Assigning Expert Authority to the Dominant Player in Role-Playing Games

Abstract: This paper investigates how a dominant player is socially assigned authority that legitimizes behaviours of gamesplaining and rule lawyering: it delves into how authority is distributed and validated between players and examines how social norms and implicit consent play a part in both the validation of authority and the normalization of exercises of power. The research introduces a synthesized framework derived from theoretical analysis of the social process of assigning and consolidating "expert authority" (Haugaard 2018 & 2021) to the dominant player in the context of playing tabletop role-playing games.

Keywords: social power, authority, implicit consent, gamesplaining, glorification of knowledge, rules lawyering, tabletop role-playing games, game master, game cultures, player behaviors

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates how a dominant player is assigned the social role of "expert authority" (Haugaard 2018, 2021) in the context of playing *Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax and Cook 1974) Research has demonstrated that popular Western gaming culture glorifies a player who displays ttechnical knowledge and traits of hegemonic or nerd masculinity, resulting in the parameters of the game being often determined by the dominant — white male — player (Dashiell 2020; Gray 2018; Taylor and Voorhees 2018; Trammell 2018; Vossen 2018). That glorification, according to Dashiell (2017, 2018, 2020, 2022), affords a player who displays "more knowledge" with the social acceptance to engage in gamesplaining and rule lawyering. I expand on the work of Dashiell to reveal how authority is distributed between players under the established belief that the more knowledgeable person is entitled to command or advise others. In doing so, I discuss how social norms and implicit consent play a part in both the normalization of exercises of power and the consolidation of authority. I examine authority through the lens of knowledge but acknowledge the significant influence of identity factors such as race, gender, and sexuality on authority. I am concerned primarily with the dynamics of authority because it will impact our studies of how consent shows up (or not) in analog gaming.

I posit that the dominant player gains and affirms its authority cyclically in a complex social process that can be deconstructed into four steps: Distribution, Reinforcement, Affirmation and Validation. (Fig.1) I propose a framework[1] that synthesizes that process. To do so, I use a speculative approach to dissect and discuss the four steps[2] that come into play at the game table. A theoretical analysis is done to address the nuances between the concepts of power, domination, and authority, and to put Haugaard's theory of authority (2002, 2012, 2018, 2021) in conversation with the work of Dashiell. One hypothetical moment of play is used to illustrate and clarify the theoretical concepts.

> *Billy (DM), Phil, Kim and Tom are playing a session of* D&D. *Before entering combat, Billy (DM) explains the rules, decides they will play without a grid, and sets the scene. Phil suggests a strategy the group should use to win according to each role's abilities. Tom plays first and takes a Search action. Phil stops Tom to suggest that all players work together to defeat the enemies, arguing that Tom, the Cleric, can cast stronger spells than other players and that starting with an attack is more logical. Tom hesitates because he wants to role-play his character even if it puts the group at risk. Kim is quiet. Phil argues by describing the actions the three of them could take in the next round. Kim nods in agreement with Phil. Tom concedes and takes his first turn accordingly. On Kim's turn, she wants to Move, Open a locked door while moving, and Attack. The DM rules that Kim will not be able to do both actions Unlock a door and Attack. Phil insists that, according to the rulebook, the Attack is allowed. The DM dismisses the argument. The game continues.*

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1   The framework should facilitate one's understanding of the complex social process of how authority moves between players but should not function as a prescriptive recipe for analysis.

2   While discussed in isolation, the steps are, in reality, context-dependent and non-exclusive.
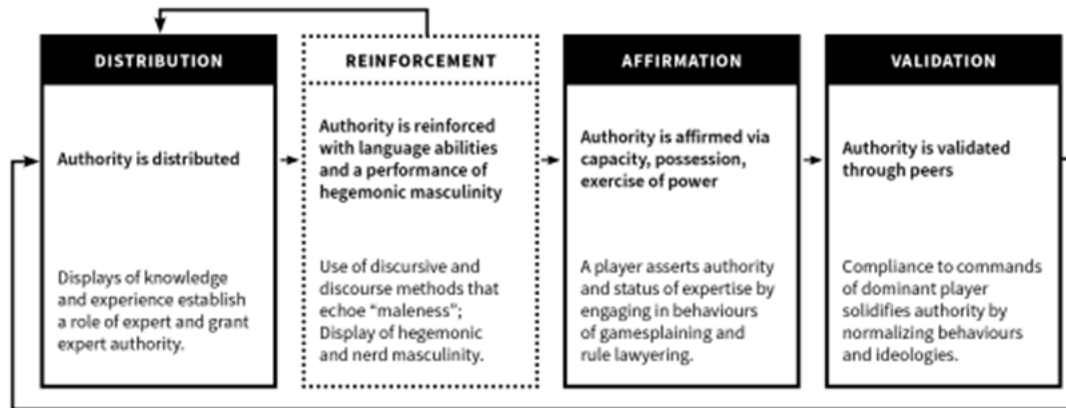
DISTRIBUTION	REINFORCEMENT	AFFIRMATION	VALIDATION
Authority is distributed	Authority is reinforced with language abilities and a performance of hegemonic masculinity	Authority is affirmed via capacity, possession, exercise of power	Authority is validated through peers
Displays of knowledge and experience establish a role of expert and grant expert authority.	Use of discursive and discourse methods that echo "maleness"; Display of hegemonic and nerd masculinity.	A player asserts authority and status of expertise by engaging in behaviours of gamesplaining and rule lawyering.	Compliance to commands of dominant player solidifies authority by normalizing behaviours and ideologies.

Figure 1: The implicit process of distributing, reinforcing, affirming, and validating expert authority.

2. DISTRIBUTION

Informed by Haugaard, authority is a power resource that is fluidly and implicitly distributed between agents and it enables and legitimizes the exercise of different forms of power. While authority enables command it also reveals relational structures of power, where an agent grants authority to another who shall have it, therefore giving them the authority to command. Alternatively, without authority, a person lacks the resources to do or to speak for themselves. As proposed by Searle (1996), the following formula defines authority:

> X counts as Y in circumstances C. The X (a person – Obama), counts as Y (authority – the President of the USA), in the circumstances C (Obama's inauguration, 20 January 2009). (quoted in Haugaard 2021, 155)

The formula reveals that a person's authority derives from and is delimited by people's belief in its legitimacy. The rationale for its legitimacy can be legal (based on regulations or laws), value and tradition-based (established beliefs and norms), or affective (devotion to a charismatic person). As explained by Haugaard, it is by law that the role of the elected president in the USA has authority. While the role of the President concerns organizational authority, there are social roles that are granted "everyday types of authority," such as "parent," "mother," "father," "male," "female," "speaker," and "expert" (2021, 161). It is through established beliefs that the social role of 'expert' is granted what Haugaard refers to as "expert authority." (Beard 2014 and 2017[2018]; Haugaard, 2018 and 2021) That belief carries weight at the game table. By definition, an expert is a person who has skills or comprehensive and authoritative knowledge in a particular area. Bureaucratic rules and procedures are often made by the expert (Cambridge Learner's Dictionary; Haugaard 2018). A player appears to possess knowledge in role-playing when they correct another player's terminology or vocabulary, self-select to answer questions or make a choice for the group, elaborate on a subject matter by using description, make direct statements for example regarding rules or procedures, and challenge someone or respond to someone's statement in the negative. In that sense, rule lawyering and gamesplaining are displays of knowledge (Hendrick 2003 and 2006; Dashiell 2020).

Building on this, it follows that a player who displays their technical knowledge and experience with the game gains the social role of "expert" and, with that, "expert authority" in the context of playing the game. This can be understood through Searle's formula:

> The X (a player), counts as Y (authority of the Expert player) in the circumstances C (the gaming episode).

A player takes the role of 'expert' when they come across as "more knowledgeable" about the game or give the impression of having more experience in gaming. An assertive display of knowledge occurs, for instance, when game rules are recited from memory, whereas a demonstration of experience happens by referencing past games. That said, the status of expertise is gained whether it is true or not that one has more knowledge than

others on that game or in gaming— to appear like you know what you are talking about and position yourself as confident is key to the process.

> *Phil conveys expertise when he uses his knowledge of the game world (D&D Classes) to explain his strategy. Then, he uses his knowledge of the rules of the game to describe step-by-step actions and prescribe strategies. That reveals he is familiar with the courses of action and obstacles the game affords or proscribes. He also refers to the rules of the rulebook by memory, which reiterates his knowledge and experience with the game.*

Once the Expert is recognized, authority is distributed by the culturally established belief that the more knowledgeable person should be granted authority.[3] Dashiell (2017) draws on Bourdieu's theory to explain that specialized knowledge is a form of capital and that authority is granted to the player showing possession of that capital. As the author explains, this is particularly evident, with rule lawyers whose use of memory reinforces their position as an expert in the game rules. Their confidence in their knowledge and abilities leads them to argue with anyone including the DM, which in turn conveys they possess an item of value — knowledge. This argument gains depth when considered alongside Haugaard's theory, which explains that the person who is framed into the role of the expert is given an authority that affords them the 'right' to exercise power over others. Importantly, the dominant player can (unwittingly or not) manipulate its status, as Haugaard (2018) indicates: "the social actor is in authority by pretending to be an authority" (23). When a rule lawyer attempts to enforce rules, they adopt the postures of both an expert, whose role is to make the rules, and of the game master, whose role is to enforce the rules. In doing so, the rule lawyer acts like an authority and therefore, if successful, becomes in authority.

3. REINFORCEMENT

In addition to knowledge, language and the performance of hegemonic masculinity contribute to the assignment and reinforcement of authority. Dashiell draws on linguistic and gender theories to argue that white male gamers who exhibit traits of hegemonic masculinity are often in a stronger position to win arguments. They use discursive methods that portray characteristics of maleness to stress the validity of their argument and gain social recognition. Dashiell suggests that successful rule lawyering not only requires knowledge and the desire to convey it but most importantly the knowledge of language and the ability to present it in a manner that convincingly demonstrates expertise. Scholarship on linguistic patterns has identified that masculine forms of discourse, such as arguing, interrupting, speaking loudly, listing facts, using sarcasm, and engaging in report talk, contribute to gaining capital. (Beard 2014 and 2017[2018]; Dashiell 2017; Coates 2003; James and Clark 1993; Kielsing 2008; Knussman 2000; Tannen 1990) Men who are socialized to engage in these behaviours often increase their level of respect or gain respect from other men, whereas such modes of interaction can be disruptive for those who are not socialized to use them. (Kiesling 2005) Historically, speaking in public has been an imprint of masculinity. Beard (2014 and 2017[2018]) explains that culturally throughout history, the male voice echoes authority and expertise, while the female voice is often associated with stupidity. Beard writes: "Public speech was a – if not the – defining attribute of maleness." (17) This aligns with Haugaard's (2018) argument that the 'speaker' who is the person deemed worthy of interaction constitutes an authority.

Given these arguments, it becomes evident that language proficiency and the performance of masculinity influence the perception of expertise. While linguistic capital and masculinity may hold authority independently of technical knowledge, this distinction highlights how Reinforcement of authority occurs when language and/or masculinity is employed (consciously or not) to bolster the Distribution of authority, based on who is perceived as possessing technical knowledge (without actually being the smartest).

4. AFFIRMATION

Once authority is distributed, it is affirmed through capacity, possession and exercise of power. Power is a social phenomenon understood within a sociocultural context and it is productive, creating subjects and organizing knowledge. (Foucault 1980) From classical to modern theories, there are various cross-disciplinary interpretations of the essence of power, but Avelino (2021) identifies three prevailing conceptions: power-to, power-over, and power-with. The first one studies power as a capacity to act and to transform outcomes (power-to). As Morriss ([1987]2002) points out, power originates from the Latin word 'to be able' and refers to capacities that manifest

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3   We should also consider the possibility that a dominant player who displays traits of hegemonic masculinity might be perceived as charismatic which would help them gain implicit devotion.

in certain ways under specific circumstances. However, not all agents have equal capacities, where some have more influence or ability to mobilize and transform, resulting in an uneven distribution of power-to. The second conception of power focuses on power as a resource and is interested in the asymmetries between agents, where one has power over another (power-over). This echoes Giddens's characterization of power as being generated through structures of domination, a theory that illustrates the conception of asymmetries and dependencies between agents. (Giddens [1984]2002) As Avelino points out, power-to and power-over are not mutually exclusive, both reside in social contexts, and both can be possessed and exercised. As defined by Wartenberg (1988), the possession of power is characterized by the influence of agent A on agent B without having to exercise power, simply by the idea that agent A could take a course of action over agent B. An agent can possess the power or be the object of possession. The exercise of power happens when agent A takes a course of action that changes the field of possible actions[4] of agent B, resulting in controlling or influencing agent B's own course of action.

> *When Phil tells Tom he should play his turn by attacking instead of searching, Phil's action (to interfere) changes the circumstances within which Tom makes his choice and reduces the field of possible actions that Tom can do under that strategy. The act of interfering in Tom's game results in Phil controlling what Tom will do. In addition, the power that Phil possesses — the simple idea that Phil could interfere — could influence the choices and the actions that Tom makes at his turn.*

Power theories inform us that authority grants and legitimizes power: the expert has a greater capacity to influence the course of play by affirming authority through the possession and the exercise of power. First, authority grants the expert more power-to. An uneven distribution of power-to signals an asymmetrical relationship, where one player holds authority over another. Both the gamesplainer and rule lawyer possess greater power-to than other players due to their technical knowledge and ability to shape the course of play (to interrupt and win arguments). The dominant player acts confidently about knowing the rules of the game and the activity, thus marking their ability to play the game. As Sniderman (1999) argues, "our ability to participate in a particular game is dependent on our knowledge of many "rules" which no one has ever spelled out to us" (482). When the "expert" "spells out" the recorded and unrecorded rules of the game, they affirm their role as "expert"— as rule maker, their status of expertise and their expert authority. Second, authority legitimizes power which in turn affirms authority. Gamesplaining and rule lawyering are exercises of power. When unsolicited and benefiting the dominant player, gamesplaining exemplifies power-over. In that event, the gamesplainer showcases their power-to through the act of gamesplaining, as it reveals their capacities—knowledge and discursive abilities— which enable them to influence the game by putting their power into action, over the benefits of others. That said, gamesplaining and rule lawyering are often disguised as exercises of power-with, perceived as interventions done in favour of the group.

As indicated by Avelino (2021) and Abizadeh (2021), power-with is a third conception that occurs when power is not solely attributed to agent A or B (power-over) but to both, and when they can come together to enhance or strengthen the collective power toward similar or different goals. Power-with is not free of asymmetries and independent from power-over, since both agents can possess and exercise power but not necessarily with the same capacity. Power-with is also not necessarily independent of power-over and/or domination. In some occurrences, power-over is disguised as power-with, when a dominant agent who exercises power makes resistance dissolve by taming and hiding conflicts behind what appears as a consensual process, and for example, leading a group to believe the power is shared among them even though a dominant agent influences the others' courses of actions.

> *When Phil suggests a strategy for the group, it gives the impression that this is a collective choice favouring the collective good. There is an appearance of exercising power with the group (as opposed to against the group) since other players must decide if they accept the commanded strategy. There is also the illusion that Phil's intervention helps everyone when it is most likely advancing his preferred way of playing, over the preferences of others.*

It is important to note that power-over is not always an exercise of domination. To Pansardi (2013 and 2016), domination entails a "particular kind of relation that may be potentially – but not necessarily actually – harmful" to subjects (2016, 92). A relationship can have a high degree of dependence but no relation of domination. A highly dependent relationship can involve a relation of domination but not be harmful to the subject, as in the cases

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4   Wartenberg uses the term "action-environment," a more complex concept than explained here. I use "field of actions" for synthesis purposes.

of parenting. Dormant power (possessed but not exercised) can dominate, and one can be vulnerable to domination without being the subject of domination, as in the case of a parent-kid relationship (McCammon 2018). What Dashiell calls "domination through knowledge", I argue is not inherently domination. A player who holds the status of expert de facto holds a position of dominance over those who do not. That posture of domination creates an asymmetric relationship that enables them to exercise power over others, such that they can dictate the group's strategies and rules. That said, their interventions are not inherent exercises of domination because they are not all morally bad nor harmful to the subjects. They could be in a position of domination while exercising power-with, for example when a player asks the expert player for help in deciding strategies.

> *When Phil imposes strategies on Kim and Tom, he is restraining their field of action. Phil who has a position of dominance (who is dominant) exercises power that might be helpful if giving Kim and Tom, let's say, a sense of direction, and most importantly it might be desirable if they want (and consent to) someone limiting their capacity. In that situation, Phil's exercise of power would not be domination because it is not harmful or morally bad.*

Social norms play a part in the normalization of exercises of power and, in turn, in the affirmation of authority. A norm-dependent domination theory affirms that domination is exercised by agent A over agent B through ideologies: the dominant agent does not operate merely because they can exercise power, but also because the social norm dictates their right to do so under their dominant posture (Haugaard 2021; McCammon 2018). I posit that authority functions similarly to domination: its affirmation is supported by social norms as the position of authority enables a socially implicit right to exercise different forms of power. The expert exercises power (all forms considered) because one is socially expected, accepted or tolerated to inform the decisions of the group. In other words, social norms dictate who is entitled to authority and normatively justify the use of power or, at times, of domination. Social norms are unwritten and implicit rules that bring people to conform. According to Unicef[5] (2021), behaviour will be practiced and driven by norms because a person will think other people do it, others will approve of them doing it and sanction them if they do not.

> *When Phil reveals a set of actions he thinks Tom should do, he burdens Tom by forcing him to decide whether he will actually follow the commanded course of action. While Phil might think he is providing a "suggestion" and merely "offering" an idea, Tom might perceive it as a command. Phil might also think his interruption is legitimate if it benefits his desired outcome for the game without considering what outcomes other players desire.*

Haugaard (2021) elaborates: when a social role is performed according to expectations, the person is likely to succeed at social integration and gain trust, which in turn validates one's role of authority, and so on. Then, a person with authority has power over others and can use that authority for collective benefits, in which cases unevenly distributed authority can be useful, and power is not necessarily a "bad thing." A parent is exercising power over a kid but that is not defacto harmful. Alternatively, they can abuse their authority to use their power to their sole advantage. In the former situation, the subjects increase their trust in the more powerful agent, while the latter situation breaks the trust between agents. (157) My investigation indicates that the desire to gain trust and social acceptance might be a factor of motivation for the expert to perform as socially expected. Thus, social norms lead the so-called expert player to believe that they are doing the "right thing" for the group when they engage in behaviours of gamesplaining or rule lawyering. The rule lawyer may be unaware of the power imbalance they hold and may perceive their actions as an exercise of power-with.

In *Consent in Gaming* (Reynolds and Germain 2019) one given recommendation for making sure that players have consented to topics at play is this: "it's not up for debate" when a player is not consenting. They write: "It's inappropriate … to pressure, persuade, bribe, or influence someone to change their mind about a consent topic" (4). However, unrecorded rules (Sniderman 1999) determine what intervention is "inappropriate," resulting in varying standards among different individuals of how to respect consent in role-playing. Power theory informs us that the rule lawyer often acts in concert with the group and under the belief that their intervention helps maintain the activity. When agent A pressures agent B to play by their rules, agent A believes their way of playing is Truth, such is the result of the legitimization of authority. Therefore, the rule lawyer does not think they are being inappropriate to B, but rather helping B play as one should. The rule lawyer does not wait for consent to operate.

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5   I chose UNICEF as a reference because its definition is grounded in fieldwork on the impact of social norms on people's well-being. I think that applied social research that focuses on safety can benefit game studies.

5. VALIDATION

Lastly, the authority is validated (continuously distributed or re-distributed) through peer recognition, when other agents consent or comply without consent, with the commands of the dominant player. Research confirms that consolidation of authority lies in the compliance of subject agents.[6] As a result of the legitimization of authority, an agent with less power will accept the dominant agent's command "as a valid norm" that justifies one's actions (Weber 1922 and 1978; Abizadeh 2021) Those who are deemed (or deem themselves) non-experts engage in behaviours that support said expert, for example, by agreeing with them (Tannen 1990). Then, one's scope of authority (exercised or possessed power) is "obeyed by" others. However, the command requires a certain "voluntary submission," an interest in obeying due to practical motives (survival) or to the belief in its legitimacy (Haugaard 2018) When peers give recognition to the hegemonic player it normalizes and consolidates the cycle of dominance (Dashiell 2020).

> *Phil imposes his strategy on the group, defending it as being for the group and towards the assumed shared goal of winning combat. Phil exercises power despite the resistance of Tom or Billy (who argues or resists), and with Kim's assistance (who nods or stays quiet). Eventually, Tom concedes to Phil, but regardless of the group's assistance towards Phil's power, it does not mean that all three players want to take the same actions, use the same strategies, and share the same goal of why they are playing the game. In that sense, Phil exercises some degree of power-despite-resistance (from Tom), with-assistance (from Kim).*

A nuanced conception of power is presented by Abizadeh (2021), who proposes a distinction between power-over-with-assistance and power-over-despite-resistance. In some occasions, an agent exercises power-over without the presence of resistance or with others' assistance (support). This is what Abizadeh calls power-with-assistance. On other occasions, both agents exercise power but the outcomes favour agent A over agent B, despite the resistance of agent B. Resistance is not always overcome and power can still be possessed or exercised. This is what Abizadeh calls "power-despite-resistance." This distinction allows us to further understand the non-exclusivity between power-over and power-with and shows that assistance is not always intentional. A relation of assistance is recognized when agent A supports agent B in its exercise of power. It can be to act in concert with the dominant agent, to omit or to abstain and it can be unintentional and done without awareness. The dominant agent can use coercion or persuasion to convince a person to assist. Social status and security are some of the many factors that can influence one agent to assist another. For example, the authority that possesses the expert can persuade a player to abstain from challenging the rule lawyer. Abizadeh clarifies that acquiescence is not the same as giving consent, although not protesting is sufficient assistance. In that sense, an agent who assists another may or not share strategies, goals, and knowledge. On the contrary, resistance requires an agent to protest such that one must not do what is asked of them. The act of resistance creates a barrier to the capacity to effect outcome (power-to) and to the exercise of power (power-over/with).

That reveals, in parts, how implicit consent plays a part in both the normalization of exercises of power and the validation of authority. Actual consent is irrelevant to the validation of authority because only the perception of consent matters. When a less powerful agent voluntarily submits to the command of the dominant agent even without explicit consent, that compliance echoes peer support and can be perceived as implied consent: recognition solidifies authority and authority legitimizes power. Through this cycle, the gain of recognition and the status of authority feed one another, then help the dominant player win the argument, which turns one's perspective into the "normal" or the socially expected way of doing things. What was once one person's preferred way of playing becomes an expected way of playing that all should abide by. The cycle continues.

> *Phil interferes with Tom's game without his request (without consent). Phil suggests an outcome for Tom that he disagrees with (resistance). Rather than accepting Tom's response and respecting Tom's boundary (lack of consent), Phil argues to persuade Tom to achieve his desired outcome. Although Tom does not give*

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6   There are a series of factors which will bring agents to validate another's authority, yet social integration seems to be central to compliance. Research on social norms shows that a person who does not adhere to a social norm expects to get punished by being socially excluded and to get rewarded by gaining social acceptance when they do adhere. (Unicef, 2021, 1) As observed by Hughes (1983 and 1995), if the social norm dictates that cheating is not welcome at the game table, then a player who gets caught cheating might be socially punished by being asked to leave the game or not get invited to play the next time around. In that sense, fear of social punishment or desire for social reward might motivate a person to validate the commands of the authoritarian player.

explicit verbal consent, he ultimately does what Phil suggests. (assistance) Kim first remains quiet and then nods in agreement. Her silence serves as a form of abstention that indirectly supports Phil (assistance). Phil might interpret the lack of resistance as implied consent. Then, Kim's nodding indicates explicit but not enthusiastic consent (assistance). Later on, when the DM dismisses Phil's desired outcome (resistance), the DM resist Phil's exercise of power and Phil's capacity to influence the outcome (resistance of power-to).

6. THE ROLE OF THE DM

Montola (2009) offers a perspective on power distribution in gaming by proposing a three-part categorization of decisive power in role-playing. The author explains that players often implicitly consent to give a game master the Exogenous authority to reconcile what he calls "conflict" in a process of "closure" (30). Montola affirms that closure involves all participants by giving them a "similar amount" of decisive Exogenous power (32). While this holds in theory, it proves false in practice, as seen when Montola's argument is examined in light of Dashiell's statement. A larger amount of Exogenous power is granted to a participant who uses hegemonic masculine discourses and comes across as knowledgeable. As Dashiell writes: "all players treat one another equally, but this courtesy tends to privilege the loudest voices in the room as opposed to the smartest" (2017, 1). By design, a DM holds the authority and is expected to define the game's parameters, enforce rules, and intervene when players deviate. The authority of the DM is established by the rules of the game whereas the authority of the rule lawyer is a "social role" maintained through norms. Both exemplify the Exogenous power of the participant on the game, from outside the game. Both authority figures can coexist simultaneously. While the *D&D* rulebooks inform us that the authority of the DM should prevail above players' and advise against the interference of rule lawyers (Wizards of the Coast 2014,) scholarship in rule lawyering has documented more than one occurrence when rule lawyers will interfere despite the presence of the DM. (Attanasio 2020; Heinz 2018; Berman 2011) Authority theory suggests that expert authority is often dominant over other authority figures due to the fetishization of rules and that it may be a "social fact" that the majority of a group believes expert authority is legitimate (Haugaard 2018).

Comparatively, we can infer that it is the group that decides when the authority of the DM is subordinate to the authority of the expert player. In some cases, the DM may seek assistance in determining or enforcing the rules, thereby creating an opportunity for rule lawyering. This suggests two important points: first, the DM is foremost a person also subject to the culturally established belief that individuals exhibiting certain characteristics possess expertise that entitles them to authority; second, rule lawyering may be desirable, at times. However, rule lawyering can also occur independently of whether the DM has solicited help. In that situation, the DM has the authority to veto a rule lawyer's argument and curb their command. That said, the DM does not subtract the power possessed by the rule lawyer, and as a result, cannot entirely stop a player from exercising that power.

7. CONCLUSION

Deconstructing the process of authority allows us to understand in what ways the glorification of expertise and the social role of authority that is tied to expertise carry weight at the game table: when less powerful players accept the advice or commands of a dominant player, they implicitly consent to the authority that upholds the dominant agent: compliance, even without explicit consent, gives implicit permission to impose one player's own rules and strategies. Consequently, authority reinforces a tabletop role-playing culture that normatively consolidates expert authority to the hegemonic player perceived as possessing more game knowledge and legitimizes hegemonic behaviours often exercised by white males. Scholars and designers are concerned with how to defuse exercises of power like rule lawyering and gamesplaining. While game mechanics and social tactics may help mitigate these power dynamics during gameplay, they do not fundamentally change the prevailing culture that allows such practices to persist. Recognizing who holds authority reveals that rule lawyers and gamesplainers operate with the legitimacy of that authority. This understanding highlights how we unconsciously and unwittingly support these behaviours, often with implicit consent or yet, without consent but without resistance.

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