

The Effects of Fantasy Role Games Can Play a Role in Manipulation and Control

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Abstract

“Fantasy Role Playing Games” explores two intents; (1) to delineate the hypothesis which was the correlation between violence and aggressive behavior to fantasy role playing games and (2) to understand the impact these games have on players’ lives. The hypothesis was tested on the game Dungeons and Dragons while also referencing more modern day games such as World of Warcraft. The scope also extends to the profile of participants initially marketed to be between ten to eighteen years old but also includes on average up to the age of twenty one. Also, possible symptoms of obsessive involvement which include loss of interest in other activities and speaking in riddles were mentioned. An in depth description of these non-physical, mind control games is also presented.

The method: dissemination of a questionnaire to one thousand people, built upon existing data from the Founder of Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons (B.A.D.D.), Pat Pulling. This provided useful information on the game and player characteristics. The questionnaire was structured to better understand the psychographics of players and their personal backgrounds. Fixed response categories were mostly utilized in the questions and the ultimate purpose was not revealed to the respondents.

The conclusion was two-fold, such that though the nature of the respondents were not generally violent, the basis of the fantasy games were built upon violent acts, this then made the players more inclined to accept violent behavior as a norm.

Introduction

In these days, many people’s lives have become fast-paced and stressful because sometimes life is just too much to take. The real world of bills, school, bullies and even the monotony of responsibility can make an individual want to escape the real world and enter a world of fantasy where they can set aside their troubles and become someone else. But is there such a place? For many this escapist sanctuary is fantasy role playing games where one can strap on armor, wield razor sharp double edged swords and battle menacing orcs. This fantasy world is oftentimes the remedy to a stressful life for many. However it isn’t just those who are stressed that engage in fantasy role playing games. We have seen that a higher quality of life has evolved in many segments of the population bringing a desire for more leisurely and recreational activity than ever before. For some individuals fantasy role playing games have taken on an even greater significance in both their personal and professional lives.

Entering this world of fantasy is seemingly harmless until players forget that it is just fantasy and then either totally invests their lives into the game or try to assimilate the game into real life. In many chronic cases the effects of these games have negatively influenced many lives both directly and indirectly. The research in the following pages was set forth with the hope of understanding the relationships involved in by those who play fantasy role playing games and how these games affect their lives.

The research was approached in two ways, first; a survey conducted on the well established game Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) and then further insight into the realm of fantasy gaming by looking at more modern days games such as World of Warcraft.

History of Dungeon and Dragons

Dungeons and Dragons is not just any fantasy role playing game, it was the first one ever made. It was started in 1974 by Gary Gygax and Dave Oliver, two Midwestern men who developed the game out of war gaming using table-top miniatures. This game, which grew into an instant success, was the ground-breaking idea which led the way to a new era of films, books and video games.

Though the first of its kind at that time, the original theme of Dungeons and Dragons was influenced by mythology and contemporary fantasy authors of the late 60's and 1970's. The existence of elves, dwarfs and orcs could easily be compared it to work done by J.R.R Tolken, which is why the owners of Tolken's work forced them to change the name from hobbit to Halfling. There were many other characteristics in the game which was said to be used simply to draw the interest of the books to the game.

Over the years many versions of the game were released, this can make it quite difficult to distinguish between the different editions. Here is a list and description of the different editions that have been released over the years: The original Dungeons and Dragons was a box set published in 1974 with revised rules published over the years. Then in 1977 TSR (Tactical Studies Rules) released Advanced Dungeons and Dragons (AD&D). AD&D was a more complex version of the game that was designed to create a more fun, fixed structure which was supposed to enhance the experience of the game to a level that was better organized than the original. It was greatly stressed by the creators that Advanced Dungeons & Dragons was not intended to be an expansion or a revised version of the original D & D.

Over the next fifteen years, three other versions of the game were released, with changes to the rules and characters being the most prominent changes made. The titles run as follows, 'Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition' (1989), 'Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition' (2000), and 'Dungeons & Dragons v.3.5' (2003). From as early as 1989, in the 2nd Edition, the game began changing its structure because of bad publicity it began getting. References to evil things such as demons, devils and other characters of the same genre were removed from the game.

How the Game is Played

Dungeons and Dragons started out as a seemingly harmless and intelligently creative game and turned into something more than that. We are not speaking about a board game, but retainer this game is played in the mind. Because it is a game of "fantasy," anything is possible and being a "role- playing" game means that a player acts as a character of that time. Everything is played or imagined in the mind. The player controls everything about his/her character.

To obtain a "character" a player must first roll three six-sided dice. He or she does this six times to obtain their six characteristics which are strength, intelligence, wisdom, constitution, dexterity, and charisma. The player also assigns a weight, height, race, etc to his or her character. After everything about the character has been arranged the player rolls the dice to achieve hit points. Hit points are the amount of stamina or damage the character can sustain before dying.

There is also a player called the "Dungeon Master," who is usually more familiar and experienced with t the game. The Dungeon Master plays a very important and powerful part of the game. This person plays God in the game and controls everything that happens within the game. The Dungeon Master may decide to destroy a character if he feels that someone has become uncontrollable and has interfered with the fun of the game.

The game is played with two or more people, with the average group consisting of five people. The Dungeon Master will describe in detail, what is around you. What actions are taking place, what sounds you may hear, what smells you may notice, etc. From this point, it is the player's option to do what he/she wants. The player must decide what the character will do, while the Dungeon Master will give the results of these actions.

Controversial Issues surrounding Dungeons and Dragons

To date there have been numerous reports of crimes nationwide tied to involvements in the game Dungeons and Dragons. In 1985 a Kansas youth murdered four people. In his statement to the press he said, "Have you ever heard of Dungeons and Dragons? That had a lot to do with it....I've got five friends that are locked up for the same thing (murder) right now because of the game). Also in 1985 a fourteen year old boy committed suicide because of the game. In his suicide note he said, "I want to go to the fantasy world of elves and dwarves instead of the world of reality with conflict."

Some of the more well known controversies about Dungeons and Dragons involve the incidence of the suicide of Irving Lee "Bink" Pulling, son of well known Patricia Pulling, a licensed private Investigator. Patricia's son shot himself in the chest with a handgun on 9th June, 1982, this reportedly happened after a curse was placed on him only hours after playing Dungeons and Dragons at his high school. Patricia Pulling filed a law suit against the principal of the high school Robert A. Bracey, III which was thrown out on 26 October 1983. She blames her son's death on the game saying that "a significant amount of youngsters are having difficulty with separating fantasy from reality?" "Or in other instances, their role playing has modified their behavior to the extent that they react in real life situations in the same fashion that they would react in a gaming situation." She also makes note of how the game encourages Satanism which she speaks about in her book.

What we also see as a problem is such prolonged involvement in a world of fantasy. This movement away from reality in to a fantasy may be a good stress reliever at times but it become dangerous when a person spend all their time enthralled in fantasy land. They then forget how to separate real life from their games.

Profile of Participants

Manufacturers estimate that there are four million plus active players of Dungeons and Dragons. Approximately 95% of the players are male with the majority being Caucasian. The very serious players fall within the age category of 12 – 20. The players are socioeconomically middle to upper middle class family members.

Usually the average player of Dungeons and Dragons is extremely intelligent, wit the ability to create the characters image in his/her mind. The game requires that the player have a very broad imagination, which is the main characteristic of most players. The player must be very adventurous when making decisions, no matter what the consequences will be. They're academically interested in history, computer science, with high math aptitude and/or interest in drama. Some of the players are possible science fiction "Buffs" and/or horror film lobbyist.

The physical build of the players are either fairly slightly build, clean cut or possibly overweight and sloppy appearance. They are generally not the muscular, sports-oriented type.

For the most part there's no involvement of drugs by the adolescent Dungeons and Dragons player, except for maybe a little marijuana. However, if they become heavily involved in Satanism this would probably increase the likelihood of more drug involvement. The adolescents who become heavily involved are generally "good kids" with no prior behavioral problems.

History of World of Warcraft

In more recent times, the new generation of fantasy role- playing- gamers were looking for a new challenge, something more modern. To answer that call came a company called Blizzard entertainment. In 1994 they released the first series of what was to turn into a series of major hits, the game was called Warcraft. It was a real time strategy game set in a place called Azeroth. This of course was a fictional world created by Blizzard where players performed their tasks and took part in battles.

In 1995 the second game was released, it was called Warcraft 2: Tides of Darkness. Although the first was a success, this is where the title made its mark as one of the best RPG's (role playing games) available. Not to be complacent, Blizzard Entertainment released the 3rd part of this series Warcraft 3: Reign of Chaos which by all accounts was remarkable in its own right.

World of Warcraft, the 4th and most recent version to be released, was launched in the U.S in November 2004. The game went on to become the fastest selling online game in history, selling 240,000 copies on its first day. In 2005, because of the rising success and global appeal, World of Warcraft was launched in Europe and then later in China with other countries following close afterwards.

Up to this day Blizzard Entertainment has been keeping the demand for the game soaring by upgrading and releasing expansion Cds which enhance the players experience and offers him new features that makes the game play an almost new adventure.

The first of these series of hit games, Warcraft: Orcs and Humans, is a real time strategy game. This where you, the player, is in control of whichever character you choose, and command that character to do whatever you see fit to survive. These games usually take some sort of strategy to play successfully, hence the name 'real time strategy game'.

The next two versions, Warcraft 2: Tides of Darkness and Warcraft 3: Reign of Chaos were the same type of game, just improving each time with graphics and user-game interface. With World of Warcraft, the 4th version in the Warcraft series, the ground-breaking feature of this game was that the player was able to go online and interface with players from all over the world, 24hrs a day. Players would go online to meet their group, or "clan" as they are called to go on daily missions and other duties the game made compulsory to live in the online world of Azeroth.

Cases of Death linked to World of Warcraft.

In December 2004 a Chinese boy named Zhang Xiaoyi committed suicide by jumping off a 24-story building in the city of Tianjun, China. The parents of the boy are suing the makers of World of Warcraft, Blizzard Entertainment, for the death of their son, saying he was re-enacting a scene from the game. There are two quests where the player has to jump off a mountain, but they safely land either by a parachute, or by being teleported away before hitting the ground.

In a second case, again in China, a young girl nicknamed "Snowly" died after playing World of Warcraft online for several days continuously during a national holiday. It is reported that her online friends said "Snowly was a very diligent member and a key official of their community who was always connected to the internet." An online funeral was held for Snowly one week after her death. Gamers assembled their characters together, and held a ceremony for her in Azeroth, the world within the World of Warcraft.

A Deeper look at Fantasy Role Playing Games and the players

Remember all of this is imagined in the mind. Players can actually see this, what they look like and the damage obtained. In many cases it is possible for the subconscious mind to overpower the conscious mind. The "fantasy game" becomes a "reality game." Players begin to live it for real, sometimes even after the game has ended. It has been recorded that sometimes players take the game too far and commit suicide or murder. "The secular objective to Dungeons and Dragons is that players become so wrapped up in its seductive fantasies that they lose contact with reality. The game causes young men to kill themselves and others," asserts Dr. Thomas Radecki, psychiatrist and chairman of National Coalition on Television Violence. "The kids start living in their fantasy..... and they can't find their way out of the dungeon."

What we are seeing is that there is an overall link between fantasy role playing games and the following; violence, aggression, cults, Satanism and other related obsessive behaviors. As mentioned before there have been numerous media reported cases of Dungeons and Dragons and World of War Craft negatively affecting people. The extent to which this occurs varies from person to person. This negative impact can be seen in the smaller manifestations such as losing sleep and students missing classes to more unfortunate and tragic occurrences of suicide, murder, Satanism, schizophrenia and other psychological disorders.

These fantasy role playing games (FRPGS') most often affect the younger people because of at that stage in life they are more impressionable and affected by outside sources. Now even though these games are not, in a strange way they are because the players supplement their existence with these (FRPG'S.) Teenagers often have a great deal of stress to cope with, they often feel like they don't fit in, they get bullied and when this become too much to bear they go to the escapist world of fantasy role playing games. They get lost in this world and it soon becomes an obsession, the more they play it, the more they become addicted. Players spend hours and hours engaging in these games, forgetting their responsibilities, missing meals and losing sleep.

It is interesting to look at the correlation between these gamers religion and the fact that fantasy role playing games encourages Satanism. Most often players are of a specified religion, we believe that part of the reason why Satanism still evolves out of the game involvement is because of the confines and constraints of the various denominations.

Players may feel like their religion is a burden and has too many rules that don't fit with their lives, whereas the realm of fantasy games doesn't have these confines, they are allowed to be who they are. The issue with Satanism is that oftentimes these because of the stress level in their personal lives, whether being bullied at school or have overbearing bosses, they feel like life is unfair and that their God has to be cruel to allow these things to happen to them. Therefore Satanism has more of an appeal.

Participant in the survey on Dungeons and Dragons played mostly with their friends; though this is true players also play with outsiders as well or in conjunction. What eventually happens is that these outsiders become friends because of the similar passion for the games. Here again we see the need to belong and be accepted.

Resulting aggression and violent behavior is twofold in fantasy role playing games. First there are the actual acts of aggression and violence in these games where players have to plan attacks and be destructive. Even though it is a game this repetitive tendency towards violence causes an eventual adoption of a violent attitude. The violence and this constancy of aggressive behavior assimilates into the player mind both conscious and subconscious and this can then later manifest into real life violent behavior.

Possible Symptoms of Obsessive Involvement In FRPG'S

1. Loss of interest I other activities.
2. Excessive time playing role-playing games.
3. Drawings depicting cartoon type figures.
4. Recurring nightmares.
5. Difficulty sleeping, insomnia.
6. Writing poetry with themes of death and dying.
7. Speaking in Riddles.
8. Individual exhibiting a belief in his/her ability to possess psychic powers.
9. Students will experience a drop in grades.
10. Collecting of artifacts.
11. Suicidal or talking about death.
12. Hearing voices.
13. Deterioration of personal hygiene.
14. References to multiple Gods.

Psychological profile of Fantasy Role Playing Gamers.

Players who are addicted to RPG's are shown have similar personality traits.

1. Most of them seem to be shy to the extent of being considered introvert.
2. They don't have a lot of self confidence.
3. Not willing to participate in activities
4. They tend to cling to friendships.
5. Most of their friends are online.
6. They neglect family and important events in order to play video games.
7. They have large phone or credit card bills for online games.

Traits of a Game Addict

There is a defined line that a gamer crosses when what was once his hobby has grown into an addiction.

1. They continuously compare real life events with what happened in the video game.
2. They continuously compare real life events with what happened in the video game.
3. Sometimes snacks are even sacrificed for the game.
4. Subjects lose touch with their friends who aren't online.
5. They lie about playing time.
6. They stay in their room for hours at a time without eating, showering and anything else that would take them away from the game for too long.
7. They miss important events so they can play video games.

Objective

The objective of was to define our hypothesis, which was how fantasy-role-playing games relate to violence and aggression. We will conduct this test on our hypothesis on the game Dungeons and Dragons.

Methodology

The study began with examination of secondary data from writing by Patricia Pulling, the founder of B.A.D.D. (Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons). This group [provided very useful information about the basic game and the characteristics of the players.

One thousand (1000) people, who were consistent players of Dungeons and Dragons, were asked to respond to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed so as to disguise their ultimate purpose, of which the respondents were not aware. The questions were designed to gain greater knowledge of the psychological make-up of the players and their personal backgrounds. Some of the questions were designed toward a structured situation where the respondents were asked questions within fixed response categories which were based on past experiences that evolved out of the game.

Results

Violence and aggression play a large role in fantasy-role-playing games. A large percentage of the players questioned said that they would be capable of killing someone after playing the game. These people said that they would consider killing for their God. 38% of the respondents said that the game had entered into their personal lives. It was found that 92% of the people that played the game did so under the influence of some type of drug. Some of the drugs used were alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine. The majority of these interviewed were Christians with the next highest group being of Jewish faith. The average age of the respondents was between the ages of 20 and 21. People tended to play the game with their friends and not with outsiders. These games were played on the average of once a week for four hours.

Recommendations

The people that were surveyed are not outwardly violent in nature, but the games Dungeons and Dragons and World of War Craft are based on violent and aggressive acts. It stands to reason that these players will be affected by the “free for all” violent action displayed in the games. People, in general are capable of being violent, although our society basically teaches toward socially accepted behavior. People who are aggressive in nature and somewhat violent, are being subdued by the common societies conception of behavior. Today’s youth have to deal with an increasing amount of social stress and peer pressures. These factors can greatly influence the behavior of both adolescents and adults. Fantasy role playing games magnifies the pent-up aggression of the players and gives them a method of release in an “acceptable” form. The players do not realize that violence and aggression are not acceptable in society, or that rebellious nature causes amplification of such emotions.

The following recommendations are taken from Patricia Pulling. In her concern about the negative effects (in particular Satanism) of Dungeons and Dragons, she mention thing that we can do to prevent this from happening to those who play Dungeons and Dragons. Though this list was specifically intended for D&D players, we believe that it can be adapted for other fantasy role playing games.

WHAT can we do?

1. Document all information relating to occult involvement (even if it does not appear relevant at the time.)
2. Keep an open mind
3. Stay objective
4. Never assume that an individual is acting along [sic] until all other information surrounding the case and individual has been fully investigated.
5. If individual is involved in “satanic activity,” he/she will deny a great deal to protect other members of the group as well as the “satanic philosophy.”
6. Have a team approach, work with a therapist, a clergymen and other helping professionals.
7. Educate the community so that potential tragedies might be avoided.

Appendix

The following is a list of the who, what, when, where, and how of teen Satanism as given by Patricia Pulling.

WHO

1. Adolescents from all walks of life.
 2. Many from middle to upper middle class families
 3. Intelligent
- Over or Under Achievers
Creative/Curious
Some are Rebellious
Some have low self esteem and are loners
Some children have been abused (physically or sexually)

WHEN does this occur?

It appears the ages most vulnerable are 11-17

WHERE?

1. Public places such as rock concerts, game clubs in communities or at school.
2. Private parties at a friend's home.

HOW?

1. Through Black Heavy Metal Music
2. Through fantasy role playing games like Dungeons & Dragons (R)
3. Obsession with movies, videos, which have occult themes
4. Collecting and reading/researching occult books
5. Involvement with "Satanic Cults", [sic] through recruitment
6. Some are born into families who practice [sic] "satanic cult rituals"

TWO BASIC PRINCIPLES APPLY HERE "Law of Attraction" and the "Law of Invitation"

WHAT can be expected?

1. Obsession with occult entertainment
2. Minor to major behavior disorders
3. Committing crimes and status offenses such as:
 - A. Running away
 - B. Grave robbing (such as bones)
 - C. Breaking and entering to steal religious artifacts or sometimes stealing small items to prove loyalty to the group
 - D. Defacing public or private property using "Satanic Graffiti [sic]" or related Graffiti [sic]
 - E. Threatening to kill (self or others, self mutilation is very common)
 - F. Aggression directed towards family, teachers and authority figures
 - G. Contempt for organized religion
 - H. Supremist attitudes
 - I. Kidnapping or assistance in kidnapping
 - J. Murder
 - K. Suicide pacts among members of the group

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