

Playing to Experience Marginalization: Benefits and Drawbacks of “Dark Tourism” in Larp

Abstract: Role-playing to experience marginalized lives impacts players and their communities for better and worse. Players may achieve greater empathy for marginalized people (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000; Greitemeyer and Osswald 2010) or undergo meaningful psychological change via intentional and unconscious self-exploration (Bowman 2007). However, not all of these stories have a happily ever after. This article examines the ways in which such role-play as a marginalized character can also have unintended negative consequences. We relate this larp activity to the phenomenon of dark tourism, in which privileged individuals voluntarily enter disaster zones due to a mix of motives that include voyeurism and vicarious danger exposure, carrying with them a mixed bag of intentions and outcomes. This review aims to answer the following question: What are the positive and negative outcomes of role-playing as a marginalized character? We will explore individual and collective outcomes of this type of experiential learning and make recommendations for designers and players to better achieve desired positive outcomes and limit the negative ones. Our work draws on research from games studies, experimental psychology, pedagogical studies, and the emerging literature about the motivations and consequences of tourism that seeks to touch on pain, trauma, and even death (i.e., dark tourism).

Keywords: role-playing games, larp, marginalization, privilege, identity, perspective taking, empathy, dark tourism, stereotypes

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1. INTRODUCTION

Larp has been increasingly popular in recent years; some speculate that it will eventually be fused with virtual reality technologies (BBC 2013), thus facilitating deeper immersion and access for a wider range of participants. Further, games studies research suggests that in-character dynamics can, and do, spill-over into the real world relationships (Bowman 2013; Leonard and Thurman 2018). As Stenros (2010) points out, different larp designs offer different outcomes. For example, sometimes the aim might be for a player to feel like and become the character (emotional emphasis), while sometimes the objective might be just to portray the character believably with an outward emphasis. Importantly, designers may even intentionally develop immersive games in order to prompt players to take on new perspectives and identify with lived experiences other than their own (i.e., transformative play; Tanenbaum and Tanenbaum 2015). The potential benefits of immersive role-play for learning about marginalized lives is thus very promising such that by engaging with character and story, players may take on the perspective of their character and govern their interpersonal interactions from that perspective. From our vantage point in applied social psychology, this practice could further a core goal of helping individuals and institutions to thrive via practical interventions (Hodgetts and O’Doherty 2019).

In this paper, we compare this style of transformative play to the practice of dark tourism. Dark tourism is defined as the intentional seeking out of a site or place with strong associations to violence and death. An example of a dark touristic destination would be the site of a terrorist attack or the site of a natural disaster (Roberts and Stone 2014). Similarly, via larping, participants may seek to experience violence, death -- and, we add, marginalization -- vicariously through a character they portray. In this case, for a person to be marginalized means that institutional structures and systems discriminate against them and exclude or invalidate them on at least one dimension of identity (Parson 2019). Throughout this work, we invite the reader to consider whether the negative impacts on individuals and communities of engaging in play to vicariously experience such marginalizations are outweighed by the possible benefits of personal growth and prejudice reduction. We conclude with suggestions drawn from the emerging field of inclusive pedagogy which may serve to improve outcomes in this direction.

Given the basis of our work in applied social psychology, we recognize that many people who larp as a marginalized character are doing so from within their own lived experience of marginalization. That is because of the rich intersectionality of larpers' real world identities and experiences; each individual has many selves (James, 1890) -- multiple group identities, such as race, religion, gender, and sexuality as well as role identities, such as occupation or a familial role (e.g., mother), that they carry with them into every situation (Burke and Stets 2009), and how these identities combine generates unique experiences of privilege and discrimination for the larper (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, a genderqueer Latine lawyer may experience privilege and stigma in varied and specific ways due to these interlocking identities. If they choose to larp as a White, cis-male coal miner working and living in West Virginia c. 1900, they would still be engaging in dark tourism. Despite the fact that they are adopting a more privileged racial and gender identity, they are also exploring marginalization with regard to class and vocation.

This perspective that individual larpers are viewing and constructing their experiences through the lens of multiple identities overlaps with Kuhn's "self theory" (Kuhn 1964). Kuhn posits a core self which includes attributes and traits that combine with societally defined roles and their expectations, social status, and social networks to comprise individuality. However, following self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell 1987), we doubt the primacy or impermeability of a core self. Rather, when a given identity (e.g., lawyer) or compound identity (female lawyer) is made salient via cues that bring the identity to mind, a depersonalization process may occur by which the person views the world through the lens of the group rather than as a unique individual. This self-categorization shapes beliefs, emotions, and actions toward preserving and affirming the group identity (Mackie, Smith, and Ray 2008) and behaving as a typical or positive exemplar of the group or groups in question (i.e., self-stereotyping; Spears, Doosje, and Ellemers 1997). Such self-categorizations may thus influence each larper's experience of a story and of others' characterization within the larp.

Fully exploring the impact of combinations of multiple real life marginalizations on this phenomenon is outside the scope of the current work. However, by examining the motivations and outcomes of dark tourism and of larping marginalized experience, we can identify common themes, such as catharsis, empathy, and experiential learning, as well as common pitfalls, such the potential commodification of intense human emotions. We launch this investigation from our perspective as applied Social Psychologists with combined experience with storytelling and design in campaign larp, edu-larp, tabletop role-playing games, and escape rooms settings. We each belong to marginalized groups by virtue of our sexualities, genders assigned at birth, or gender nonconforming status; some of us are also racial minorities in the United States context and have experienced microaggressions in role-play communities.

Given that many communities and individuals remain targets of long-standing discrimination, exclusion, and even violence (UNDP 2010), it is valuable to investigate whether larp can decrease prejudice and increase intergroup empathy. In other words, if ever-increasing larp popularity has potential to reduce the social inequities present throughout the society, then we propose that the research community ought to develop a structural framework for how to best utilize such a prosocial application. For this endeavor, we suggest drawing on practices of inclusive pedagogy which we feel are highly relevant to larping as marginalized characters given that a common goal of this type of roleplay is to learn. However, these suggestions are merely a starting point for this work and, we hope, will become part of a much larger conversation involving scholars, participants, and practitioners.

2. WHY ENGAGE IN DARK TOURISM? APPLICATIONS TO THE THREEFOLD MODEL

According to Blom (2000), the main motivations to engage in dark tourism are to learn, to achieve emotional catharsis, and to immerse oneself in the experience of “other.” However, these motivations are not independent of one another; they are overlapping categories that often mix and interact. These three motivations of classic dark tourism can also be related to the Threefold Model of role-playing, which divides player motivation in three categories: Dramatists, people who are in it to tell a story and advance plot; gamists, who want to “beat” the game they are playing by exploiting rules and learning how to best win; and simulationists, who want to feel fully immersed in the fictional world they are playing in even at the expense of storytelling or gaming (Kim 1998). That is, although dark tourists who travel to sites of suffering are not assuming identities of marginalized people, they share similar goals as larpers who seek to vicariously experience trauma and marginalization in their role-play.

The educational motivation of dark tourism focuses on the individual wanting to learn the most that they can about a certain culture and their heritage, especially its more morose parts (Light 2017). In this “heritage tourism,” individuals are motivated to learn more about the history and culture of dark tourism sites like post-Katrina New Orleans; this motivation may share commonalities with those role-players referred to as “dramatists” in the Threefold Model (Kim 1998). In both categories, participants are motivated by a desire for knowledge and narrative. A dark tourist and dramatist alike might seek out stories that increasingly fall outside of the norm in order to shake up their perspective and learn something “new.” For example, most people will not experience what it is like to travel across a border illegally so they may seek out that experience in the form of a dark tourist attraction that can provide the experience or by larping a character who is a refugee.

In contrast to heritage tourism’s emphasis on experiential learning, tourists seeking emotional catharsis are focused on emotional fulfillment through activity (Iliev 2020). One example of this is when individuals travel to natural disaster sites to aid relief efforts, like those who traveled to Haiti in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, hoping to feel fulfilled by the act of helping others during a time of tragedy or by vicariously experiencing the full range of human emotion that occurs under extreme duress. The utility piece of this motivation for dark tourism most relates to the gamist category in the Threefold Model. In both of these cases, the individual is pursuing an end goal (e.g., to beat the in-game puzzle or to help people at a disaster site) so that they can feel a sense of achievement in overcoming a daunting challenge (Rucinska 2016). However, in the realm of dark tourism this emotional catharsis can also come from attempting to experience the emotions of those at dark tourism sites, via empathy (Blom 2000), which can be a requisite for a sense of achievement sought by gamists at larp.

Since emotional catharsis is defined as experiencing an emotional or intellectual conflict as a way to release it, it can involve empathizing with disaster survivors and may overlap with the final primary motivation of dark tourism: immersing in the experience of “other” (Blom 2000). This motivation focuses upon the shared, communal consumption of dark tourism sites or experiences (Podoshen 2013), and is most similar to the simulationist category in the Threefold Model. The tourist/larper is seeking an escape from their everyday lives while also yearning to be in community or even merged with others. This motivation can apply to tourists who want to integrate themselves into the object of consumption at a dark tourist site, this “object” can be a person, an event or even a place where a tragedy has occurred. The tourist’s fascination can be with witnessing violent or dark events or with the broader context within which the dark events occur (Blom 2000). For example, the death of an individual or group of people can act as the initial motivation for collective celebration, remembrance, or mourning. Although experiential immersion has strong overlap with the desire for catharsis, it becomes distinguishable due to the tourist’s commitment to the high degree of immersion and dedication to feeling as though they

are a part of another group. Bringing it back to the Threefold Model, this immersion enhances how the tourists feel like a part of the “Other” within their new environment.

Dark tourists who are motivated by a desire to immerse in the experience of “Other” may go to extreme lengths to preserve their sense of immersion, sometimes putting themselves at great risk. This is in line with the importance many larpers place on immersion in role-playing games. Although dark tourism motivations may center on immersing into community, Bowman and Standiford (2016) identify five other categories of immersion in larp: activity, game, environment, narrative, and character. However, the lines of dark tourism motivations are blurred such that the participant may also attempt to “live” the story of the dark tourism site (environment), metaphorically “lose themselves” in the act of providing aid (activity), or to slip into a version of themselves that is fundamentally removed from their typical day to day life (character). As such, dark tourism and larpers alike can undergo a journey of self-discovery and learning which is made even more meaningful due to communal experience.

3. DRAWBACKS OF DARK TOURISM IN LARP

Aside from direct benefits of aid to disaster sites, dark tourism likely confers some positive effects on individuals and communities. Researchers have found that those who engage in dark tourism have higher self-reported levels of empathy not only regarding the related community but also globally (Light 2017). In general, an increase in dark tourism worldwide has also corresponded to increased global awareness of these tragedies, which has in turn fostered renewed interest in education and aid (Rucinska 2016). However, the benefits of the aid offered are often undermined by apparent costs, such as “depleting scarce resources (like food and water), using culturally inappropriate methods, [and] violating security precautions” (van Hoving, Wallis, Docrat, and De Vries 2010, 202). Similarly, a privileged larper who chooses to dip into a marginalized identity for the course of an event may pull social resources away from marginalized larpers by drawing on limited time and energy of game runners and support staff, engage in culturally inappropriate play, or even create an unsafe game experience for themselves and others.

Dark tourism in and out of larp may commodify the experiences of those affected by tragedy, as some have said that the presence of outsiders who have paid to leer at a disaster site makes survivors feel as though their lived experiences are being exploited. Further, the consumer’s attempt to experience a sanitized and controlled version of trauma can obscure the true meaning of these harmful events (Blom 2000). Similarly, larpers who are exploring a marginalized identity through role-play may show inadequate gravitas (Alyanak n.d.). Just as taking selfies at Ground Zero can fail to match the solemnity of the context, so too can larpers fail to match the gravity of the identity experience being portrayed. In this way, dark tourism aimed at increasing empathy for those affected by tragedy can in fact become a medium for the colonization of the experiences of others (Ruberg 2020).

This kind of identity tourism has been explored in depth by Nakamura (1995), who found that in online settings, players who choose to portray characters not of their race or gender are often doing so in a way that perpetuates stereotypes. Players who participate in this kind of virtual identity tourism do so to be able to live out their fantasized experience of “Other” while not having to be critical of the experiences of the minority groups they are portraying. While this research focuses on online experiences, the concepts can be carried over into larping such that players may come to a larp to play out a stereotyped fantasy and, if the moderators of the larp are not vigilant in their administration, this will lead to the above negative outcomes. One way larpers can seek to mitigate this problem is by being critical of their character choices and intentions, meaning that the players should strive to see their choices from an empathic perspective and investigate how they might affect others in the space. A more

thorough way of doing this would be if moderators or game-runners reviewed character information before the start of the event and gave feedback and revisions.

Nevertheless, dark tourists may misuse cultural products despite genuinely good intentions (Alyanak n.d.), and this could extend to its counterpart in larp. For example, a larper may seek to articulate a marginalized character's experience aided by their own research. While this is likely preferable to character choices derived entirely from stereotypes and media portrayals, problems can still arise from research driven character development. For example, in developing touchstones in the lore of a culture, the player may elect to replicate traditional clothing elements in their costume or physically represent cultural symbols on crafted props. This practice can become inappropriate if these items are considered taboo or sacred and/or carry specific cultural significance that is mishandled in a harmful way.

Although a balm to inappropriate characterization in larp could be careful research and preparation, these steps can backfire in a similar vein as when dark tourists inadvertently obstruct aid and use up much needed resources (Alyanak n.d.). For example, larp safety teams, often volunteers, may be called upon to screen the cultural appropriateness of player generated backstories before a new player enters the game. This practice uses up finite resources, however, which could instead be turned toward addressing the challenges faced by players who are underrepresented in the local larp community or marginalized in the broader social context.

Even more directly, larpers who are interested in playing a marginalized character may be encouraged by plot or safety teams to check in with peers who are connected to the marginalized experience in real life. Relating this to the Threefold Model, dramatist and simulationist players may be especially motivated to get the portrayal "right" due to their motives to tell the story well and deeply immerse themselves into their character (Kim 1998). While this practice can help filter out character choices that would be problematic before they enter play, it can be draining for marginalized group members to field such questions repeatedly. This is especially the case because such conversations may lead to microaggressions or the anticipation that microaggressions might occur. These subtly insensitive or even rude communications can demean a person's heritage or identity, and exclude, negate, or nullify their thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality (Sue et al. 2007). Larpers with marginalized identities are right to be wary of such interactions given that racial and sexual harassment does occur at larps and in role-playing communities (cf. Dashiell 2020; Trammell and Crenshaw 2020). Therefore, the common practice of peer-to-peer cultural consultation can have downsides which may be further exacerbated by the sheer number of requests that marginalized larpers may receive from across their entire larp community.

When members of underrepresented groups exist in mixed communities, we are often called upon to be experts on our own lived experience of marginalization. Although this may have the cumulative effect of improving accuracy and sensitivity of character and story, the repeated request for advice along these lines requires emotional labor (performing "correct" emotions in order to carry out a job; Hochschild 1983), which is both taxing and undervalued in larp (Jones, Koulu, and Torner 2016). Relatedly, activists of color who experience burnout have ironically attributed some of their strain to the racialized emotional labor required of them by their White counterparts in the movement (Gorski and Erakat 2019) and undergraduates of color have reported experiencing "ambassador fatigue" after repeatedly being called upon to explain or perform their culture for their White peers (Butay, Wong, and Burns-Glover 2011).

In addition to burnout from being the target of frequent consultation requests, larpers from underrepresented groups may also share disaster survivors' resentment of being the object of voyeurism. For this reason, van Hoving and colleagues (2010) decry dark tourism at disaster sites because it may cause communities and their leaders to subsequently get fed up and stop accepting foreign aid. This

outcome may correspond to underrepresented larpers shying away from games that center on themes of extreme marginalization or even becoming disillusioned by larp altogether. In the long run, these dynamics may even reinforce the view of larp as made by and for dominant group members, much like some universities are portrayed as commodifying diversity and treating underrepresented minorities as objects to learn from rather than full community members (Musser 2015).

Taken together, the drawbacks of dark tourism in larp can create a “chilly climate” (Steele 1997), which is when subtle identity threat cues compound to make underrepresented group members feel uncomfortable in a given context. For example, women and racial minorities in higher education often accrue enough of these tell-tale experiences to eventually leave disciplines in which they have been historically underrepresented, abandoning careers they were once passionate about (e.g., engineering, Adams, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, and Steele 2006). Likewise, larpers with marginalized identities may seek short term disengagement and subsequently experience long term disidentification from larp due to a build-up of discomfort from microaggressions, excessive requests for unpaid emotional labor, and seeing their marginalized experience commodified or represented inaccurately.

4. BENEFITS OF DARK TOURISM IN LARP

Given that the stakes of dark tourism in larp are so high, we now turn to a discussion of possible benefits which draws on experimental research on perspective taking. A key benefit of dark tourism is being able to relate to survivors and see the world through their eyes. This can facilitate learning, generate shared narratives and drive prejudice reduction (i.e., the mitigation of negative feelings toward another group and its members; Vescio, Sechrist, and Paolucci 2003). However, this process is prone to backfire due to the mechanism of taking another person’s perspective, which is itself flawed and often shaped by bias.

Just like Stenros (2010) outlines, the internal emotional turmoil of the character, perhaps hidden and not so obvious, may be more worth examining than anything that is visible on the surface. That is, because actions are ambiguous, people evaluate each other’s beliefs and intentions in order to interpret their behavior. To do so, individuals often reach for their preconceived notions of a certain group in the evaluation of their actions (Wu and Keysar 2007). Thus, initial negative expectations of a marginalized group combine with an inability to take on other perspectives to form the basis for a further increase in stereotypes (beliefs and expectations about a group and its members; Decety 2007; Batson et al. 1991). Therefore, although perspective taking and its emotional counterpart, empathy, are key benefits of dark tourism and larping as marginalized characters alike, they must be done in specific ways to reap benefits while avoiding costs.

4.1 Individual Outcomes of Larping Marginalized Experiences

When one adopts the perspective of a member of another group, they may come to see that group as less stereotypical (e.g., rate the elderly as less worrisome) and more positive (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000). These effects likely arise from increases in the perceived overlap between the self and others (Davis, Conklin, Smith, and Luce 1996). Therefore, rather than drawing on stereotypes to predict and explain the other group’s behaviors, the perspective taker will relate them more readily to their own traits and motivations (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000). In other words, larping the experience of an individual can have a benevolent effect on intergroup perceptions and evaluations. However, this process does not necessarily make judgments of other groups and their members more accurate, and can even result in less accuracy due to assumed similarity to the self. Larpers may mitigate this by portraying character and story with intentionality, drawing on research about the marginalized experience rather than assumptions rooted in their own self-concept.

The trade-off of intimacy over accuracy observed with perspective taking also emerges when larpers feel emotions as a marginalized character. This phenomenon, known as empathy, is distinguished from perspective taking due to its emphasis on overlapping emotions as contrasted with sharing thoughts and lower level perceptual experience (Batson et al. 1997).

Individual role-playing experiences within larp can promote empathy by placing a player into the role of a specific character within the game. Subsequent identity transformation gives way for the player to take on a new perspective and thus experience new emotions as the target identity (Segura et al. 2019).

Therefore, via identity transformation, larp can be used to learn and empathize with marginalized groups' points of view. However, with limited information about the true emotional experience of the target person, the larper may again fail to hit the mark on accurate emotion sharing. This outcome could be assessed using clinical measures of prosocial behavior. Prosocial behavior is defined as "voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals" and modern studies have found that empathy has a positive correlation with prosocial behavior, therefore prosocial behavior can be measured without self-report it is ideal to use as an indirect measure of empathy (Rameson, Morelli, and Lieberman 2012). In addition to assessing prosocial outcomes from larps, designers should offer guidelines for effective role-play. These guidelines would likely need to promote adequate preparation, proper alignment of roles, structured feedback guidelines, as well as the acknowledgement of the value of social interactions for learning (Nestel and Tierney 2007).

In terms of the emotional aspect of perspective taking, role-playing is used to help people establish social bonds and support their mental and emotional well-being, all through the acquisition of new perspectives. As Stenros and Montola (2010) point out, it could be said that in larp one replaces one's own worries with the worries of the character. This is particularly beneficial because when we empathize with a marginalized individual, we may place greater value on their welfare. For example, Batson and colleagues (1997) used perspective taking instructions to strengthen the degree to which participants empathized with an individual member of a marginalized outgroup. Similarly, incorporating explicit perspective taking instructions into the larp experience has the potential to result in enhanced empathy toward marginalized group members.

Another mechanism by which role-playing as a marginalized character could produce benefits is via bleed-out, i.e., when in-character dynamics spill over into out-of-character feelings and experiences (Leonard and Thurman 2018). For example, hormones associated with trust and love might promote social bonding between different players through shared in-game experiences. If playing as a marginalized character, this trust and love might spill over into empathy for the marginalized group of one's character or their in-character intimates. This trust resulting from bleed-out might be a necessary precondition for the reduction of prejudice and stereotypes of the marginalized group (Vanman 2016).

However, what happens when a player experiences bleed-out of negative interpersonal dynamics? According to Twenge et al. (2001), neural activity triggered by negative interactions could set off defensive aggression or social withdrawal behaviors. If these behaviors happen with a person taking the role of a marginalized character, they could bleed over into out-of-game interactions and bring about negative perceptions of the entire group. For this reason, it is important for game designers to consider curtailing interpersonally antagonistic story beats that could have the effect of reinforcing prejudice and stereotyping. Additionally, larp runners should provide workshops in which participants can learn and practice safety gestures so as to achieve greater control over their emotional experiences at larp (Segura et al. 2019).

In addition to larp organizers' role in crafting more beneficial perspective taking experiences in larp, larpers can also directly take control of their own bleed during and after role-play. As Leonard and Thurman (2018) note, larpers who consistently label their experiences as solely due to the in-character dynamics of the game may be able to successfully compartmentalize their emotional experience.

However, this practice may require cognitive and emotional resources which are commonly depleted by activities involved in larp (e.g., self-presentation and choice making). If successful in labeling and separating their in-character experiences from out-of-character dynamics, larpers may be able to limit undesired bleed-out. Unfortunately, this could also dampen the impacts of the perspective taking experience and the positive outcomes that follow. For that reason, it may be best to design larp experiences aimed at learning about marginalized identities in a way that limits negative interpersonal dynamics in the first place.

Under ideal conditions, larping marginalized characters and experiences may even improve participants' ability to see the bigger picture of structural inequality. As Jones and Nisbett (1972) noted, their perspective taking manipulation reduces the actor-observer effect, which is the tendency to attribute the actions of others to their dispositions while attributing one's own actions to situational factors (Vescio, Sechrist, and Paolucci 2003). For example, an outgroup member might be judged to be intellectually inferior due to poor academic performance, whereas the same performance by an ingroup member might be explained by outside circumstances (e.g., relationship issues). Indeed, as Lukka (2014) points out, the actor-observer bias explains why external behavior is the most important way of communicating to others about the personality of the character. In other words, perspective taking reduces the double standard by which individuals judge the outgroup's behavior (as revealing inherent traits) versus their own group's actions (as circumstantial and constrained).

Finally, perspective taking in larp may be able to reduce prejudice (i.e., feelings about the group) irrespective of character stereotypicality. For example, Vescio, Sechrist, and Paolucci (2003) encouraged individuals to adopt the perspective of an African American interviewee who described some difficulties he had faced as a result of his racial identity. The participants later reported more favorable attitudes towards the outgroup that the interviewee belonged to, as compared to those who remained detached and objective listeners. This finding supports the notion that perspective taking can have a positive effect on intergroup relations via prejudice reduction. However, it is still important to avoid stories and characterizations which needlessly reinforce stereotypes about marginalized groups and their members.

As Vescio, Sechrist, and Paolucci (2003) demonstrated, participants who were shown a stereotype confirming interview later endorsed more stereotypic perceptions of the outgroup (i.e., African-Americans as athletic) than did those exposed to a stereotype disconfirming interviewee. In larping as marginalized characters, one must consider that a stereotypical portrayal has the possibility of further increasing the visibility of the marginalized group and resulting in a momentary increase in stereotyping of its members. Even positive stereotypes can be harmful as they can pigeonhole group members into only a few roles (Czopp 2008) and reinforce essentialist beliefs about groups (i.e., viewing racial categories as biological and natural; Kay, Day, Zanna, and Nussbaum 2013). For these reasons, it is likely best to design larp characters which are balanced toward disconfirming stereotypes associated with the relevant group, regardless of their positivity.

To summarize, a variety of positive and negative individual outcomes may occur when larpers take the perspective of a marginalized person. These include prejudice reduction and increased empathy for the marginalized group, which in turn could spill over into one's real-world interactions via bleed-out. As discussed above, the repeated act of perspective taking can be used to further develop empathy. All of this could result in the larper placing an increased value on the welfare of others. On the other hand, perspective taking comes with the risk of increasing the perceived stereotypicality of other groups and their members, which could even result in a momentary rise in prejudice. However, it is important to point out that perspective taking could be more or less effective for various reasons. Moderators of the effectiveness could be found in the role itself or in the person inhabiting the role.

4.2 Moderators of Individual Outcomes

The possible positive and negative perspective taking outcomes we have presented are likely to shift given the type of immersion achieved by the role-player. For example, one study by Herrera et al. (2018, Study 2), investigated the role of technological immersion in perspective taking. They did so by comparing three different types of perspective taking modalities: analog, via desktop computer, and through VR, along with a control condition where participants received fact-driven information about the houseless. Results showed that even though there was no difference in self-reported measures for any of the perspective taking conditions, a significantly higher number of participants in the VR condition signed a petition supporting affordable housing as compared to the other conditions. As observed from the aforementioned study, the modality of immersion can influence the outcomes out of the larp experience.

Designers who wish to facilitate prosocial behavioral impacts of larp may elect to use VR or at least offer visually and physically engrossing analog role-play experiences for their participants. In addition to the impact of role-play modality, the specific role that a person plays can also moderate the impact of perspective taking. Ramirez, Eskenazi, and Coskun (2019) investigated the effectiveness of role-play for developing a more holistic perception of elderly people. They instructed undergraduate students to simulate everyday activities typically engaged in by elders. Some of the students were assigned the role of a caregiver or an observer, as distinguished from an elderly condition. The researchers found that participants in different roles experienced different levels of immersion. For example, players who had the role of caregivers appeared to have been affected less by the experience compared to other participants. As the researcher noted, this implies that a holistic perception and other types of prejudice reduction interventions might not be directly transferred to players inhabiting different roles within the same larp game.

Future research should explore the mechanism by which such different outcomes are achieved based on the roles engaged within the role-play, noting that not all identities carry equal weight for all individuals. For example, in the previously described study procedure, Ramirez, Eskenazi, and Coskun (2019) assigned a condition which imposed a role identity (caregiver) rather than a group identity (e.g., elderly; Burke and Stets 2009). Although the role of caregiver could enhance empathy for the elderly, role identities tend to be more impermanent and self-chosen than group identities, which are often bestowed via social convention (e.g., gender and race), which may help explain why this condition did not show as strong an effect as did simulating the daily activities of an elder.

Another likely moderator of the effect of perspective taking in larp is the larper's personal connection to narratives. Research shows that the extent to which an individual becomes immersed in a narrative influences its potential to subsequently affect story-related attitudes and beliefs (Busselle and Bilandzic 2009), which likely relates to bleed-out and its mechanisms. For example, Sukalla et al. (2016) showed that participants' self-reported narrative engagement was associated with psychophysiological indicators of attention and emotion. Relatedly, Jørgensen (2018) collected focus group data regarding uncomfortable experiences in video games and determined that player agency and moral complicity in the game story yielded empathic engagement for her participants, a phenomenon she calls "positive discomfort." These results support the claim that narrative engagement influences one's psychological experience and, thus, moderates the emergence of the expected larp outcomes outlined above.

In addition, it is worth considering larpers' ability to control their immersion levels as a moderator of desired larp outcomes. For example, some gamers interviewed by Jørgensen (2018) reported welcoming the relief offered by perspectival distance during intense moments of video gameplay. Similarly, as Montola (2010) explores, some larpers cite being able to control their attachment to the game consciously, thus regulating the intensity of the game. Such comments were made in regard to

the role-playing games specifically aimed at creating extremely intense experiences of tragedy, horror, and disgust. Even if in such extreme scenarios, players appear to be (at least partially) in control of their immersion and detachment from the game, we must consider the inherent ability to control one's immersion as an important moderator affecting individual larp outcomes.

However, even if desired outcomes are not achieved during the game due to conscious detachment, game creators may try to reach for such outcomes by focusing on post-play activities and briefings. In fact, the larp structure is usually not conducive to post-play activities, unless the game organizer shortens play to include such activities as part of the time allotted (Brown 2018). Due to this, the players lack the opportunity to process the experience and resolve emotional thoughts. Thus, an intentional focus on post-play reflections may limit the moderating effect of conscious detachment and increase the likelihood of desired outcomes. Furthermore, this moderating effect may be regulated by requiring the players to read up on and internalize their characters prior to the game, and then to bodily and mentally pretend to be those characters, as some of the Nordic style larps have already done (Waern, Montola, and Stenros 2009).

The extent to which the game is indistinguishable from everyday life may act as yet another moderator of the individual larp outcomes. Indeed, as Stenros et al. (2007) explain, when the game is indistinguishable from the reality, everything becomes related to the larp world. This merging effect alters the way in which the world is perceived, and the players start seeing the game where there is none. When the game is conceived as reality, the everyday personality becomes just another character. In fact, this merging of game and reality may lead to what Pohjola (2004) referred to as inter-immersion -- that is, when everything a character does enhances the believability of the game world, and everything in the game world enhances the identity of the character (in contrast to that of the player). This creates the positive feedback loop which increases the likelihood of bleed-out and the individual larp outcomes taking place in everyday life.

In order to magnify the benefits of perspective taking in larp, game designers could aim to amplify four dimensions of narrative engagement: narrative understanding, attentional focus, emotional engagement, and narrative presence. For example, narrative understanding and attentional focus may each be dampened if larpers observe that story world logic is inconsistent as this violation of realism appears to cause disruptions of the narrative experience (Busselle and Bilandzic 2008). Therefore, if game designers wish to lay a foundation for the benefits of perspective taking in larp to take hold, they should aim to introduce any inconsistencies via the narrative itself and these deviations must be made to seem plausible. Overall, the narrative engagement scale developed by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) could be a useful tool for investigating the extent to which a larp experience is expected to engage players in the narrative.

4.3 Collective Outcomes of Larping Marginalized Experiences

We have argued that, when done with intentionality, larp experience can promote increased equity in group dynamics even on a societal level by reducing prejudice and increasing empathy for marginalized individuals and groups. Going further, larpers may learn to empathize more frequently and effectively in real life by practicing this skill in role-play. That is because an important component of empathy is the mental flexibility to adopt the perspective of another while also maintaining self-awareness (Decety 2007). In other words, routine perspective taking is a key foundation of human empathy (Batson et al. 1991), and its practice could accrue positive collective benefits.

Although larp's ability to produce these outcomes does not have much direct empirical support, a study done by Herrera et al. (2018, Study 1) investigated whether VR simulations are a more effective method of eliciting empathy as compared to the traditional perspective taking. The Inclusion of the

Other in the Self (IOS) scale data showed that over the course of eight weeks, participants in both the VR and the traditional perspective taking conditions reported feeling empathetic and connected to the houseless at similar rates. In other words, these participants selected increasingly overlapping circles to represent the relationship between themselves and the houseless as they experienced it. However, the results for attitudes toward the houseless and the dehumanization scale show that the participants who simulated houselessness in virtual reality had longer-lasting and more positive attitudes towards the houseless. This goes to show that perspective taking, whether traditional or enhanced via immersion, is an important factor in producing empathy toward the marginalized outgroup.

The consequences of increased empathy across group boundaries are many, but one example would be a reduction in racial inequality in medical care. Epidemiological evidence indicates that African Americans receive lower quality pain treatment and are denied pain medication at higher rates, as compared to European Americans, an outcome which is correlated with the magnitude of the empathy bias in the medical context (Drwecki et al. 2011) Having in mind the aforementioned, the strategies to increase empathy appear to be a priority in the medical sector equity research. As noted previously, perspective taking within larp can act as an important means of stimulating the empathy-making process. In turn, this process may result in reduced racial disparities in the medical field to the degree that medical practitioners engage in larp or experience edu-larp as part of their training.

Furthermore, studies suggest that a reliable association can develop over time between empathy and altruism (i.e., helping others without a cost-benefit analysis; Batson et al. 1991), and there is also evidence in support of a causal effect of perspective taking on altruism (Underwood and Moore 1982). If such a causal link is indeed present, larp proliferation could stimulate a new wave of altruism in adults immersing themselves into role-playing games. This altruism, along with perspective taking and empathy, could further stimulate activism against violence toward minority groups and marginalized communities.

When evaluating and proposing collective outcomes, it is important to bear in mind the cultural differences that underlie perspective taking. A cultural dimension worth examining is individualism/collectivism. As Kağıtçıbaşı (1997) explains, the main feature of collectivism is emphasis on the group such that the group serves as the source of value and that the interests of the group take precedence over those of the individual. Hofstede (1980) found that the countries of East Asia score particularly high on collectivism, in contrast to the English-speaking countries. Relating this cultural dimension back to perspective taking, Wu and Keysar (2007) concluded that the cultural patterns of collectivism focus attention on others (as opposed to the self), causing Chinese individuals to be better perspective takers on average than their American counterparts. For example, eye gaze measures demonstrate that Chinese participants are more tuned into their partner's perspective, as compared to the Americans. Wu and Keysar (2007) further note that Americans often completely failed to take the perspective of their partner, whereas Chinese participants almost never failed to do so. This suggests that culturally prepared interdependence can help individuals better interpret other people's actions.

Another collective benefit of dark tourism in larp comes directly from education about marginalized experiences as this can help bridge the gap between communities. This is because a key proponent of reconciliation is developing a shared mutually acceptable understanding of history (Staub 2008), but repeatedly recounting generational trauma could be emotionally fatiguing. For this reason, some locals in New Orleans welcomed post-Hurricane Katrina tours that wove narratives of death and loss into the traditional tourist experience of the city. Without these tours, locals likely would have had to answer questions about their recent trauma on a frequent, ad hoc basis (Bowman and Pezzulo 2010). Similarly, marginalized individuals who choose to design larps inspired by their lived experiences may opt-in to educate themselves and their larp communities on their own terms rather than continuously upon request. These larpers could then harness the healing power of revisiting and reframing trauma

that has been shown to be effective for some Indigenous elders (Aho 2014).

Furthermore, as Stenros and Montola (2010) explain, larps are great at showing alternatives -- both good and bad. This ability to construct and experience either a utopian or dystopian society may have profound effects on the players' critical thinking capacities. As critical tools, these games have immense potential. While larping, players can examine hypothetical scenarios that may make more sense than the monotonous realities they live in. Thus, larps can bring forward the awareness needed and empower players to initiate the real-life change in their societies. In this way, larp can be a potent catalyst for social change.

To summarize, there appears to be a variety of positive outcomes of playing to experience marginalization in larp as it can increase shared narratives of marginalization and perpetuate prosocial and equitable group dynamics. Furthermore, this type of larping may promote intergroup empathy more broadly, which could lower social inequities across various fields and even bring about societal increases in altruistic behavior. However, additional research investigating the cross-cultural generalizability of these collective effects is necessary.

5. DISCUSSION

Role-playing to experience marginalization and dark tourism may be rooted in similar motivations and suffer some of the same pitfalls. Without careful guidance, larp designers and participants can create harm to individuals and communities. At minimum, designers of larps should consider and clearly communicate the intended purpose of disaster tourism style larps and what safeguards will be provided, if any. Such larps could count as transgressing the boundaries of play, which is often prescribed as requiring positive emotions and trivial content (Stenros 2018). Discrepant creative agendas (i.e., what each participant wants to get out of the larp) and disagreements over play culture (e.g., themes) can become a major source of conflict among role-players (Bowman 2013). However, we are hopeful that the proposed benefits of perspective taking, enhanced empathy, and altruism can be achieved with preparation and scaffolding by larp designers and participants alike to provide greater forewarning and opt-in for participants. This will be possible if certain moderators, such as role-play modality, the inhabited role, cultural modes of perspective taking, and narrative engagement, are carefully considered.

Some additional caveats bear mentioning. First, the longevity of these effects is untested. Indeed, research on perspective taking and empathy has primarily been conducted in brief, laboratory settings. However, repeated exposure to treatments over time tend to have deeper and longer lasting impacts in general, so one could predict that repeated exposure to a character mindset in a campaign larp setting or repeatedly playing characters from the same marginalized group could have a more pervasive impact on the larper.

A second consideration is that many larpers who play marginalized characters are also deeply marginalized in real life. According to Kemper (2017), individuals who have marginalized identities can explore modes of freedom by playing for emancipatory bleed. That is, players can use their role-play experiences in order to explore the themes of oppression extant in their real lives using various methods. The practices Kemper suggests -- pre-game preparation, in-game steering, and post-game evaluations -- are likely vital tools for any larper to learn from in-game experiences and contrast them with their out-of-game experiences of marginalization and privilege.

Intentional framing of a learning experience like that suggested by Kemper (2017) is also a hallmark of the emerging field of inclusive pedagogy. Therefore, we recommend larp designers try their own version of instructional scaffolding -- support provided by instructors to students in order to aid them in mastering tasks which are at the edge of their current ability and experience (Hogan and Pressley 1997). This scaffolding may include: providing a forewarning of themes relevant to culture, power

and identity issues that will likely arise in the game; providing education about these themes before or after the game; and offering or workshopping strategies in advance regarding ways students may incorporate these themes into the collaborative story to minimize harm and support effective learning. Larp designers should consider using these tools whenever they encourage or encounter themes of marginalization in their storytelling.

In addition to scaffolding by instructors, inclusive pedagogy experts encourage students to practice and utilize meta-cognition to enhance learning. This occurs whenever students write and reflect about their learning experience before, during, and after the lesson in order to deepen their understanding of their learning (LaVaquer-Manty and Evans 2013). Such practices relate most to Kemper (2017)'s suggestion of using auto-ethnography to enhance emancipatory bleed. We argue that these tools can be helpful for anyone engaging in a larp that touches on themes of marginalization. For example, larpers and designers alike should consider outlining learning outcomes for the experience they are engaging in and producing. The list of what one should/could get out of a specific larp experience may be a shared vision that is developed collaboratively or completely individualized and à la carte. Regardless, when all participants identify desired outcomes at the design stage, it will likely help designers meet those expectations during the event and help larpers steer their play toward those goals.

Finally, we centered much of this discussion on the motivations for dark tourism and, in turn, larping to experience marginalization. Indeed, Van Hoving and colleagues (2010) recommend dark tourists check their personal intentions before embarking on any journey, and so do we. It may be better for a larper to withdraw from a scene or event entirely if they discover their motivations are harmful. In addition to that, it is important for designers to evaluate their own motivations when creating larps which center on the experience of marginalization and ask themselves why they are offering the option of moving through marginalized spaces in the first place. The game creators should evaluate why the marginalization within the envisioned world takes the form it takes and delve into personal biases that might have informed the creation of the game. Indeed, as Kessock (2016) points out, these biases may influence how organizers view players that enter their space, what characters players are allowed to play, and even character interactions during play.

Proactive reflections on the creators' part before and during events are vital because they might counter subconscious networks of negative responses to people's identities and traits which are outside the norm. As Kessock (2016) elaborates, if a person who holds social capital within the group (in this case, the game creator) expresses bias against a fellow player based on their identity or characteristics, this can cause further discrimination. As these biases might subconsciously be ingrained within the game design, it is vital for the game creators to evaluate whether their choices further perpetuate inherent biases that come with gender presentation, racial acceptance, and other individual traits. The players should also be encouraged to get these questions answered in order to identify any potential issues before they arise.

Checking motivations and being transparent about them is difficult in part because, as Harviainen (2008) points out, both the practitioners and the outsiders studying larp are affected by personal bias which leaves the study of role-play in a state of chaos. This makes personal reflection even more important for all the actors involved with larp, especially with the games concerning marginalized spaces. However, because understanding and accounting for our own motives can be a difficult task, we next propose another more attainable approach: cultivating a growth mindset for learning. In this case, viewing human attributes as malleable and failure as a learning opportunity is important because this can lay the foundation for greater personal growth and make an individual more receptive to critical feedback (Dweck, Chiu, and Hong 1995).

Given the benefits of a growth mindset for learning, it is fortunate that play and playfulness align with this approach to learning. As Mortensen and Navarro-Remesal (2018) point out, play allows

us to intentionally court failure so we may seek to better understand it. That is, we propose that the acceptance of possible failure implied by conventions of gaming could alleviate much of the anxiety that often plagues intergroup contact (Plant and Devine 2003), thus paving the way for the prejudice reduction that tends to follow from direct and even imagined interactions with members of other groups (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Turner, Crisp, and Lambert 2007; Turner, Hewstone, and Voci 2007).

6. CONCLUSION

We share Tanenbaum and Tanenbaum (2015)'s view that play can be a transformative resource throughout a person's life; through play we can construct new worlds and reconsider our current perspectives. As discussed here, the individual and collective benefits of larping to experience marginalization have the ability to perpetuate more equitable group dynamics and foster shared and healing narratives about historic oppression. Routine perspective taking in larp could even foster the transfer of empathy skills to real world settings and stimulate altruism more broadly. However, larpers and designers must carefully avoid the possible drawbacks of increased stereotyping that can occur due to flawed perspective taking and subsequent harm to marginalized larpers and community trust. As discussed previously, marginalized larpers who are routinely called upon to screen new character concepts and are often expected to give feedback about portrayals of their own marginalization with grace and even-keel are engaging in draining emotional labor which, over time, could cause them to feel alienated from larp communities altogether.

The question that remains to be answered is whether dark tourism in larp is something to be encouraged and if empathy is a worthwhile goal considering the potential risks and drawbacks associated with larping as a marginalized character. Furthermore, one should ask themselves whether commodification of trauma is a reasonable side effect of this empathy-inducing phenomenon. Indeed, no discussion of benefits is adequate without the careful consideration of the costs. A "do more good than harm" mandate has ties to consequentialism, a traditional moral classification that Sageng (2018) also uses to evaluate the morality of video games. Sageng argues that killing fictional characters in games is permissible in part because the harm is make-believe; it has no real world impact. Similarly, although our foregoing discussion has primarily engaged in an instrumental consideration of dark tourism in larp, we feel that weighing costs and benefits is directly relevant to the ethical principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence in our field (American Psychological Association's Ethics Code; APA 2017).

We can find further ethical consideration of dark tourism in larp via Sageng (2018)'s application of deontological theory to video games. Specifically, as deontology centers on moral actions requiring adherence to perceived moral norms, Sageng argues that in-game racism is not permissible because "the mandate that comes from play does not have the power to outstrip respect for dignity" but rather "originates in an acknowledgement of an individual's right to take pleasure in her own self-worth" (79). We feel this claim is also supported by the ethical principle of Respect for People's Rights and Dignity, which centers on self-determination and respecting "cultural, individual, and role differences" (American Psychological Association Ethic's Code; APA 2017).

Whichever ethical framework designers, players, and larp theorists use to evaluate dark tourism in larp, we should all make these evaluations in the context of the communities and individuals our choices impact. This mandate is also consistent with the APA ethics code, which calls on practitioners to honor their responsibility to society, build trust with their communities of practice, and create fair and equitable access to their contributions (APA 2017). However, the foregoing could be especially challenging for those larps which reproduce a limited perspective due to design teams and social capital which serve to amplify White, straight, male, cis-gendered and able-bodied experiences. Ideally, therefore, we can flip the dark tourism experience in larp from a process of consumption to one of

collaborative education -- a shared learning laboratory in which marginalized larpers have control over their own narratives.

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