however the book and movie ended up doing more harm than good when it came to communal perception of Dungeons & Dragons. Once again the general public was faced with the idea that the game induced a false sense of reality on adolescents and damaged their overall mental health.

While both previous events focused on the “harmful impact” of Dungeons & Dragons on mental health, other problems with the game, such as its “devilish” and “satanic” depictions and inclinations were brought into question as well. These ideas were sparked by the death of Irving Pulling in 1982. Irving Pulling, a Dungeons & Dragons player, was discovered to have died by suicide by his mother Patricia Pulling, who supposedly found a note detailing a curse that had been put on her son’s character in the game (Cardwell 160). Patricia Pulling was understandably horrified by what had happened to her son, but blamed the whole event on Dungeons & Dragons, saying that it made her son end his own life because he must have thought that he was cursed in real life. She went on to create Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons (BADD) in 1983 and

wrote a book entitled, *The Devil's Web: Who is Stalking Your Children for Satan?* in 1989.

Throughout this time, Patricia Pulling teamed up with Dr. Thomas Radecki, the founder of the National Coalition of Television Violence (NCTV) (Wilson 15). The duo's aim was to censor material and force the makers of the game to put labels warning about hazardous conditions and potential for suicide ideation on the Dungeons & Dragons products. To do this they filed a petition with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), but were eventually denied because the courts found that there was no significant evidence linking Dungeons & Dragons to suicidal ideation and tendencies, especially not enough to warrant a label on all products (Cardwell 160). Still, Pulling and Radecki got their moment in the spotlight when they were called onto a segment of *60 Minutes* in 1985. They used their time to urge the public to stay away from the game, Pulling going so far as to say that her son thought of himself as his character in real life, and the curse applied to him, not just his character (Wilson 5).

The last key instance of controversy surrounding Dungeons & Dragons to be discussed in this paper is the publication and distribution of the anti-D&D Christian pamphlet "Dark Dungeons" written by Jack Chick in 1984. This pamphlet was essentially a short comic written by Chick depicting the story of two young girls playing Dungeons & Dragons. One of the girls' characters dies, so they kick her out of the game in real life. However, she cannot get over the loss of her character and unfortunately ends up taking her own life. The other young girl is recruited by her Dungeon Master to become a real "priestess and witch" (Jack T. Chick) and she uses her witchcraft to make her father buy her more Dungeons & Dragons products. However, once Debbie finds out that her friend died by suicide, she turns to the church and is exorcized by a preacher. She then burns all of her "occult material" that evening (Jack T. Chick). This pamphlet was particularly harmful to the game because it focused both on Dungeons & Dragons

as a starting point for a mental health and anti-Christian crisis. It was written and distributed by one of the most prolific Christian writers and publishers of the time (Gannage 19). This anti-D&D propaganda was spread not only throughout the church, however. Pamphlets were distributed face-to-face and even by mail to hundreds, if not thousands of people. Today, the pamphlet is technically out of print, however according to the publishers they are still orderable in groups of 10,000 or more (Jack T. Chick). There is no question that this pamphlet was harmful to public perception of Dungeons & Dragons, and makes it clear that the church was one of the biggest rivals of the game.

Regardless of the fact that there was no basis on which to back the ideas that Dungeons & Dragons was causing mental instability and Satanism, during the “Satanic Panic” period until the mid-1990s people feared to let their children play or even be around those who played the game (Grannage 24). In the mid- to late-1990s people finally began to realize that one cannot judge gaming material based on religious beliefs and that anecdotal evidence by grieving parents is not objective nor does it have scientific standing. Eventually, Dungeons & Dragons came back into mainstream media. Dungeons & Dragons has lasted for decades despite many different attacks by the church and the public, and in recent years has flourished due to attention brought on by video games and shows on television like *Stranger Things*, a popular show depicting a group of kids who play Dungeons & Dragons. Though its name has been smeared on occasion after occasion, Dungeons & Dragons has endured, and with seemingly constant additions and new supplemental material being created, it likely will for quite some time to come.

SECTION III: PARALLELS AND POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS

Parallels

Through the research process, this author has identified multiple parallels between drama therapy techniques and aspects of Dungeons & Dragons game-play. These include Role Play, Dramatic Reality, Dramatic Projection, and Distancing. These four concepts can all be present during a single session of drama therapy and are important due to their impacts on both the client and the drama therapeutic setting. Below this author describes how each concept can be applied to a session of Dungeons & Dragons.

To begin, the concept of role play in Dungeons & Dragons is reasonably straightforward. During the game, players take on the roles of their created or assigned characters. Ideally, when players create their characters (or when the drama therapist creates characters for the group) they do not let their own lives influence that creation. The drama therapist should encourage the players to actually model their character off of someone drastically different from themselves. This encourages them to “try-on” and understand new roles in a fluid manner. As the players progress through the game sessions, they will take on new roles in character. For example, perhaps “healer” also takes on the role of “protector”, or “warrior” also takes on the role of “friend” through the progression of play. By increasing the characters’ role repertoires, the clients view in-game scenarios through a variety of new perspectives they had not previously considered. In theory, upon conclusion of the in-game portion of the drama therapy session, the players would be able to freely discuss these newly discovered roles and perspectives in order to better understand the roles they enact in their everyday lives.

The construction of the in-game world comprises dramatic reality. While it may not be physical as is typical with most use of the dramatic reality, Dungeons & Dragons does not

necessarily have to be complete fantasy. Drama therapists can use real life scenarios in their sessions while simultaneously remaining in the play space, where anything is possible. Time can be subjective too, which means that characters can go back or forward in time to see how they could have acted differently in any given situation. They can also be in two places at once, perhaps watching their actions from outside of their characters' bodies after they have just completed something that the drama therapist thinks they should revisit. Players are also encouraged to act out any situation they see fit while having no real consequences for their actions. It is important that this remains the case and the drama therapist does not get too caught up in the game with rules because the client will feel as though they need to be more cautious with what they are testing out emotionally. Balance is important between the structure of the game and the drama therapist letting the players have a completely rule-free game, as if the drama therapist lets an individual player do whatever they want during the game session then they will be taking away from other players' experiences.

Dramatic projection is a natural occurrence within a role play setting. While this author has made clear that players should remain at a distanced state throughout the duration of the Dungeons & Dragons session, the drama therapist should still introduce issues that the clients deal with in their everyday lives in order to assist the clients in learning positive ways to cope with said issues. Because these issues are ones with which players can identify, as may be expected they will bring aspects of their own experience into the game. By playing the game they are projecting their ideas and emotions onto a fictional character of their own creation. In this sense, their character becomes somewhat of a mask that can be stripped away during the debriefing or "closure" phase of the session.

Finally, the aspect of distancing in drama therapy is one of the most applicable to Dungeons & Dragons. Because the game is constructed outside of traditional reality and players are taking on the roles of in-game characters, when the characters face difficult obstacles in the game, the players are a step removed from said obstacles. In other words, because the players are tackling obstacles in the game through the lens of a different character or role, their personal experiences outside of the game that may relate to what the characters are dealing with are not directly confronted. This allows the player to process difficult obstacles outside of their own experiences, where they can think more rationally about their circumstances. Thus, players are less likely to feel moments of emotional distress in the drama therapeutic setting than when they are directly confronted with their issues as is common in traditional therapies or psychodrama. Understanding how to address difficult situations in one's life in a distanced setting also allows the client to gain confidence to discuss their real life experiences within the group during the closure part of the drama therapy session.

Setup for a Session

Before beginning with ideas on how to effectively run Dungeons & Dragons within a drama therapy session, it is important to first take into consideration the baseline environmental conditions the drama therapist should establish to ensure all members of the group are maintaining a safe and healthy mindset throughout their time within the setting of the game. These conditions for play are likely to be most beneficial when initiated with members of the group present, so that they may understand the tools accessible to them and the boundaries of others. The first environmental condition for play would be the introduction and explanation of safety tools as discussed in Section II. As a brief restatement, safety tools may be utilized by any

member of the group at any time during the session. A member utilizing a safety tool is not required to share why they did, however because the session takes place within a therapeutic context, it may be of interest to the drama therapist to reach out to their client privately to discuss their limitations when it comes to whatever area it was where they utilized the safety tool. To minimize the chance of this happening and as utilizing a safety tool can be intimidating to some, this author suggests the drama therapist utilize the “check-in” step of a session (as discussed in Section I) prior to the warm-up stage in order to better grasp what issues their clients may not be ready to tackle during the day’s session.

After a check-in and a brief warm-up (which should focus on mental warm-up rather than physical) the game may begin (assuming that all players are familiar with the rules and how to play, although this should be addressed before safety tools and warm-up, etc.). Players should be encouraged to utilize note-taking during the game by the drama therapist in order to make sure they have something to speak about during the debriefing (or closure) phase of the drama therapy session. Simply jotting down feeling words is sufficient as long as the player remembers at what point in the session they were feeling that way.

Once the game has begun the drama therapist should summarize the last session of in-game play. If the group has just begun their meetings, then the drama therapist should introduce the setting and take time for each group member to share a little bit about their characters and their background, as well explain their character’s relationships to the other characters at the table. For the purposes of a drama therapy context, this author suggests the PCs already know each other rather than having to be introduced to one another during in-game play. This allows the group to begin the game with a feeling of support rather than skepticism about other characters they do not know. In addition, giving the clients time to brainstorm how their

characters know one another provides a chance to form connections with other members of the group before the game has begun.

Following the summarization of the prior session, the drama therapist may begin the game by establishing the current focus of the day's in-game exercise. To maintain distance between the players real lives and the in-game lives of their characters, the drama therapist should not explain the focus directly to the players, but let scenarios naturally and fluidly emerge during the session. Because table-top role playing games such as Dungeons & Dragons are improvisational and continuous, the drama therapist must stay flexible in their approach to delivering the scenarios or issues they would like to address within the session. Rigidly setting up the focus by abruptly placing players in a distressing, or hard to deal with, situation will not encourage them to explore different ways of handling said situations because they are not given time to develop their in-game character's perspectives. Exploring the settings within the game and interacting with other characters through role-play allows the players to evaluate how they believe their character would respond to difficult situations within the game. Continually setting players in these scenarios could also potentially cause emotional exhaustion or loss of interest in the game due to its redundancy. Drama therapy and table-top role playing games, for the purposes of this paper Dungeons & Dragons, are both meant to encourage creative engagement among clients or players respectively. Proposing the same structure of each session stifles the creativity that could be brought forth by players.

Setting up a successful session must be done carefully, so as to keep all engaged in play while feeling safe in their environment. When done correctly, the drama therapist will have much to bring to the table and players will begin the session feeling ready to open their creative mind and dive into whatever situation comes up in their session.

Potential Applications

As discussed above, drama therapy techniques and aspects of Dungeons & Dragons game play parallel one another in multiple ways. When used as part of a theoretical framework such as any of those discussed in Section I, this author suggests that Dungeons & Dragons may serve as a valid modality of drama therapy that encourages client progression not only in mental well-being, but in further education of social justice issues. After careful consideration of many topics, referring to readings and Dungeons & Dragons historical information, and rereading different modules of Dungeons & Dragons, this author has decided on three areas of concern which may be addressed using Dungeons & Dragons. These topics are as follows; Dealing with Loss, Discrimination and Its Effects, and Combating Social Anxiety. Below are three scenarios (one for each topic) the drama therapist may use to introduce said topics with proper distancing. These session ideas are not comprehensive. This author acknowledges that there are many ways in which to handle said topics in a Dungeons & Dragons session, and hopes that the following ideas inspire further discussion from which drama therapists may create meaningful and impactful sessions in the future.

Dealing with Loss

At some point in everyone's lives, they will experience loss. For the purposes of this paper, "loss" refers to the death of a loved one, whether that person be a family member, friend, or close peer. This issue is one to be dealt with in a delicate manner due to the fact that people experience a varied range of emotions when dealing with loss. These emotions can be difficult to understand and in many cases cause distress to the individual experiencing them. The drama therapist must be mindful of this before they start their game session, and remember to employ

the concept of distancing especially if some individuals within the group recently experienced the loss of someone in their lives.

In the following scenario, the assumption is to be made that the group has been traveling with an NPC for some time. For the purposes of this case, the NPC will have made deep connections with the characters in the game. Notice that this author states “characters” rather than “players”. This is an important distinction because in accordance with the concept of distancing, the drama therapist has the responsibility of limiting the emotional attachment of the player (or client) to the NPC.

Of course it would be inappropriate to end the life of a traveling companion for no apparent reason, so this scenario is one that the drama therapist needs to be ready to handle when an NPC death occurs. The death of the in-game character should trigger the actions of the drama therapist, not the other way around. In the following scenario, the abbreviation “DT” will be used to refer to the drama therapist when relaying their suggested dialogue.

DT: During your desperate battle, you notice a bandit out of the corner of your eye. Without any warning she raises her arm and fires a single bolt at your companion out of her hand crossbow. Your companion has no time to react as the projectile strikes them with deadly effect. After slaying the perpetrator, you quickly respond by rushing to your companion’s side. Unfortunately, it is too late and your companion succumbs to their wounds. How do you proceed?

Upon receiving the information that their traveling companion has died, the drama therapist should observe closely the immediate feelings of those within the game. For example, do they exhibit grief? Do they show signs of feeling guilty? Are they completely unfazed by the

passing of their traveling companion? The drama therapist must be aware of the actions of the characters as well. For example, do they attempt to resurrect their companion?, Do they commemorate their traveling companion by holding a funeral?, etc. The drama therapist should not judge the actions of the characters nor should they suggest any particular ways in which the characters should deal with the death of their traveling companion. Shortly after the characters discuss their feelings and demonstrate their actions, the drama therapist may find it beneficial to end the in-game portion of the session for that day. In the closure phase of the session, the drama therapist may then open the discussion of how the client group felt about the particular in-game session for that day. After discussing those feelings, if the drama therapist finds that the group can handle a more personal conversation, they may steer the conversation in the direction of personal loss, ideally making it easier for the clients to make discoveries about their feelings in regards to loss and how they handle said feelings in their everyday lives. Once the drama therapist feels satisfied that the group has shared as much as they want, they may then introduce productive techniques in dealing with loss.

This author acknowledges that the PCs may also fall in a battle scenario such as that stated above. The death of a player's in-game character may be a little more difficult to address because of the player's proximity to their character relative to that of an NPC, however it would still offer an opportunity for the drama therapist to encourage all players to discuss their immediate reactions and their character's feelings about what happened before ultimately having a discussion with the players outside of the in-game setting.

Discrimination and Its Effects

Dealing with discrimination is a highly sensitive issue that the drama therapist must plan for thoroughly so as to address the issue at hand without harming or causing emotional distress to players at the table. Under no circumstances should the drama therapist allow inter-character discrimination, as the group should be encouraged to work together rather than against one another. The following scenario suggests one possible way for the drama therapist to introduce the issue of discrimination and its effects to a group.

To give context to this particular scenario, perhaps the group has been traveling with an NPC since the beginning of their campaign. This NPC would be of a different, less accepted race in the game (this author advises against running this scenario using a PC as the subject of discrimination, so as not to single out said player). An important thing to note is that race in Dungeons and Dragons is not the same as race in the real world. In Dungeons and Dragons, race is fictionalized and players can choose a variety of humanoid characters such as dragons, elves, humans, etc. For the purposes of this scenario, the NPC will be classified as a half-orc (a less accepted race within Dungeons & Dragons). The abbreviation “DT” will be used to refer to the drama therapist when relaying their suggested dialogue.

DT: After traveling for quite some time, your group finally catches sight of a town further down the path. As you approach, you notice large, thick walls guarded by soldiers high atop the parapets. Assuming you are traders on your way into town, they acknowledge your presence with a nod and begin to open the gates. However, before you can all make your way through, the guards shout down to you all, “We do not allow orcs within the city walls. Leave them behind and you may enter.”. After pleading with the guards for some time, it is clear they are stuck in their ways. What do you do?

At this point, the drama therapist should observe how the group handles the above situation. For example, do the players choose to use violence to solve their problem? Do they attempt to persuade the guards to allow them all to enter the city? Do they choose to attempt to sneak into the city? Do they leave their friend behind to enter the city? All of these methods are valid in-game options that may give some insight into how the players deal with this type of issue in their everyday lives. The drama therapist should do their best not to intervene with their ideas of how to handle said situation. This allows the players to discuss the thought processes and the motivations of their characters. While the group is making their decision, the drama therapist should encourage the players to write down their thoughts for later discussion.

Upon completion of the in-game session, the drama therapist should lead a discussion on how the players reacted to the discrimination displayed by the guards of the city. Based on this discussion, if the drama therapist deems it appropriate, they would ideally lead the conversation past the players' actions in the game, and discuss how discrimination plays a part in their everyday lives. The aim of this discussion is to help the group understand how they may deal with or cope with discrimination outside of the in-game setting, and give new perspectives from those who have dealt with discrimination in the past. The drama therapist may also take this opportunity to walk through other ways of dealing with discriminatory actions. For example, if the group chose to use violence to deal with the guards the drama therapist may help the group explore other ways of dealing with issues such as this.

Combating Social Anxiety

The first two areas of concern chosen by this author are addressed with specific in-game scenarios that may assist the drama therapist in introducing said topics to the group in the therapeutic setting. Combating social anxiety using table-top role playing games is a bit more complex, because this area focuses on learning for individuals within the group rather than the entire group itself. However, coping with situations that give clients anxiety is a skill that is beneficial for the entire group to learn.

While there are certainly in-game scenarios that could be used to address the obstacle of social anxiety, and while the nature of the game itself may impact the players simply because it involves reliance on others within the group, this author suggests that the drama therapist use techniques outside of the game to reinforce a positive social climate within the group. This author suggests the following techniques for addressing social anxiety exhibited by members of the group. The abbreviation “DT” will be used to refer to the drama therapist when relaying their suggested dialogue.

The first scenario described by this author focuses on the introduction of role play. As previously mentioned, role play refers to the embodiment of roles other than ones with which a person is familiar. In other words, the role-player will take on the identity or characteristics of another person or symbolic figure. This scenario may take place before the role playing game even begins. As discussed in Section II, some players will opt to simply narrate the actions of their player rather than taking on the role of the character themselves. In this context, the role-player could be considered to be over-distancing themselves from the game, which the drama therapist should aim to avoid, as the drama therapist should try to keep the players at a balanced distance as much as possible during their time in the session. By doing so, the drama therapist emboldens the players to attempt different courses of action without having significant

physical or emotional ramifications for those actions. With encouragement from the drama therapist to commit to testing out their character's roles, ideally clients will find that acting out their character's roles in a group setting is safe. Further, when they end up exiting the constructed dramatic reality they will find that acting out their own roles in a group setting is safe as well. Although technically there are ramifications for their actions in the everyday world, clients will have had a chance to test out these situations within the dramatic reality, which gives them a "test run" of sorts for difficult social situations about which they may be anxious.

The second scenario proposed by this author is concerned with using the flexibility of the constructed dramatic reality to show the players new perspectives on their actions and the beliefs of others in social situations. To do this, the drama therapist may run a social interaction between the characters, perhaps a simple trip to a marketplace where they need to gather a few items by working together or bargaining with an innkeeper to receive better rates for their rooms. The drama therapist would introduce the situation and let it play out naturally, observing how the players interact with each other, who is taking the lead, and who may be struggling to have their voice heard or participate. Upon completion of the task, the drama therapist may confront them with the following:

DT: Good work! I noticed that each of you used different aspects of your individual characters' personalities to address this task. I wonder how this scenario would change if each of you stepped into a different character's role. Why don't we try this again a little differently.

At this point, all of the players should be instructed to switch their character sheets with someone else in the group. The drama therapist would first instruct the players to brainstorm in

their notes what the motivations of their new characters would be and then describe the same in-game situation once again, instructing the players to try out the scenario again now acting as the others' characters. Through this lens, those struggling with social anxiety are encouraged to gain a new perspective on others' motivations and see how others view them on the outside as well. With this new information, clients would hopefully begin to understand that others are not there to scare them or make them uncomfortable. Rather, other people offer the client new ideas and motivations that the client may not have thought of previously, overall making the thought of being around others a bit less scary and anxiety-inducing.

CONCLUSION

By examining the connections between drama therapy techniques and aspects of table-top role playing games, this thesis has shown that table-top role playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons may serve as a valid modality of drama therapy intervention. Using the key concepts and techniques of drama therapy: role play, dramatic reality, dramatic projection, and distancing, the drama therapist can create meaningful in-game scenarios for clients to make discoveries about their feelings and behaviors in their everyday lives. Due to the fact that drama therapy is still a developing field, research on the effectiveness of drama therapy is limited, let alone research on the effectiveness of table-top role playing games as a valid and useful mode of drama therapy. This author recommends that empirical research of some kind be attempted in regards to the subject of using table-top role playing games as a mode of drama therapy as well as drama therapy's effectiveness overall. Although a formal study was not conducted for this thesis, this author hopes to have offered valuable strategies for drama therapists interested in researching table-top role playing games for their therapeutic sessions. In addition, this author

hopes to have sparked overall interest in drama therapy and table-top role playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons.

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