A Qualitative Exploration of the Perceived Social Benefits of Playing Tabletop Role-playing Games

Abstract: This study explored the lived experiences of young adults who play tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) to gain deeper insights into the perceived social impact of tabletop role-playing games. Six young adults (3 men, 3 women) between the ages of 19 and 24 (M = 21.2, SD = 2.6) were recruited from role-playing communities within Nova Scotia, Canada. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used to assess perceived social competence and semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect detailed qualitative data about lived experiences with role-playing games. Responses on the SDQ indicated that participants had typical strengths and difficulties with respect to social competence at the time of the current study. The qualitative description indicated the emergence of four main themes related to role-playing games from the interviews: Content Focus, Social Focus, Creativity Focus, and Identity Focus. The themes present in the interviews are consistent with findings from previous case study research, suggesting that role-playing games may have the potential to improve perceived social competence, and further elucidate the lived experiences of people who play role-playing games in terms of why they engage with tabletop role-playing games.

Keywords: Role-playing games, social competence, qualitative, interviews, young adults, tabletop

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1. INTRODUCTION

Based on theoretical reviews of operational definitions, social competence can be generally defined as "effectiveness in social interaction" (Rose-Krasnor 1997) and is typically operationally defined in terms of rate of interaction, specific behaviours, and/or adequacy of performance (e.g., social performance in an experimental condition) (Cavell 1990). Research-informed models of social competence suggest that it is developed through social role-play in early childhood (Bowman and Lieberoth 2018; Howes 1997; Howes and Matheson 1992), fostering skills that allow children to develop relationships and empathy-related skills (Rose-Krasnor 1997), and that social role-play can improve the development of social competence in dynamic environments and increase prosocial behaviour (Howes and Matheson 1992). Models also suggest that well-developed social competence is associated with improved social navigation and resiliency (Rose-Krasnor 1997) and experimental studies suggest that poorly developed social competence is associated with psychological distress, behavioural concerns (Rockhill, Stoep, McCauley, and Katon 2009; Stepp, Pardini, Loeber, and Morris 2011), and diagnoses of psychological disorders (Cole, Martin, Powers, and Truglio 1996; Settipani and Kendall 2013).

Tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs), sometimes called pen and paper role-playing games, are games typically played in-person in which players take on the role of characters who cooperate in a fictional world (White, Arjoranta, Hitchens, Peterson, Torner, and Walton 2018; Zagal and Deterding 2018). TRPGs have common components and characteristics, including an adventure that the players pursue (e.g., stealing gold from a dragon, planning and executing a heist, saving a king or queen), a setting in which the adventure takes place (e.g., Middle-Earth, Earth in the future), and a system of rules to govern gameplay (e.g., Dungeons & Dragons, Call of Cthulhu, Shadowrun) (White, Arjoranta, Hitchens, Peterson,

Torner, and Walton 2018). TRPGs also typically contain dungeons, which are labyrinthian locations within the setting of an adventure (e.g., a wizard's castle, a corporate HQ, a villain's underground lair), and wilderness locations, which are outdoor areas outside towns, cities, or dungeons that can contain challenges for players (White, Arjoranta, Hitchens, Peterson, Torner, and Walton 2018). Most TRPGs focus on high fantasy, with the first and most popular TRPG being Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) (Gygax and Arneson 1974). Recently, the popular press has reported anecdotal instances of TRPGs as successful social skills interventions as well as an increase in the use of TRPGs for social difficulties (Bartlette 2014; Burke 2017; D'Anastasio 2017).

Researchers have noted that TRPGs may be psychologically beneficial due to their similarity to therapeutic role-playing techniques that are often used as part of social skills interventions (Blackmon 1994; Bowman and Lieberoth 2018; Meriläinen 2012; Rosselet and Stauffer 2013; Zayas and Lewis 1986). Specifically, three studies investigated the use of TRPGs as part of an intervention. Zayas and Lewis (1986) investigated the use of a TRPG designed to help develop interactional and teamwork skills with young boys. Findings indicated that the group was able to overcome social skills difficulties after playing the game. In a case study, Blackmon (1994) reported on the interaction between a client's course of treatment for social difficulties and his involvement in an TRPG, noting significant improvement in his daily social functioning. Finally, Rosselet and Stauffer (2013) reported on an intervention in which clinicians used an TRPG as a group intervention for gifted boys who struggled socially. After completing the intervention, the boys demonstrated significant improvements in their social skills.

In addition to the previously discussed intervention studies, three studies have indicated the positive impact of engaging with TRPGs. Based on a survey of role-players, Meriläinen (2012) concluded that the opportunities that TRPGs provide could be used for personal and social skills development. Similarly, Daniau (2016) and Scott et al. (2016) found that TRPGs could facilitate the refinement of skills related to creativity, collaboration, and identity exploration.

Based on the encouraging results of previous case studies, small group interventions, surveys, and anecdotal reports, the goal of the current study is to assess whether TRPGs have an influence on players' lived experiences of social competence. The current study expands on the previous literature through the use of semi-structured interviews, obtaining rich information about the lived experiences of TRPG players. Results were expected to reflect the observations made in previous studies, such that a positive association would be found between involvement in TRPGs and perceived benefits to social competence. It was expected that if TRPGs were perceived as being beneficial to the development of social competence, themes derived from interview responses would reflect this. It was also expected that the results of the questionnaire would support the themes present in the interviews by suggesting that participants did not currently experience significant social challenges.

2. METHOD

2.1 Sample

Participants were recruited from the community of TRPG players in Nova Scotia, Canada using recruitment posters placed in gaming stores and shared on online communities for people who play TRPGs. Recruitment posters instructed potential participants to contact the researchers via email if they met the inclusion criteria and were interested in participating.

Participants were enrolled in the study if the met the following inclusion criteria: (1) they were between 19 and 24 years of age, (2) they had experience playing TRPGs in the last year, and (3) they had experience playing TRPGs in-person.

Participants were six young adults (3 men, 3 women) between 19 and 24 years of age ($M=$ 21.2, $SD = 2.6$). A seventh participant was excluded from the study due to a misunderstanding of the inclusion criteria. Based on the qualitative research guidelines provided by Creswell (1998) and Morse (1994), the sample met the minimum size requirements for qualitative, phenomenological research to achieve data saturation (i.e., no new themes likely to be detected with additional participants).

Participation was compensated with a gift card valued at $10. The study was approved by our institution's Research Ethics Board.

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 Demographic and Role-playing Habits Questionnaire

Demographic and role-playing habit information was collected using a questionnaire designed by the researcher for the current study. Demographic questions included age, self-identified gender, level of education, and employment status. Questions about role-playing habits focused on frequency of playing TRPGs, how many other people participants typically play with, and whether they use technology to play TRPGs.

2.2.2 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

Information about participants' perceived strengths and weaknesses was obtained using the SDQ (Goodman, 2009). The original SDQ was designed to assess the overall well-being of children aged 3-16 years for the purposes of clinical assessment, outcome evaluation, epidemiology, community screening, and a wide variety of psychological research and has been widely used and is reported to have a high degree of reliability and validity (Goodman, 2009). The current study uses a version of the SDQ modified by Goodman (2009) for self-report for individuals who are 18 or more years old. The questionnaire consists of 33 items, 25 of which are three-point scales where the participant is asked to select not true, sometimes true, or certainly true in response to statements about themselves and eight of which are four-point rating scales, which have different responses depending on the content of the item. Responses are coded to provide scores for five scales: emotionality, peer problems, prosocial behaviour, hyperactivity, and conduct problems. Scores on each scale fall into one of three descriptive categories: normal, borderline, or abnormal. Scale scores can range from 0 to 10, with cut-off scores varying by scale. Scores on the scales are intended to correspond to the intensity of the associated descriptor.

2.2.3 Semi-Structured Interview

Qualitative information about participants' role-playing experiences was collected using a semi-structured interview. An interview guide was designed to obtain specific information about participants' experiences with TRPGs and how these experiences related to their perceived social competence. The interview guide consisted of three questions about the games the TRPGs the participants had played (i.e., "Why did you start playing tabletop

role-playing games?"; "which three games do you play the most?"; "which three games are your favorites?"), followed by seven questions focused specifically on the TRPGs noted by the participants, each with prompts to gather more detailed information if the participant's response was missing key details or if they did not answer the question that was asked (i.e., "What do you like about playing _____ ?", "What is the group you play _____ with like?", "When you play _____ are you usually a Game Master/Dungeon Master or a player?", "Describe your approach to playing/running a game when you play _____ ", "If you played as the player/GM instead of the player/GM, how would you approach the game?", "How do you feel when you play _____?", and "Why do you continue to return to this/these group(s) to play _____ ?"). These seven questions were repeated for each TRPG the participant noted during the initial three questions to ensure that as much detail as possible was gathered about their experiences, since different games can offer different experiences.

2.3 Research Protocol

Following the informed consent procedure, participants were asked to complete the demographic and role-playing habits questionnaire and the SDQ (Goodman 2009). Once both questionnaires were complete, the interview began. Interviews were recorded using a digital microphone and a computer. Interviews took between 20 and 60 minutes to complete. All interviews were completed individually and were transcribed immediately following each interview. Pseudonyms have been used to anonymize participant responses.

2.3.1 Statistical Analysis

Responses to the SDQ (Goodman 2009) were coded using the instructions from Goodman (2009). The results of the SDQ were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

2.3.2 Qualitative analysis

Interview responses were examined using qualitative description. Qualitative description is a method of analyzing written, verbal, or visual messages to make inferences from data in their context (Sandelowski 2000), like content analysis (Elo and Kyngas 2008). The aim of qualitative description is to attain a straightforward and unambiguous description of a phenomenon; the outcome of the analysis is a set of concepts or categories describing the phenomenon (Sandelowski 2000).

For the current study, the procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used. Their procedure involved six stages: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing found themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing a report. Stages 1 and 2 were conducted through an initial reading of the interview transcripts by two authors. Once prominent themes were identified, a single author began stage 3, which involved re-reading the interview transcripts and coding the text using the initial codes generated by the research team as well as any new codes that were observed, while regularly cross-checking for consistency. Four primary themes with seven subthemes were identified in stage 1 and carried through stage 2 and stage 3 (i.e., no themes were eliminated). Codes were also sorted into broader themes and sub-themes and the relationships between codes and themes were identified. Stages 4 and 5 involved two authors meeting to review the coded data to determine the necessity of new codes or themes. Finally, stage 6 involved

a single author completing an analytic narrative by placing coded extracts into the context of their themes with two authors providing consistent input and feedback.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Demographic Data, Role-playing Habits, and SDQ

Collected demographic information is summarized in Table 1. Three of the participants reported that their highest level of education was high school/GED, two participants reported that college was their highest, and one participant reported that some university was their highest. Only two participants reported that they were employed full time or part time, with the remaining two participants reporting that they were employed casually or were a full-time student.

Table 1: Sample demographic details

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Employment
Aidan	24	Male	Secondary	Casual
Bill	19	Male	College	Full-time
Courtney	24	Female	College	Full-time
Dennis	19	Male	Secondary	Part-time
Estelle	19	Female	Secondary	Student
Fiona	20	Female	Some University	Part-time

Reported role-playing habits are summarized in Table 2. Half of the participants indicated that they had begun to play TRPGs approximately two to three years prior to participating in the current study, while the remaining participants reported that they had begun playing TRPGs between five and seven years earlier. Half the participants ($n = 3$) noted that they played D&D exclusively, while the other half mentioned that they played at least one other TRPG regularly. Most participants reported that they played with a regular group ($n = 5$). All participants reported playing in person with other players regularly and most participants reported that they did not play through the Internet regularly, with only one participant stating that they did.

The scores produced by the SDQ (Goodman 2009) are divided into five scales: conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, prosocial behaviour, and emotional problems. In the current study, most of the participant scores for each scale were within the average range and the average scale scores across participants were within the average range (See Table 3). One participant (Courtney) had a score that was in the abnormal range for the hyperactivity scale and a score that was in the borderline range for the emotional problems

scale.

Table 2: Sample role-playing habits

Participant	Years Playing	Play Frequency	Group Size
Aidan	5	>1-3 sessions a week	4-5
Bill	6	1-3 sessions a week	4-5
Courtney	7	3-4 sessions a month	4-5
Dennis	2	1-2 sessions a month	3-4
Estelle	3	1-3 sessions a week	5-6
Fiona	2.5	1-2 sessions a month	3-4

3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The themes and subthemes found in the semi-structured interviews and the percentage of the total interview responses covered by each theme can be found in Table 3 and the percentage of individual interview responses covered by each theme can be found in Table 4.

Table 3: Percentages of total interview responses coded under each theme.

Theme	Subtheme	%
Content Focus		12
Social Focus		
	Social Context	16
	Social/Psychological Improvement	16
	Relationship Building	12
	Social Atmosphere	12
Identity Focus		
	Character Creation	8
	Taking on Roles	8
	Autonomy	8
Creativity Focus		8

Table 4: Percentages of interview responses under each theme for the participants

Participants	Content Focus	Social Focus	Identity Focus	Creativity Focus
Aidan	20%	60%	20%	0%
Bill	20%	40%	40%	0%
Courtney	50%	50%	0%	0%
Dennis	0%	66.66%	33.33%	0%
Estelle	0%	40%	20%	20%
Fiona	0%	50%	25%	25%

3.3.1 Theme 1: Content Focus

Content focus outlines the ways that the content of TRPGs influence how appealing they are to players. When reflecting on their experiences with TRPGs, several of the participants indicated that they were attracted to their favorite TRPG because of the content of the game (e.g., rules, settings). Participants also noted that their interest in TRPGs came from a pre-existing attraction to fantasy fiction. For example, when asked about why he started playing tabletop TRPGs, Aidan (age 24) reported, "I first started playing tabletop role-playing games . . . just because I liked the whole fantasy aspect." When discussing one of the TRPGs he regularly played, Bill noted "I like the mythos behind it more than maybe the game itself." When asked why she enjoyed *Dungeons & Dragons*, Fiona said "I'm a really big fan of the *Tales of Symphonia* and those type of games, so I found I could project that sort of gameplay, but in my own way." Similarly, Estelle noted "I like how creative it is, like, it's very fantasy oriented. You've got werewolves and vampires and all these magical items, spells. It's all very creative and very fun."

3.3.2 Theme 2: Social Focus

This theme outlines how social context can be a primary factor in convincing people to try playing TRPGs and how the social atmosphere of gaming groups, new and maintained friendships, and perceived social/psychological improvements can be primary influences on people's decision to continue playing. When reflecting on their experiences with RPGs, participants reported that their experiences with TRPGs were influenced by social factors and that these experiences influenced their social experiences outside of playing TRPGs.

3.3.2.1 Theme 2 Subtheme 1: Social Context. Participants noted that their initial experiences with TRPGs often came about because of a pre-existing interest in TRPGs among their group of friends. For example, Estelle (age 19) reported, "It's something that my friend wanted to do." Bill stated, "Me and some close friends learned together and enjoyed it." Courtney said, "I started going because one of my high school friends moved up to the city." Similarly, participants also noted that their experiences in TRPGs were often influenced positively and negatively by social factors external to the game (e.g., arguments with friends, family hardship). Aidan noted, "When outside forces generally dampen your spirits. . . . I know

when my grandma died, I was not at all for *D&D*."

3.3.2.2 Theme 2 Subtheme 2: Social and Psychological Improvement. Several participants suggested that their experiences with TRPGs improved their social skills. For example, Dennis stated, "I've noticed that I'm a little more—I'm able to speak clearer almost." Similarly, Fiona also noted, "I think I used to be really shy," whereas Estelle stated, "I'm a lot more social, like I meet a lot of people through *D&D*. I was very antisocial before I started it and it's kind of helped me open up and get closer to people." Finally, Aidan said, "I'd say I'm a lot more social now. I was social before, don't get me wrong. But now, I'm just like, 'Hello, random person, how are you?'"

3.3.2.3 Theme 2 Subtheme 3: Relationship Building. When discussing what they had gained from playing TRPGs, participants noted that they had gained or improved friendships. For example, when asked whether she felt that she had gained new friends through role-playing games, Estelle said, "Yes, definitely," but also noted, "We get into a lot of fighting because we have different personalities. . . . So, it's a bit dysfunctional but we're always kind of on the same page in the end. We always work it out and end up having a good time." Bill reported, "I've really been able to hold onto my best friendships through role-playing games" and "I can account for a lot of my relationships through some sort of role-playing." When asked if she had gained friends from playing TRPGs, Estelle said, "Yes, definitely." Similarly, Fiona noted, "It's a great way to meet new people. I've met so many new friends from playing this and I find it's a really great way of connecting with other people."

3.3.2.4 Theme 2 Subtheme 4: Social Atmosphere. When discussing what their role-playing group looked like and what motivated them to continue playing TRPGs, participants suggested that the atmosphere of their role-playing group was generally positive. For example, Bill noted, "The group itself is very fun and playful and we take it very casually." When asked why she continues to return to TRPGs, Estelle said, "My friends. It was always a great time. It was honestly the highlight of my week every time I would go." Similarly, Fiona stated, "[They are] really friendly. We're all pretty good friends. Everyone's pretty chill."

3.3.3 Theme 3: Identity Focus

Identity Focus outlines how playing TRPGs allow players to feel autonomous while taking on novel roles using game characters that they have created themselves.

3.3.3.1 Theme 3 Subtheme 1: Character Creation. Participants expressed their enjoyment of creating new characters and trying to create characters that represented different parts of themselves. For example, Fiona noted, "I love my character. So, for me, I keep coming back because I want to see how her story unfolds." Courtney said, "The cool thing . . . is that you can play whatever you want whenever you show up, it doesn't really matter, so I've gotten to try a couple different things." Regarding how he made a character, Dennis said, "Since I know the rules a lot better, I know how to build a very powerful character just through the rules system. I hate to say that, but I know how to [min-max] a character to be the best one possible, so I believe it's like I could center myself to be the leader of the group because I could be the most powerful character, but being—saying that, I could just make a character that's just ridiculously smart or ridiculously funny."

3.3.3.2 Theme 3 Subtheme 2: Taking on Roles. Participants also reported that they enjoyed trying different roles to see how they could perform in a role that they are not used to having.

For example, Aidan said, "You can play so many different types of people in those games. Like, in one game I'm a female character who is a warrior and in another game I'm a small little gnome wizard." Bill noted, "I usually play a leader type character who is half decent at talking and I usually try to play a smart character." Dennis noted, "There's two sets of people I can be, almost. Like, I might interact with my friend right next to me differently and then my character would, say 'suck it' to their character."

    3.3.3.3 Theme 3 Subtheme 3: Autonomy. Participants noted that they enjoyed the freedom that TRPGs allowed for them to exercise different parts of their identity within a safe space. For example, Bill noted that "I felt like I had control over the situations. . . . I found it fun." Courtney noted, "I like planning. Improv makes me nervous, so having that plan and having everything set out would be easier for me. . . . I'm kind of like that in real life too." Aidan said of his character's identity, "I would say pretty much the same as my personality, which is generally good hearted and semi-talkative."

3.3.4 Theme 4: Creativity Focus

Creativity Focus outlines the creative elements of playing a TRPG that appealed to the participants. Participants discussed the amount of freedom that TRPGs allow players to exercise when solving in-game problems and developing characters. For example, Fiona said, "The creative part of it I really liked. . . . It's kind of cool to me that you can create your own world or play within someone else's world." Dennis said, "I keep coming back and it's like, 'Oh, it's time to play this awesome character I've created and who I've more elaborated on as since the initial session and this character has this big long back story and fears and pros and cons.'" Similarly, Estelle reported:

> It kind of gives you the ability, because you control the character, because the character is kind of a personification of you in a way and it's how you would react in similar situations and I like how we get put in situations we wouldn't be put in in like, a normal life, and even if you haven't experienced things like spells, you can still work it out.

4. DISCUSSION

The current study sought to obtain a deeper understanding of the social experiences of role-players by qualitatively examining the lived experiences of young adults who play TRPGs and integrating quantitative assessments of their current perceived social difficulties. Based on information collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, participants' experiences are summarized by the overall theme Role-playing Games Are Appealing for Social and Personal Reasons. The four themes: Content Focus, Social Focus, Identity Focus, and Creativity Focus contribute to a detailed understanding of experiences with TRPGs. Based on these themes, conclusions can be drawn about the lived experiences of people who play TRPGS.

4.1 Social Competence

Based on previous studies that have examined the influence of TRPGs on social skills (Blackmon 1994; Meriläinen 2012; Rosselet and Stauffer 2013; Zayas and Lewis 1986), it was hypothesized that themes relating to improvements in social competence would emerge in

the qualitative interviews. The contents of the Social Focus and Identity Focus themes suggest that the participants in this study experienced a perceived improvement in their social skills after playing TRPGs as all six participants indicated that their social skills had been positively influenced by playing TRPGs. The improvements mentioned by participants (e.g., becoming less shy, improving friendships) are also consistent with accepted operational definitions of social competence (Cavell 1990; Rose-Krasnor 1997), in that participants reported that they became better able to achieve social success after participating in TRPGs. However, in isolation, these themes are simply anecdotal evidence of perceived improvement.

In addition to meeting the expectations set by previous studies, the results of the current study offer unique insight into the lived experiences of people who play TRPGs. In the relationship building subtheme, participants discussed instances of demonstrated social achievements, specifically the creation and maintenance of relationships, through their involvement with TRPGs. Social achievements were also discussed in the social context and social atmosphere subthemes, with participants suggesting that their involvement with TRPGs came about due, in part, to their acceptance within a social group and that their acceptance within that group has maintained due to their continued involvement with TRPGs. The successful use of social skills was also discussed, such as the use of empathy to solve in-game problems that was discussed in the taking on roles subtheme (Cavell 1990; Rose-Krasnor 1997). In the social and psychological improvement subtheme, participants noted that they felt that their ability to appropriately navigate social interactions had improved and that the skills they had developed through their involvement in TRPGs had helped them to make social achievements (e.g., forming and maintaining relationships).

4.2 Additional Themes

The themes found in the current study that go beyond reported improvements in perceived social competence expand on the results of previous studies by allowing a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of young adults who play TRPGs. The themes outside of the broader theme of Social Focus reflect personal reasons for engaging with tabletop RPGs and their presence suggest that they are attractive to users for non-social factors as well (Blackmon 1994; Rosselet and Stauffer 2013; Zayas and Lewis 1986). Half of the participants noted that the content of RPGs played a primary role in their initial attraction to TRPGs and almost all the participants ($n = 5$) reported that TRPGs allowed the exploration of their identity. Finally, two participants noted that they engaged with TRPGs because they allowed them to exercise a degree of creativity. These subthemes suggest that, for some young adults, engagement with TRPGs may be due to the opportunity for identity exploration, engagement with the content of the game itself, and the open-ended nature of TRPGs, suggesting that the lived experiences of people who play role-playing games are consistent with observations made by Blackmon (1994) and Rosselet and Stauffer (2013).

4.3 Relation to Clinical Practice

Although the current study does not establish a causal relationship between engagement with TRPGs and social competence, some of the themes in the current study do align with clinical observations in the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) community. Clinical care providers have begun to use TRPGs to teach social skills to children, adolescents, and young adults with ASD, indicating that they have observed positive outcomes (Bartlette 2014; Burke 2017;

D'Anastasio 2017). Future studies should experimentally investigate the impact of TRPGs on social competence in clinical samples.

4.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Future Research

The limitations of the current study are related to the measures and sample. Interpretation of the interview data could have been influenced by the researchers' biases. However, to mitigate the potential for bias, experienced qualitative researchers were consulted when the interviews were coded and interpreted. Additionally, the SDQ (Goodman 2009) is more general than the social competence measures used in previous studies, making it difficult to compare the current study and previous studies. It is also possible that the effects of TRPGs noted in the qualitative interviews may not be exclusive to TRPGs, based on the tendency for social competence to develop through imaginative play (Howes and Matheson 1992). It is also possible that, given the amount of time between when participants initially engaged with TRPGs and the facilitation of the current study, it is impossible to determine if TRPGs were the only factor positively influencing the social competence of the participants. Finally, the sample of the current study was not a clinical sample, making the results difficult to extend to a clinical population. Future studies should adopt a more experimental approach to determine which component(s) of TRPGs may influence perceived and observable social competence. As well, comparisons should be made between typically developing and clinical samples using comprehensive measures of social competence in addition to comparisons of TRPGs to other forms of imaginative play (e.g., games of pretend, social role-play).

5. CONCLUSION

The results of the current study corroborate and expand on the findings of previous case studies through an in-depth examination of the lived experiences of young adults who play TRPGs. Participants' experiences with TRPGs suggest that TRPGs are appealing for social and personal reasons, including the content of the games, the allowance of identity exploration, and the design of the rules. These lived experiences also suggest that TRPGs have the potential to improve social competence, as the lived experiences of participating TRPG players contain themes that reflect improvement in social or psychological improvement which are supported by their responses to the SDQ.

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