TITLE: Report-talk and the Alienation of Women in Dungeons & Dragons

AUTHOR: Alexandra Chace

FACULTY SPONSOR: Sarah Kegley, Applied Linguistics and English as a Second Language

Abstract: Dungeons & Dragons is a popular tabletop roleplaying game, a genre in which players engage in logical, shared, structured fantasy predicated on certain fictional assumptions (Fine, 2002, p. 12). Dungeons & Dragons is a collaborative and highly social activity, therefore requiring significant social investment and engagement by each member of the community (Adams, 2013, p. 77). Adams (2013) furthermore concluded that the game served as a “vehicle for players to consistently make an effort to socialize in structured ways” (p. 77). However, these communities continue to be associated with social ineptitude and further stigmatized by association with psychiatric disorders (Lis, Chiniara, Biskin & Montoro, 2015, p. 381-382).

I was introduced to a Dungeons & Dragons community by a mutual friend. After an initial observation of several hours, I conducted preliminary interviews with both leaders (Dungeon Masters), in succession. Afterwards, I conducted a follow-up interview with just one of the leaders. This paper demonstrates the relationship between shared fantasy and collaborative consensus building, but pays particular attention to the unique jargon and conversational style of the community. I construct several taxonomies through thematic analysis, exploring the strategies gamers use to construct shared fantasy, and a shared repertoire based on cross-media references, politics, and the history of the game. This paper furthermore analyzes the role of report-talk, a typically masculine conversational style that uses the exchange of information as a means by which to compete for and communicate status (Tannen 1991). I explore how these values and styles serve to alienate women and impede female participation.

Keywords: gender, gaming, Dungeons & Dragons, alienation, women, report-talk