Assigning 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: power, authority, consent, gamesplaining, rules lawyering, tabletop role-playing games, game master

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1. INTRODUCTION

> *Billy, 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, who is most familiar with the game, suggests a strategy that the group should take to win according to each role's abilities. Tom plays first and takes a Search action. Phil stops Tom to suggest that all three players work together to defeat the enemies, arguing that Tom, the Cleric, can cast stronger spells than other players and that starting by attacking "is more logical" than hiding or searching. Tom hesitates because he wants to play according to his character's storyline 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 door while moving, and Attack. The DM tells her she will not be able to Attack because "the door is stuck and opening it counts as one action." Phil insists that the Attack is allowed because "it is instructed in the rule book that interacting with one object on your move is a free action." The DM dismisses the argument, Kim completes her turn according to the DM's indications. Phil and Billy play their turns and the game moves forward.*

This moment of play illustrates a player, Phil, interfering with other players' games, arguing, and winning arguments regarding rules and strategies. This paper investigates how a dominant player is assigned the social role of "authority of expertise" (Haugaard 2018 & 2021) that allows them to do gamesplaining and rule lawyering.

Research has demonstrated that popular Western role-playing and board game culture glorifies a player who displays technical knowledge and traits of hegemonic or nerd masculinity, resulting in the parameters of the game and the activity being often determined by the dominant players. (Gray 2018; Dashiell 2020) Dashiell (2020) explains how a player who displays 'more knowledge' is likely to gain a form of peer validation that allows them to engage in behaviours of 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 others. Then, I examine how social norms and implicit consent play a part in both the normalization of exercises of power and the consolidation of authority. I conclude by briefly discussing the influence of game rules on authority. Part I of this paper presents a literature review to provide game scholars with fundamentals from theories of social power, where I address nuances between the concepts of power, domination, and authority. Part II proposes a framework that synthesizes the social process of how authority is distributed and consolidated to the Expert at the game table. To do so, a theoretical Kimlysis is done to dissect Haugaard's theory of authority (2018 & 2021) and a speculative approach is used to discuss the different steps that come into play when a dominant player is assigned a role of authority in the context of playing a TTRPG. One hypothetical moment of play from *Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax & Cook 1974) is used to illustrate the theoretical concepts. While drawn from lived experiences, this scenario lacks empirical evidence and therefore aims only at clarifying theories. Subsequent research should involve the collection of empirical evidence.

This article intends to provide game scholars and designers with the vocabulary and common grounds for understanding the overall complex process of authority that happens at the game table and often goes

unnoticed. 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 and how the social role of authority shapes the outcomes of playing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I define key concepts of Power, Domination and Authority and contextualize them to my investigation. The literature review was conducted by extracting and synthesizing theories from scholars of power. My intention with this section is to provide the reader with fundamental theories of social power that must be understood when investigating consent and power in play.

2.1 Power

From classical to modern scholars, there is no consensus in understanding the essence of power, on whether it is a resource used for self-interest or a capacity to mobilize resources to reach outcomes, on whether power is to be conceived as a relation between agents and outcomes or as an asymmetrical relation between agents. For instance, Morriss "points out that power is derived from the Latin word *potere* – 'to be able' – and claims that in philosophical and linguistic terms, power 'is always a concept referring to an ability, capacity or dispositional property'."(Morriss [1987]2002, 283; quoted in Avelino 2021, 428). Davis claims "power [...] mediates the desired or intended outcomes of social actors and the actual realization of these outcomes in their daily social practices" (Davis et al. [1991] 2002, 214; quoted in Avelino, 426). On the other hand, Giddens characterizes power as being generated through structures of domination. (Giddens [1984]2002, 160; quoted in Avelino, 426) This agent-based theory is criticized for defining power only in terms of domination and dependencies between agents. (426) In short, while there is no consensus, one can still identify two prevailing conceptions of power. The first one studies power as a capacity to act and to transform (*power-to*), while the second conceptualizes power as a factor of domination in a subordinate relationship between agents, where one agent has power over another (*power-over*). This thesis will mainly focus on the latter which is interested in the asymmetries between agents and considers power as a finite resource that one agent gains at the expense of another agent. As Avelino (2021) points out, power-to and power-over are not mutually exclusive, both reside in social contexts, and both can be *possessed* and *exercised*.

Wartenberg (1988) defines the possession and the exercise of power-over as follows. The possession of power (10) 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. (3) The capacity to affect the situation of another agent, should she choose to (18). The exercise of power (11) happens when agent A takes a course of action that changes the field of possible actions[1] of agent B, resulting in controlling or influencing agent B's own course of action. Let us come back to the *D&D* example presented in the Introduction. 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.

Other conceptions of power should be brought forward. As mentioned above, power-to refers to the capacity of an agent to act on outcomes, it is power-to-effect-outcomes, while power-over refers to the asymmetric social power between social agents and can be understood as power-over-others. Aside from these, *power-with* is a third conception that occurs when power is not solely attributed to agent A or B but to both, and when they can come together to enhance or strengthen the collective power towards similar or different goals. (Abizadeh 2021; Avelino 2021) Power-with is not free of asymmetries and independent from power-over, nor from power-to since both agents can possess and exercise power but not necessarily with the same capacity. Power-with is not necessarily independent of power-over, violence, and/or of domination. Indeed, in some instances, 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. (Avelino, 2021, 432) When Phil suggests a strategy "for" the group, he leads the group to believe it is a collective choice. A fourth conception is proposed by Abizadeh (2021), who refutes the notion that power-over entails the

1 Wartenberg use the term "action-environment" which is more complexed than explained here. I use "field of actions" for synthesis purposes.

capacity to overcome resistance, and thus proposes a revised conceptualization of power-over and power-with to distinguish between *power-over-with-assistance* and *power-over-despite-resistance*. In some occasions, an agent exercises power-over without the presence of resistance, and/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 since power-with is the power to effect outcomes with others' assistance (7), yet this does not mean that assistance is intentional, that agents share strategies, actions, goals, and knowledge. (Follett 1942; Arendt 1969; quoted in Abizadeh, 7) For instance, Phil imposes his strategy over the group at the beginning of the game, defending it as being for the collective good (winning) and towards the 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), and power-over is disguised as power-with.

Lastly, this paper adopts the perspective that social power exists between people and can be held by dominant structures by enforcing knowledge through consent. (Avelino 2021; Foucault 1980; Gramsci 2011) Power is a social phenomenon that can only be understood in a sociocultural context; It is intrinsic to and shapes social relations and is visible in how it is possessed and exercised between social agents. Power is productive in the sense that it creates social subjects and objects, organizes social relations and power structures, and creates, as well as is disrupted and constructed by, knowledge. (Foucault 1980; Wilson & Sicart 2010; Avelino 2021) I adopt a Foucauldian perspective on power as a social and productive concept because I draw my focus on how power exists between players. Thus, when I refer to power, I mean social power.

2.2 Domination

Domination and Power are sometimes used as synonyms but are distinct concepts. Domination can be conceptualized as a power structure, as a distribution of power, or as a capacity in itself. Firstly, Wartenberg (1988) conceptualizes domination as a power structure and argues that domination is a subset of power-over that is harmful to the subjects. Power does not dominate if it is not abused. Therefore, not every exercise of power implies instances of dominance, even if they are harmful to the subject. Much like power, domination can be possessed and exercised. Feminist scholars often define domination as an unjust or illegitimate power-over relation and often use "oppression," "patriarchy," and "subjection" as synonyms for domination (McCammon 2018). Secondly, Pansardi (2013, 2016) studies domination as "a distribution of power within a social relation or a society as a whole." (2013, 26). To Pansardi, domination entails a "particular kind of relation that may be potentially – but not necessarily actually – harmful for the interests of the power-subjects." (2016, 92), and requires a situation of "extreme asymmetry of power" caused by dependence between agents. (2016, 94-95) A relationship can have a high degree of dependence but no relation of domination, such as a friendship. In contrast, a highly dependent relationship can involve a relation of domination but not be harmful to the subject, as in the cases of parenting. (2013, 616) 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, 5-6), Thirdly, Much like power can be conceptualized as a capacity-to-outcomes, domination as capacity refers to the agent's capacity to exercise power-over to mediate the outcome by interfering—using domination as the capacity to "interfere arbitrarily" (Petitt 1997; quoted in Pansardi, 2013, 623).

In the context of this paper, I will look at domination as a form of distribution of power. What Dashiell calls "domination through knowledge" is what I call an exercise of power that is moral-independent and norm-dependent. At the game table, a player who holds the status of Expert de facto holds a position of dominance over those who don't. 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. I will not consider those interventions as exercises of domination (power structures) because I cannot confirm that they are inherently morally bad or harmful to the subjects. 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 is not domination because it is not de facto harmful and morally bad. That is also true if the DM welcomes assistance from a player

with expertise. That said, future research should investigate further what constitutes an exercise of domination at the game table. Throughout this paper, the words "domination through knowledge" might be used to refer to gamesplaining and rule lawyering, or interchangeably with "exercise of power-over", although it should be understood that power does not always entail domination.

2.3 Authority

This article investigates power through the lens of authority which functions as a resource to justify and enable the exercise of power:

> When the less powerful are aware of the power resources of the more powerful, they may respond as they think the more powerful desire them to, without the more powerful having to do anything (Dowding 2003). Hence, the less powerful respond to resources [the authority of the person in command] without the presence of any exercise of power." (Haugaard 2021, 154)

Authority is a resource that enables command and reveals relational structures of power, where an agent grants authority to another who shall have it, therefore giving them the authority to command. (Weber 1978; quoted in Haugaard 2021) Alternatively, in the absence of authority, a person lacks the resources to do anything on her behalf or to speak for themselves. (156) A person's scope of authority is tied to and delimited by the social beliefs of others:

> As observed by Weber, authority depends upon belief (Weber 1978, 213), which is cognitive and meaning related. As argued by Searle (1996), authority follows the formula 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). (Haugaard 2021, 155)

Haugaard explains that the role of the President concerns organizational authority, but there are everyday types of authority[2] tied to specific common social roles: "The social roles of 'parent', 'mother', 'father', 'male', 'female', 'customer' and so on, all have authority expectations associated with them." (156)

This paper is interested in the everyday type of authority that is tied to the social role of the 'more knowing' player who is perceived as the Expert at the game table. By definition, an expert is a person who has a comprehensive and authoritative knowledge of or skill in a particular area. The expert player is normatively assigned "authority of expertise" and is expected to use that authority during the gaming episode:

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

The scope of the authority of that player might extend outside the activity as the same person might have authority among the same circle of friends when they are not playing. This would, in turn, influence the authority they are given in the circumstances of playing. That said, I will only discuss the scope of authority in the context of the gaming episode.

3. DISTRIBUTION AND VALIDATION OF AUTHORITY

In this chapter, I propose to break the process of authority into four overarching steps. Figure 1 shows a framework that synthesizes each step: Distribution, Reinforcement, Affirmation and Validation. A speculative approach was used to dissect each step of the process outside of and within the context of gaming. While they were discussed in isolation, it should be understood that in reality, they are not mutually exclusive, not linear, and are context-dependent. The phase of Reinforcement is not discussed thoroughly because of scope but merits more attention. 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 Kimlysis. Scholars are invited to use, develop and challenge this typology further.

2 Another type of authority raised by Korsgaard (1996) is Citizen's authority. It concerns the fact that everyone is technically entitled to but might not practically have the authority to decide for themselves. While this is relevant, this is out of scope.

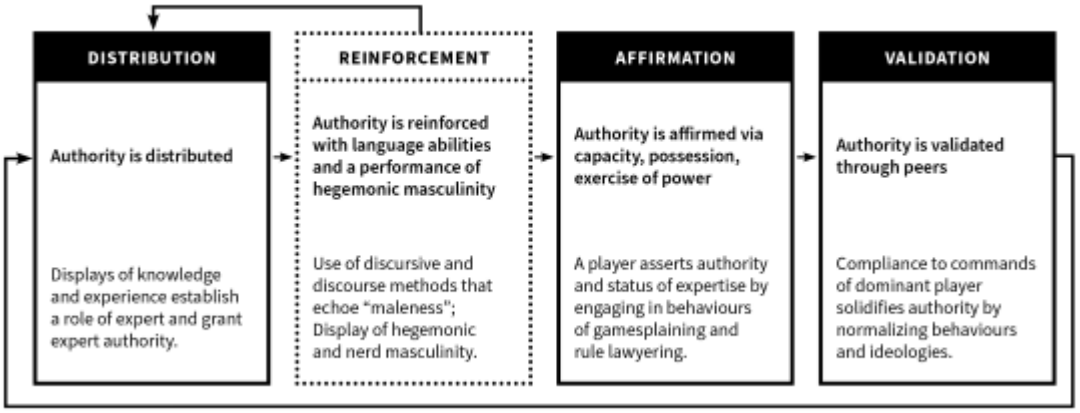

Figure 1: The implicit process of distributing, reinforcing, affirming, and validating expert authority.

Let's take a step back from gaming. Authority is a power resource that is fluidly and implicitly distributed between agents. Authority derives from people's belief in its legitimacy. (Weber 1991, 8; quoted in Haugaard 2018, 2) 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 but it is through established beliefs that the more knowledgeable person is entitled to what Haugaard calls the Authority of Expertise. (Beard 2014 & 2017[2018]; Haugaard, 2021) That belief carries weight at the game table. According to Dashiell (2020), gaming spaces that glorify male superiority encourage players to assert dominance through knowledge. White male gamers who show traits of hegemonic or nerd masculinity, and who come across as the 'more knowing' players "are in a better position to win arguments" because they use report talk and discursive tools that portray characteristics of maleness, such as using a loud voice, to stress the validity of their argument and gain social recognition. (Tannen 1990; Dashiell 2020), It is both their status as white males and the peer recognition they gain that affords them the posture to dismiss others, lead in the discussion, and engage in behaviours of gamesplaining and rule lawyering.

Phil conveys expertise when he displays knowledge by reciting rules or experience by referring to past played games, resulting in him being perceived as more a person of experience. A player performing masculinity by displaying their technical knowledge gains an "authority of expertise" through the culturally established belief that the more knowledgeable person is entitled to a status of authority. Additionally, a demonstration of hegemonic maleness, including the use of discursive tools, contributes to being assigned authority.

3.1 Explicit vs. Implicit Authority

A game master, or dungeon master (DM), holds an explicit role of authority tied to the rules of games and the DM is expected to define the parameters of the game. In parallel, a player can be implicitly assigned authority under their demonstration of expertise because of the social belief that expertise deserves authority and of the social expectation that the expert offers guidance. In other words, a DM is explicitly required to interfere with or enforce rules, whereas a player with greater experience at playing the game will implicitly allow themselves to advise the group on strategies, interrupt others, command actions, dictate the rhythm of the game, and challenge the decisions of the others. This paper is interested in *implicit* authority that enables a dominant person to interfere, advise, and command. In that context, the presence of a DM does not prevent another player from asserting authority over them and there can be more than one person who possesses authority.

Interestingly, the rule books of D&D inform us that the authority of the DM should prevail above players and advise against the interference of rule lawyers. Scholars have documented more than one occurrence when rule lawyers will argue over rules with the DM, instead of tolerating flexibility and adjusting to the group's preferences. (Attanasio 2020) When Billy rules that opening a door constitutes one action, she is using her authority as expected by the rule book which instructs that "the DM could reasonably expect you to use an action to open a stuck door or turn a crank to lower a drawbridge." (D&D Beyond n.d.) When Phil insists otherwise and recites rules from memory, he is also asserting authority.

In a GM-less game, the tasks that are usually undertaken by game masters or game systems are broken down between players who need to negotiate aspects including rules enforcement and determining who gets to talk (Boss et al. 2012). Deconstructing the authority of the GM means there is no explicit role of authority. That opens the possibility for any players to take on that role, or parts of it, whether they do it explicitly or implicitly. That is also true for games that need a "guide player" (164) or that require the group to negotiate actions such as cooperative board games. One could think of a cooperative board game like Pandemic (Leacock 2008), but I will save this argument for my next paper.

3.2 Affirmation

Authority is affirmed through exercises of power, or vice-versa. Haugaard suggests that authority affords a person the 'right' to deem others 'unreasonable', denying them the right to speak and to be heard, ultimately deciding what information is transferred and what ideologies are predominant in the group. (Haugaard 2021, 161) This concurs with one school of thought that relies on the work of Bourdieu and Barnes to claim that knowledge defines power in the sense that the agent that has the rein over the dominant ideology also has the reins over the social structures of society. (Avelino 2021, 439) At the game table, the player who reins over technical knowledge such that they demonstrate more experience or skills about a game has more influence on how the group will organize what will be the parameters and outcomes of the game.

Moreover, authority functions similarly to domination, as its affirmation is supported by social norms. 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 rather because the social norm dictates their right to do so under their dominant posture. (Haugaard 2021; McCammon 2018, 5) Similarly, the position of authority enables a socially implicit right to exercise different forms of power, or what Dashiell calls dominance through knowledge. For example, the gamesplainer will interfere in a player's gameplay who fails to adhere to the accepted standards of gameplay according to them, and despite request or consent. When Phil advises Tom who does not ask, he projects his standards of how combat should be played (by attacking) without considering Tom's views (who wants to search). Similarly, the rule lawyer will have draconian adherence to rules and will impose their vision of how a game should be played upon others, regardless of consent. When Phil challenges the decision of the DM who rules that opening a door is one action, Phil displays a desire to adhere to game rules and refers to the rule book to support his argument. In this situation, Phil interferes with Kim's turn even if Kim is accepting the ruling of the DM. Through social norms, a person with authority exercises power.

Social norms dictate who is entitled to the role of authority (the Expert) and normatively justify the use of power or, at times, of domination. They are unwritten and implicit rules that bring people to conform, "that define acceptable and appropriate actions within a given group or community […] They consist of what we do, what we believe others do, and what we believe others approve of and expect us to do." (Unicef 2021, 1) According to Unicef (2021), a 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, or because they think it is the morally right thing to do. If the same behaviour is practiced due to a lack of knowledge or the inability to do something else rather than because of what others think, then it is not a behaviour driven by norms. 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 (it's a cycle). Then, a person with authority has power over others and can use that authority for collective Tomefits, in which cases unevenly distributed authority can be useful, and power is not necessarily a 'bad thing'. Alternatively, they can abuse their authority to use their power-over 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) In light of this, we can raise the hypothesis that a desire to gain trust as a means to obtain social acceptance motivates all players to perform as socially expected. Thus, social norms lead a dominant player to believe they are doing the "right thing" for the group when they engage in behaviours of gamesplaining or rule lawyering. When Phil reveals a set of actions he thinks Tom should do, he places a burden on Tom by forcing him to decide whether he will actually follow the commanded course of actions or not. While Phil might think he is providing a "suggestion" and merely "offering" an idea for the Tomefit of Tom, Tom might perceive the suggestion as a command. Phil might also think his interruption is legitimate if it Tomefits his desired outcome for the game without considering what outcomes other players desire.

3.3 Validation

Research confirms that consolidation of authority lies in the compliance of subject agents.[3] 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 & 1978; quoted in Abizadeh 2021, 4) 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. (Weber 1991, 53; quoted in Haugaard, 3) However, the command requires a certain "voluntary submission", an interest in obeying due to practical motives (survival) or to the belief in its legitimacy (3) As pointed out by Dashiell (2020) when peers accept interferences, unsolicited advice or commands from a hegemonic player, for example when a player agrees to play by the rules of the rule lawyer, it normalizes and consolidates the cycle of dominance. Feminist scholars agree that implied consent is not consent and that compliance does not equal consent but regardless of our position, 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.

3.4 The Influence of Rules on Authority

As a final thought, I want to open the field by discussing how rules influence the distribution and consolidation of authority because they often give leverage to the argument of the rule lawyer or gamesplainer.

Classical game theorists often define games as objects governed by sets of rules that demarcate what courses of action players can and cannot do to achieve the goals of the game (Salen & Zimmerman 2006, 9). In that conception, rules are obeyed by players to make the game move forward. Game rules proscribe the ends and the means, namely, what is the goal of the game and what means players can take to achieve that goal. (Suits 1990; Costikyan 1994) This paper adopts a critical game theorists' perspective that a game is a social contract between players who constantly negotiate the rules. (DeKoven 1978; Goldstein 1971; Hughes 1983 & 1995; Sicart 2014; Sniderman 1999)

> Hughes (1995) defines Game rules are a set of instructions "recorded by an informant" (Sniderman, 1999) that refers to the structure of the game and informs us on how-to-play the game. […] Social rules refer to the cultural knowledge that is incorporated into the activity, sometimes operating without players' awareness. Whereas Gaming rules refer to the process of moulding players' cultural knowledge (social rules) to the game structure (game rules), or vice-versa, in order for the activity to take place with respect to what is socially "acceptable". (95)" (Tremblay, 2024)

A group of players that adopts a classical view of rules would normatively expect that game rules are obeyed for the game to be played successfully. The glorification of expertise coupled with the sacredness of rules Tomefits the dominant player in possessing or exercising one's power:

> Domination is exercised by agent A over agent B through the ideology (norm) that game rules are to be obeyed. Therefore, A believes that their interference is legitimate because they are not asking the subject to obey them but to obey the rules of the game (as normatively expected).

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3 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 & 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.

The gamesplainer adheres to the norm (that rules must be obeyed for the game to function) and assumes the same of all players. As a result, they consider the act of advising on the better-winning strategy legitimate when the norm states that the goal of playing is to win because they expect that all players share the goal of winning. Similarly, if the norm states that the rules are inflexible and binding, the interference of the rule lawyer, who insists on following the recorded rules, is considered valid. When the rule is normalized, it is likely to be considered a natural way of doing, a Truth of sorts. In such cases, the rule is harder to question or change because participants who challenge it can be deemed unreasonable, accused of breaking the frame of the game or told to lack knowledge on how to play that game or games in general. This is a mode of enforcement that can support the argument of the rule lawyer or gamesplainer.

Furthermore, there are gaming or social rules that will dictate how the group should address consent in gaming. Monte Cook Games released *Consent in Gaming* (2019), a resource for game masters to gain tools and strategies for making sure that everyone at the game table as consented to topics at play. One of the given recommendations advances that "it's not up for debate" when a player is not consenting. They write: "It's inappropriate and unfair for anyone else in the game to pressure, persuade, bribe, or influence someone to change their mind about a consent topic. They shouldn't argue why it's actually okay." (4) Social rules determine what intervention is "unfair" or "pressuring someone to change their mind", resulting in varying standards among different individuals. I am concerned that we could observe this scenario:

> Pressure is exercised by player A over player B to play the game according to the social rules of agent A. They believe their social rules are the normative way of playing, such is the result of the legitimization of authority. Therefore, A believes that their interference is legitimate; from their perspective, A is not being unfair to B, but rather helping B plays as one should.

Under those circumstances, a dominant player would persuade a less powerful player to consent to a challenging topic under the genuine belief that their intervention would improve the gaming experience.

4. CONCLUSION

The process of assigning authority to a player with expertise often operates without players' awareness (including the receiver of authority). The dominant player asserts authority cyclically, first, to prove that they are knowledgeable on the game at play, and the affirmation perpetuates once they have established their status of expertise. That cycle is normalized and sustained through social norms that justify the role of authority and the act of power-over: the gamesplainer and the rule lawyer do not operate merely because they can exercise power over, but rather because they think they are entitled to under their role of authority. In turn, compliance consolidates authority. The study of this cycle reveals the weight that authority carries 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, resulting in encapsulating the activity into dominant interpretations of how the game should be played. Consequently, authority contributes to reinforcing a tabletop role-playing culture that normatively consolidates authority to the hegemonic player perceived as possessing more game knowledge and that legitimizes behaviours of hegemony and dominance often exercised by white males.

This research was limited by the absence of empirical evidence thus, future research should examine a moment of actual play to challenge the validity of the proposed observations. From here, I also recommend future research to move toward practical questions: what types of interactions afford exercises of power and how are rules enforced by gamesplaining and rule lawyering? It would also be interesting to gather evidence into different cultures' interpretations of social norms in gaming which might deepen our understanding of the social acceptability of rule lawyering and gamesplaining. This would delineate if and when these behaviours are problematic, acceptable, or desirable. Lastly, we should be concerned with how to defuse exercises of power that are caused or supported by the role of authority of expertise.

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