# The Damsel and the Courtesan: Quantifying Consent in Early *Dungeons & Dragons*

**Abstract:** This essay is a history of *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974-) fans in the 1970s *Alarums & Excursions* fanzine community. It offers a historical analysis centered around the way these fans performed hegemonic masculinity through the rules they constructed for two character classes: the damsel and the courtesan. An analysis of these two classes shows a community eager to use game rule algorithms as a way to center sexuality in their play. We argue that these communities provide evidence of how the *Dungeons & Dragons* ruleset provided a boiler-plate for game rules that support the norms of hegemonic masculinity and have influenced the culture of toxic masculinity in game algorithms today.

**Keywords:** Dungeons & Dragons, Alarums & Excursions, cultural history, representation, algorithms, masculinity, trpgs, tabletop, role-playing games

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The story that has been told about the development of role-playing games often starts with the publication of *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1974 and cascades forward from there. Despite the fact that it is well documented how *Dungeons & Dragons* and the role-playing game genre in fact emerged from a complex network of hobby designers and players (Peterson 2012), the game's popularity is frequently attributed to the efforts of *D&D*'s putative authors, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. Gygax, specifically, is fetishized by the media. For example, game news publications like *Polygon* frequently document the latest developments of the Gygax estate, the "geek news" web site *boingboing* has highlighted those portions of Jon Peterson's history of *D&D* that deal most specifically with Gygax (Doctorow 2014), and *Wired* ran a feature-length article dedicated to "The Life and Legacy of Gary Gygax" (Kushner 2008).

If we relied upon this media discourse to understand the success of *Dungeons & Dragons*, we would be inclined to attribute the popularity of role-playing games to the singular efforts of Gygax and his close collaborators. In other words, we would know role-playing games to be the historical invention of a handful of determined and visionary white men. This "great man" style of game history has been critiqued by game scholar Laine Nooney. She writes, "Our sense that videogame history is 'all about the boys' is the consequence of a certain mode of historical writing, preservation, memory, and temporally specific affective attachments, all of which produce the way we tell the history of videogames" (Nooney 2013).[1] But the

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1    The media archaeological approach that Nooney takes here has been criticized for its reductive tendencies by Jaakko Suominen (2016), who categorizes it as a "pathology." (555) Because the approach taken in this essay might be also considered a work of media archeology, it is worth noting here that the authors would differ with this characterization. This essay has more in common with Foucault's later work on genealogy than his earlier work on archeology. Specifically, this work details the continual reemergence of hegemonic masculinity as a subjectivity in the players of *Dungeons & Dragons* and by extension other games which have borrowed its mechanics. We track the descent of this subjectivity over time through the mechanics of consent, specifically.

problems of this narrative go far deeper—they extend also to a historical mode of storytelling that completely obscures all voices, objects, and events that sit at the margins of society.

What if a history of role-playing games began with the communities that played the games as opposed to the designers who published them? There are hints of such historiography in existing work. For example, Jon Peterson's (2012) influential *Playing at the World* casts game design as a bottom-up community driven practice, despite attempts to read it as specifically valorizing Gygax and Arneson. Nick Mizer's (2014) cultural anthropological explorations of role-playing game play center the engagement of players at the table as opposed to foregrounding the experience of game designers. And, of course, Gary Fine's (1981) classic *Shared Fantasy* offers a close sociological reading of role-playing game players in the late 1970s; he interviews Gygax but doesn't regard his claims as necessarily authoritative.

Despite these important strides forward in understanding the community-driven design practices of the early *Dungeons & Dragons* scene, there is little historical work that attempts to address the cultural dynamics of early role-playing game communities. This article makes a contribution to that underexplored avenue of investigation. Importantly, this essay deviates from a good deal of orthodoxy in role-playing game studies scholarship. Although we discuss the way that consent is quantified and implemented as a rule in *Dungeons & Dragons*, we make no claims about the experiential nature of consent as a mechanic in role-playing games. The important work on how game mechanics do and do not evoke sexuality has been discussed in great detail by others such as Eliot Wieslander (2004), Ashley Brown and Jaakko Stenros (2018). This essay takes an agnostic stance toward the phenomenology of embodiment, sexuality, and play and focuses instead on the circulation of algorithmic representations of hegemonic masculinity through *Dungeons & Dragons*. In this sense, we draw on Stuart Hall's (1980) sentiment that these representations might be accepted, negotiated, or even dismissed by their audiences. (136-8) For better or worse, the brand of *Dungeons & Dragons* has become almost synonymous with role-playing games in popular culture. We are interested in how some rules capture the essence of hegemonic masculinity, and the discursive impact of these rules.[2]

Like Michael Saler's (2012) historical work on how science-fiction fans replicate and reinforce ideology, or the historical readings of role-playing games that Aaron Trammell (2014, 2016, 2018) has advanced, this essay works within the field of role-playing game studies to consider a critical, cultural, and feminist reading of an early role-playing game community. Like Saler and Trammell, this essay uses fanzines as a primary source to consider how these communities negotiated hegemonic masculinity. Documentation that explores the reception of the homebrew Damsel and Courtesan classes from *Alarums & Excursions* [*A&E*],[3] the largest fanzine community devoted to *Dungeons & Dragons*, helps us to understand how fans understood their own identities and learned to better understand the identities of others as part of a process of slow and negotiated cultural change.

This essay argues that the culture of hegemonic masculinity within the *Alarums & Excursions* community—even as they criticized specific individuals as "male chauvinist pigs"—

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2    Steven Dashiell (2017) has written about how the practice of rules lawyering in role-playing games furthers systems of hegemonic masculinity at the game table. Nick LaLone (2019) and Matt Barton (2008) have written about the influence of *Dungeons & Dragons* on computer role-playing games. This essay connects these two arguments reads *Dungeons & Dragons* as an influential popular medium that models hegemonic masculinity with its systems.

3    *A&E* citations will be included in the footnotes of this essay whenever used. They will follow the following format: Author Name, *A&E* issue #, Month and Year, Page Number(s).

effectively *validated* and *normalized* efforts to engineer and implement quantitative mechanics of negotiating consent in role-playing games. This validation, we suggest, has affected how consent in games is treated today, and deserves re-examination.

## 2. ALARUMS & EXCURSIONS AND METHODS

In 1975 Lee and Barry Gold played *Dungeons & Dragons* (1973) for the first time. Later that year, Lee would send sixty copies of her fanzine *A&E* to friends around the country, beginning the print run of the longest running *Dungeons & Dragons* fanzine in history—one that continues even today. The articles printed in *A&E* would prove to be highly influential among role-players, and several of its contributors would become noted game designers in subsequent years (Mason 2004), showing how the creative energy of fans could be incorporated into a feedback loop with designers, thus co-constituting the game industry.

We consulted a private archive of *A&E* fanzines to conduct the historical research in this essay.[4]

*A&E* was born out of the Los Angeles science fiction fan scene in 1975. Inspired by her experience playing *Dungeons & Dragons*, community buzz about the game in other fanzines, and the publishing traditions of science fiction fans, Lee decided to found a fanzine dedicated to role-playing games. *A&E*, Lee wrote in the introduction of its first issue, is a cross between an amateur publishing association and a fanzine.

The division between fanzine and amateur publishing association is undoubtedly complex. Fanzines, as Gold intends the term, were usually single-author collections that are distributed by mail to a relatively small intimate network of subscribers. An amateur publishing association, in contrast, is a network of fan authors and readers who would collect and collate submissions from each other for distribution to each other. *A&E* is a hybrid of the two models, because although its contents were crowd-sourced through its affiliate, Gold was particularly diligent in editing its contents, and managing its economic solvency herself (Figure 1).

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2.   The fanzine will cost
     a.   Contributors - postage only.
     b.   Non-contributors -- postage plus
          1)   nothing if you had a contribution of at least four pages
               in last issue.
          2)   35¢ if you had some contribution in last issue
          3)   75¢ otherwise.
     c.   The zine is not available for trade except to other D&D
          publications.
     d.   Due to variability of cost, we are not offering subscriptions
          but you may send a check for a lump sum and we will deduct
          costs until the money is almost all used up and then notify you.
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**Figure 1:** An example of the administrative work behind an issue of *A&E*.[5]

Lee Gold's hybrid model was a space of radical conversation amongst its constituents. Readers of *A&E* were also writers for *A&E*.[6] One popular way of understanding fans, and fan

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4    As of this writing, issues of *A&E* are only available for purchase from Lee Gold directly.

5    Lee Gold, *A&E* 1, July 1975, 1.

6    Although *Dungeons & Dragons* creator Gary Gygax often chose to publish his thoughts through Dragon, the magazine published by TSR hobbies, he would occasionally publish within *A&E* as well. Those publishing in *A&E* were so keenly invested in the understanding and development of *Dungeons*

culture broadly, is advanced by Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture* (2005). Jenkins argues that fans operate through grassroots channels, often challenging the logic of media producers in productive ways (Jenkins, 2005). The plurality of hats and roles taken on by fans in the publication were so notably diverse that it makes little sense to juxtapose the fans publishing *A&E* against those like Gygax who had graduated from the world of small-distribution fan publishing (in *Diplomacy* fanzines) to the world of medium-distribution business management.

Recognizing the intimate relationship between fans and industry helps to better contextualize the work of Lee Gold and her cohort at *A&E* against the master narrative of Gary Gygax as game design genius. This lens reveals how gamers and designers are often one and the same. It helps to show how the political views of designers and fans in this space were the result of long-standing discussions and hard fought social battles. Gamers in 1975 and 1976 were actively engaged with problems of feminism and intersectionality that are still being negotiated within the gaming community today. *A&E* moves us away from a history of heroes and villains toward a history of slow and negotiated collective change.

Following Foucault, we employ genealogical methods that offer a way to recuperate a lost perspective of the past, to descend through the accidents, errors, and falsehoods which have yielded that which we value today. This sort of historical genealogy can be deployed to reveal invisible structures of power. According to Foucault, the method of genealogy "seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations" (Foucault 1984, 81).

The "hazardous play of dominations" is a key focus of our method. We work from moments of contention and conflict in the historical record in a deliberate effort to reveal invisible systems of subjection. Thus, our work offers a glimpse into how consent and masculinity were negotiated by this early player community, so that we can better reflect on how these issues are negotiated by players today.[7]

## 3. CASE STUDY: THE DAMSEL AND THE COURTESAN

One such moment of contention was the discussion surrounding the articles about "the Damsel" and "the Courtesan" presented in *A&E*. The Damsel and the Courtesan were two optional character classes that players could choose to play or that Dungeon Masters could incorporate as NPCs with which to confront players.

As fan creations appearing in a fan publication, the Damsel and the Courtesan were not official or authorized additions to the game. Rather, they were articulations of their authors' particular visions of *Dungeons & Dragons*, offered in order to share those visions with fellow players with some communicative intent—even if only provocation. Certainly, the charges of "male chauvinism" that were levied against the authors did not seem to faze them much. Thus we mean to suggest that the Damsel and the Courtesan are not so much indicative of the overarching culture of *D&D* fans as they are indicative of how fans at the time reacted to and managed provocatively sexist material. By analyzing the snippets of discourse which follow

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*& Dragons* that they would publish exposés on the game's mechanics, offer modifications to help adapt the game to their play-style, and even share their own home-brew games to for interested players. To consider the fans publishing in *A&E* as occupying a single category such as "consumer," "publisher," "author," or "designer," would be inaccurate.

7    Our work here complicates Eliot Wieslander's (2004) argument that sex mechanics are underdeveloped in role-playing games by drawing attention to how early rules introduced sexuality to role-playing games within the context of hegemonic masculinity.

our analysis of the mechanics, we present a grassroots-level account of how masculinity and consent were negotiated by the designers and players in the *A&E* fan community. The rules for the Courtesan appeared in the 1975 November-December issue of *A&E*.[8]

The author of "The Courtesan" was Dick Eney (1932-2006). Lee Gold described Eney to us as being known for his argumentative nature and his track record for publishing provocative articles in the community.

In describing a rationale for the Courtesan character class, Eney writes:

> I remember Lee Gold commenting once that she wouldn't allow Characters to loan each other items free unless they were lovers. That's a slight hint that there is an aspect of the Dungeon which has escaped regularization so far: our Characters' sex lives, or rather the various means we have to simulate these. Naturally, since everything in the Dungeon has a probability table to go with it, we ought to have something for this too: and it might be a Good Thing to allow them to set up special relations with other Characters in a regular fashion. Thus three new draft rules for your consideration, covering the three essential aspects of making Love as well as War; or, *Dungeons and Debauchery!*[9]

Eney thus advocates for a game-mechanical sensibility around love instead of war and notes that sex is actually a somewhat repressed aspect of role-playing games where the focus is often set on ways to combat other characters.

But Eney's seemingly sex-positive intentions stand in contrast with his employment of a number of explicitly sexist tropes that present women less as partners in a consensually sexual relationship, and more as objects to be interacted with in the game. It is consistently implied that courtesans are intended as NPCs to be patronized by male player-characters.

For example, the mock advertisement for the business called "Marilyn's Magic Massage" (figure 2) presents an idealized and hyper-sexualized female body who may be one of 15 woman available round-the-clock to offer services such as "bikini baths" in "complete privacy." The tag line, "Maybe there's a branch in *your* dungeon," is addressed to the reader both as Dungeon Master (here is a resource for play) and as player-character (here is a titillating service of which your character can partake).

The article then describes a number of game mechanics that only make this relationship more clear. As courtesans would gain experience they would earn titles (figure 3) that only serve to highlight their explicit connection to sexuality: "Jillflirt," "Painted Hussy," "Pleasure Wench, "Temptress," and "Joy-Bringer" are among the various titles given to the courtesan.[10] "Advancement" signaled that the courtesan had become a more practiced and higher class prostitute, as level titles such as "Fair Cyprian" and "Hetaera" signify.

Finally, rules are also included for how the courtesans should misrepresent herself to others when seeking to earn money, "When negotiating Courtesans will misrepresent themselves as being 3-6 levels (D4 roll +2) above their actual level."[11] This rule tells the Dungeon Master how courtesans operate: They lie about their social status in order to earn more money from the john.

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8   Dick Eney, *A&E* 6, November-December 1975, 25-32.
9   Dick Eney, *A&E* 6, November-December 1975, 25.
10  Dick Eney, **A&E** 6, November-December 1975, 25.
11  Dick Eney, *A&E* 6, November-December 1975, 25.

**Figure 2:** A comedic banner framing Eney's Courtesan class.

Eney's rules for bringing sexuality into the game, in other words, were less about raising sexuality as a point of conversation, or play, and were instead a set of algorithms for transforming the female body into a robot of sorts. Sex and sexuality are not described here as facets of the role-playing experience. Far from it, they are instead new ways in which an idealized male player can be said to exert his gaze on women in the game world. Eney's Courtesan is more of an interactive sex toy than she is a woman with agency.

The algorithmic sexuality of Eney's Courtesan is different than the scopophilia that Michelle Nephew (2006) critiques role-playing games through. Nephew draws on film theory to explain that role-playing games commonly foreground the sexuality of women because they are made in a large part for men to consume. While we agree with this reading of role-playing games generally, we read Eney's robotic Courtesan as a simulation. She is more than the object of the male gaze: she is the embodiment of it.



| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | Jillflirt | 20,000 | Temptress |
| 1200 | Flower Girl | 40,000 | Fair Cyprian |
| 2400 | Painted Hussy | 60,000 | Joy-Bringer |
| 4800 | Pleasure Wench | 90,000 | Hetaera |
| 9600 | Songstress | 125,000 | Adventuress |

**Figure 3:** Advancement titles for progressing in Eney's Courtesan Class.

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### 3.1 "Making Out": Maneuver Rules

This is made clear by Eney's rules for how players might interact with the courtesan. This is a fascinating turn, as Eney draws attention to the ability of games to represent sexuality by developing game mechanics that perform this work, while at the same time reducing sexual interaction to that of a set of numbers. Despite the ways Eney's algorithm works to flatten sexual encounters to one of numbers and not compassion, it is visionary insofar as it saw sexuality as a sphere of human interaction as equally compelling as combat.

The rules that Eney proposed for "making out" work as follows: Players choose a target that they aim to make out with. They then calculate the difference in their Charisma statistics (for instance a character with a Charisma score of 11 who tries to make out with a character with a Charisma score of 13 has a two point difference) and use this difference as a positive or negative modifier for their saving throw. In the case of the example in parentheses, if the character with a lower charisma was targeted by the other character, they would add two to their saving throw stat making it that much harder to resist the advance on the roll of a twenty-sided dice.

When making out with other players, this logic becomes especially invasive. Eney writes, "Player characters, having free will, may choose to roll twice; if so, they resist seduction by a saving throw on either roll." Free will—the difference between human-ness and object-ness—is captured here as an extra die roll. Although we ought to give Eney some credit for considering that a second player may desire more agency when deciding to opt out of a sexual encounter, it is concerning that this sense of agency is reduced to a second roll of the dice, and not something more fitting like a conversation.

The idea that consent can be captured by the roll of the dice implies that in the algorithmic space developed by Eney, consent was simply a number to be draped upon one of the hollow puppet character bodies included in the game. The implication that consent could ever be represented as a die roll underscores the degree to which objectification permeates most early role-playing games. For example, one Dungeon Master, the editor of a well-regarded codification of *D&D* rules and a practicing psychologist, described making a female player roll to see if her female character was still a virgin despite the importuning of another player and could thus successfully interact with a unicorn.[1]

The mechanics and rules of role-playing games, to the degree that they utilize dice and resolve encounters, transform all bodies—player and otherwise—into objects within the game

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1    John Eric Holmes, 1980. "Confessions of a Dungeon Master." *Psychology Today.*

world. The crucial question that we must ask of the algorithms in games is where has the player been given agency over their own body, and where has the game's machinic logic denied the player agency.

The way that agency is allocated is more clearly accessible in the algorithm provided in Eney's article related to the intensity of a make-out session (figure 5). Here, a six-sided dice is used to determine how a courtesan's interaction in a sexual encounter will escalate. Implied here is that the courtesan's body is not her own given that the difference between a conversation and going "all the way" revolves only around a roll of the dice.    This bizarre rule codes intimacy as the result of mathematical negotiation and not affection, dialogue, or bodily capacity. The benefits to "morale" and "confidence" as well as other positive effects accrue, of course, to the PC john, becoming greater as he achieves more intimate sexual congress.

| Table A.    Encounter Intensity -- Effect | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Intensity | Morale | Confidence | Benefit (rule 2) |
| 1. Conversation | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| 2. Flirtation | +1 on 4-6 on D6 | 0 | 7 |
| 3. Light snogging | +1 on 2-6 | D6 roll -3* | 9 |
| 4. Heavy petting** | +1 on 1-3, +2 on 4-6 | D6 roll -2* | 11 |
| 5. All the Way** | + half a D6 | D6 roll -1* | 13 |
| 6. Mutual Satisfaction** | + D4 roll | D6 roll | 15 |
| Constitution drops as morale increases, point for point. | | | |
| * Never less than 0. | | | |
| ** Requires privacy.    Return to quarters or pay for a room. | | | |

**Figure 5:** Eney's rules for "making out" in *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Some context for these rules must be considered. Just as Eney and Konklin both identified as men, many (but not all) of the folks playing with and experimenting with these rules were also men. In this study we counted the number of women publishing in *Alarums & Excursions* over the course of the first year and found that the number consistently dropped with the publication of each issue. Although the reduction of sexual relations to that of an encounter with an object is concerning, to say the least, there is also a question of whether these rules may have worked as a boundary object through which homoerotic desire was negotiated. Because reducing sexuality to an algorithm where one has no control over their body is such an extreme form of dissociation and objectification, one is left to wonder how these rules were used in practice. Consider a scenario where a male Dungeon Master uses these rules as a way to negotiate a sexual encounter between a female NPC in the game and another male player. Reducing sexuality here to mathematics allows both presumably heteronormative players an alibi for what could otherwise be seen as an exercise in gender bending and playing with sexuality.

Reducing sexual encounters to a set of numbers allows players to play with sexuality in a way that avoids the dangers of intimate encounters of the body. At the same time, it furthers a discourse of objectification that pervades the logic of role-playing games. At the time, in the seventies, it was a somewhat radical departure from the rules which constrained

wargames to consider the mechanics that lay beneath human intimacy and not human warfare. Similarly, these rules must be read as the byproduct of a time where sex, culturally, was the focus of a conversation around "free love." And some feminists, like Andrea Dworkin (most famously), were entertaining a conversation that questioned the social value of men and even pornography. Feminism at the time was sensationalized by the media, based on this work, as being anti-men and anti-sex, and thus somewhat stigmatized culturally.

### 3.2 The Damsel

The fan community did not embrace the Courtesan with open arms. One fan, the notorious Samuel Konkin III, agreed with the premise that *Dungeons & Dragons* ought to provide players with an opportunity to role-play love as well as war. To this end, Konkin also devised a character class—The Damsel. [2] The Damsel was the typical Disney princess. Konkin critiqued Eney's Courtesan for not being, well…courtly enough, and developed the damsel as a lawful counterweight to the roguish courtesan. Unfortunately, Konkin's Damsel fell prey to many of the same sexist and reductionist pitfalls that Eney's Courtesan was subject to.

Samuel Konkin III (1947-2004) was a Saskatchewan transplant living in Los Angeles with strong libertarian and anarchist beliefs. Where Dick Eney's writing was often grounded in militaristic and conservative philosophy, Konkin was ultimately very idealistic and left leaning. Konkin edited and published several political zines like *New Libertarian Notes*, *New Libertarian Weekly*, and *New Libertarian* magazine in addition to his contributions to *A&E*. Konkin's work as a fan was often explicitly political, such as a drawing he published in
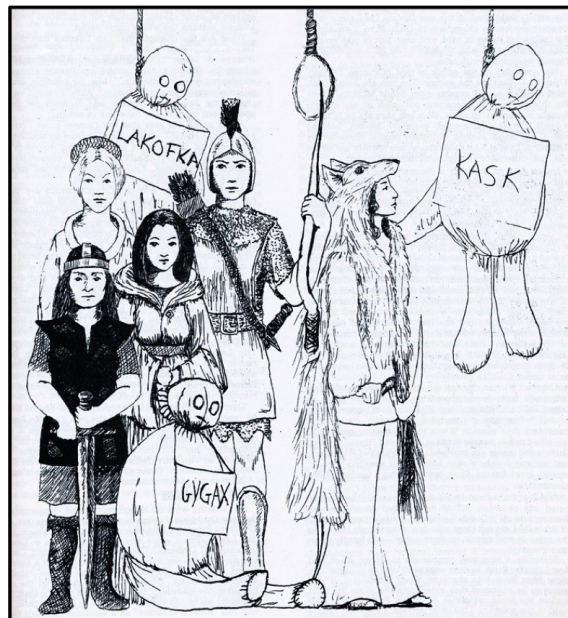


**Figure 4:** An illustration by S.C. McIntosh published as the cover of Samuel Konkin III's Clear Ether within *A&E* 19. It depicts feminist pushback toward the *Dragon* editorial team.

*A&E* featuring several women in the fan community hanging effigies of Gary Gygax, Len Lakofka, and Tim Kask (figure 4).[3] Konkin often incorporated themes of social justice into his

2    Samuel Konkin III, *A&E* 7, January 1976, 39-42.
3    Samuel Konkin III, *A&E* 19, February 1977, 63.

writing.

The Damsel was a counterpoint to the courtesan. It was a class for women who embraced stereotypes of purity as opposed to stereotypes of sexuality and duplicitousness. Despite Konkin's well-meaning objective in creating the damsel, she was nonetheless an exaggerated stereotype of femininity. In playtesting the character, Konkin ran a character named "Cheerlieder," who was unable to find a suitable mate in the party and who held the lantern while the other characters brandished sword and steel.

For us, the most problematic characteristic of the damsel was her sense of honor. Not only did Konkin's damsel play into stereotypes, the rules implied that she was again supposed to reduce her own identity to one of sexuality:

> Damsels choose death before dishonor (in classic sense), yielding their chastity only to males married by Cleric. The damsel then becomes a "consort" and may raise children. Failure to maintain [honor] (including submission to rape without suicide!) drops the damsel to a courtesan. Clerics may *absolve* (neutral) courtesans to damsel status—but only for sincere repentance.[4]

Konkin not only equates purity with virtue and chastity in this passage, but he also suggests that suicide is an appropriate response to rape. By proclaiming that a victim of rape is expected to "repent," he is playing into a rhetoric of victim blaming. He also insinuates that the damsel's main (and perhaps only) use is a sexual one. Like the courtesan, the female body, in the case of the damsel, is again reduced to that of a sexual object.

Konkin would struggle in his writing to articulate the female body's relationship to sexuality. He would consider the possibility of including male damsels. He writes, "Male Damsels? If some group wishes to go 'gay,' and remain lawful, it could be conceivable that a gay damsel could make fourth level, and higher toward Gay Vampires, etc. However straights will be utterly repelled and immune. Lesbian damsels are undetectable unless they deliberately turn-off males."[5] Not only does sexuality persist as the defining characteristic of the damsel, but Konkin limits the degree to which gay men can pass as a damsel and suggests that we understand gay women by observing the degree to which they reject the advances of men. Through his writing Konkin reifies the idea that women are sexual objects, and even suggests that gayness is problematic in a women only if she resists a man's advances (thus challenging the essentialization of her as an object).

In the context of this period Konkin may have had good intentions. His clumsy acceptance of gayness as an acceptable sexuality shows that unlike many others in the community who were explicitly homophobic, Konkin held progressive values and wanted to include a greater diversity of people in the hobby. That said, Konkin's depiction of the Damsel was just as, if not more, dehumanizing that Eney's Courtesan. Konkin's writing reduces women to a sexual stereotype of purity while Eney's reduces women to that of a stereotype of vice. Both flatten the representation of women in *Dungeons & Dragons* and regulate character and intimacy with a set of mathematical equations. As noted above, these equations would then continue to circulate within tabletop and computer role-playing games over time. But while the algorithms that governed intimacy in games crystalized in these misogynist frameworks, the player community was able to negotiate and manage any feelings that were hurt through conversation.

4    Samuel Konkin III, *A&E* 7, January 1976, 40.
5    Samuel Konkin III, *A&E* 7, January 1976, 41.

## 4. DISCURSIVE ACTION WITH MALE CHAUVINIST PIGS

Our aim in this essay was to excavate moments of historical conflict in an effort to reveal the invisible forms of subjection at play in the community. Through our research, the fan conversations around these character classes revealed to us that while the community was discussing new rules for *Dungeons & Dragons* on a surface level, they were truly interrogating their deep-seated beliefs, stereotypes, and biases on a deeper level. For this reason, we end this essay by returning to these conflicted conversations as a way to better observe how the community was itself negotiating the currents of hegemonic masculinity flowing through it.

The community was deeply involved with conversation about the damsel and the courtesan. Many questioned the degree to which these characters offered an accurate representation of sexuality. In the excerpts analyzed below, it is clear that many considered Konkin and Eney to be MCPs, or Male-Chauvinist Pigs (the 1970s equivalent of the MRAs or Men's Rights Activists), for the ways that they so brazenly engaged with female sexuality in their writing. Even conservative Dick Eney was concerned with how Konkin connected suicide and rape through a game mechanic. Despite these differences, the community continued to publish, but over time many of the women who contributed to *A&E* dropped out; we have provided in this essay a good deal of circumstantial evidence to support the argument that this is a consequence of the objectification detailed in this essay.

The fans who discussed the politics of inclusion with Samuel Konkin and Dick Eney, were surprisingly civil. As they negotiate the politics of bodies, algorithms (for them, rules) and sexuality, they offer polite but firm pushback on the points that are most concerning. It is imperative on us, visitors to an earlier time from the future, not to judge the Damsel and the Courtesan by our present moral standards as much as to recognize ourselves in this earlier moment of gamer culture where things were somehow more naïve. Writing now in a post #metoo world, we must revisit the past remembering that the politics of popular culture were, at that time, understated. To this end, we must recontextualize this essay with player accounts drawn from players themselves living through their moment.

We end this history with some snippets from the conversations players had with one another about the Damsel and the Courtesan in *Alarums and Excursions*. As Gold, Eney, Pierson, and Sherna critique the problematic tropes of these classes, they also find space to critique the absurd. They wonder how long it takes to lace armor in the bedroom, tease the MCPs in their lives for their abject ignorance, and even find time to acknowledge and accept the queer folks in their community and lives. It is important to remember that the folks participating in these discussions saw these as private conversations occurring within the private boundaries of community. These conversations were never expected to be observed by researchers from the future; they must be read as naïve friends communicating and negotiating radically different understandings of gender, sexuality, and consent at a time when misogyny stood as the dominant cultural paradigm.

*Lee Gold wrote to Samuel Konkin:*

Like your Damsel character, but I sort of object to the MCPism of it all, particularly the fact that a damsel loses honor after rape unless she commits suicide. Seems to me that isn't medieval but Victorian mores, hence highly anachronistic. //By the way, removing plate armor in medieval days usually took a good hour and even leather armor about

ten minutes minimum.[6]

*Dick Eney wrote to Samuel Konkin:*

Damsel unable to use her wiles unless she is dressed revealingly is Bad Stuff, but might be justified by the pleas that some grossly evident attraction is needed in a rushed situation (That would indicate that you've never seen how good a pretty girl can look in armor or other protective gear, but let it pass.) But then you go on to have these attractions also destroyed when she does something that shows high intelligence, and to that I can only say, *oink oink oink! ***

** Mighod, mandatory suicide after being raped? One seldom thinks of the medieval church as more liberal than faaans, but bedamned if it isn't in this case.[7]

*Dan Pierson wrote to Lee Gold:*

Were-armor is a good idea. I'll have to include some. I agree that Courtesans need not be female; I also accept homosexual lovers.[8]

*Sherna wrote to Sam Konkin:*

Your Damsels are a <u>really</u> fine satire, although I might choke a bit at anyone actually trying to play one. (On the other hand, I <u>do</u> have a[nother] Unique [character class], called a male chauvinist pig. . .)[9]

Reading these candid messages today, we are struck by the ways that the community engages Samuel Konkin's Damsel with an earnest dialogue about how it was problematic. The community takes great care to participate in restorative social justice, trying to explain to Konkin what he got wrong and what made his character class profoundly unfun for a diverse group of players. What's more, in the snippet above there is even an inspiring note of acceptance for LBGTQ characters. Even though some of the mechanics the *Alarums and Excursions* community developed were toxic to their community, it's important that we recognize that these players were in explicit dialogue with these challenging cultural tropes. Although they struggled to make sense out of cultural practices of consent, they also worked together to raise their consciousness about negative representations of women in games.

Nonetheless, the presence of a kind of hegemonic masculinity is a key feature of the *A&E* discussions about the Damsel and the Courtesan.

Research on hegemonic masculinity grows out of sociological theory that identifies patterns of action amongst men. Historically, work on hegemonic masculinity predates the now more contemporary (and meme-able!) work on toxic masculinity. Sociologists R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt explain that hegemonic masculinity is less about <u>forceful subordination</u>, but instead small and invisible patterns that add up to societal

6    Lee Gold, *A&E* 8, February 1976, 9.
7    Dick Eney, *A&E* 8, February 1976, 42.
8    Dan Pierson, *A&E* 8, February 1976, 51.
9    Sherna, *A&E* 10, April 1976, 54.

force, "Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendency achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion." (832) Importantly, the concept did not imply that all men perform hegemonic masculinity, nor did it imply that all masculinities were hegemonic. Hegemonic masculinity is a structural problem; it is reinforced by people of all genders at all times in our society.

Although the impact of hegemonic masculinity remains relevant to scholarship on identity today, writing on digital culture—and games more specifically—tends to utilize the related concept of toxic masculinity more frequently. To some extent, this is due to the alignment of games and computational technologies with geek culture, and the recent work on toxic geek masculinity best defined by media scholars Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett (2017). For Salter and Blodgett, the identity policing which occurs across lines of gender in geek communities is what comprises the performance of geek masculinity (11-12). Geek femininity exists only in absence to the hegemonic presence of masculinity in geek communities, and the microaggressions through which geek culture is gatekept are precisely what make geek masculinity toxic.

The culture of masculinity in games relates to a set of deeper questions about what is taken for granted about player and avatar. We argue that the assumption in these contexts is not just that games are designed for a stereotypical male player, but that they are constructed in a way that aims to provide this player with a masculine power fantasy of unlimited agency. In the open worlds of role-playing games specifically, the masculine player is presented with a veritable buffet of bodies that they are encouraged to interact with. As this essay will show, rules were engineered to manage these interactions (and their consequences) through dice rolls, charts, and tables. Thus, we argue that quantified systems of consent are an example of a system that reinforces hegemonic masculinity.

The unique idiosyncrasies of hegemonic masculinity within the context of *Dungeons & Dragons* is precisely what make the *A&E* community so fascinating to study. The *A&E* group offered homebrew rules for *Dungeons & Dragons* and offered a different approach to gameplay than that advocated for by Gary Gygax in *Dragon*. The above research on *A&E* shows a community working through the messy and conflicted space of ideology as it discusses and debates how consent and gender should be approached in character design.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This essay focused on homebrew classes in the *A&E* community as a way to consider the lived cultural politics of role-playing game fans in the 1970s. This focus offers a way to observe a historical parallel to the toxic masculinity which persists within gamer communities today. The Damsel and the Courtesan offer examples of how the early players of *Dungeons & Dragons* took for granted the ways they performed and reinforced hegemonic masculinity. This led not only to the stereotypical architecture of these character classes, but it also reinforced a more insidious belief in the ways the value of quantification for game design. Despite the concerns we may harbor from our critical reading of *A&E*, we ultimately feel that the *A&E* community merits further study as a space of radical discourse. One of the great strengths of role-playing has been its ability to bring people from radically different walks of life together around a game table, and the class design of The Damsel and The Courtesan shows them doing just this. The case study described above, however problematic, is also a real story of real friends working difficult cultural problems that still arise today.

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