

## THE ROLE-PLAYING GAMES (RPG) SUBCULTURE

*The author attempts to give a short introduction to the role-playing games (RPG) subculture, which she claims is a specific subculture, in many aspects different from what is usually dubbed subculture. First, she presents the sociological development of the concept "subculture" followed by an attempt to give a working definition of "subculture". Then she gives a short description of the emergence of the RPG and the five types of the RPG: tabletop RPG, computer RPG, Multiple-User Dungeons/Dimensions (MUD), Live-Action Role-Playing (LARP) and Trading Card Games (TCG). In the second part of the paper she uses Phil Cohen's classification of four subsystems of subculture lifestyles (dress, music, argot, ritual) and his concept of "territoriality" in order to examine subcultural characteristics of the RPG community. Finally, she discusses the subcultural actors.*

*Key words: subculture, role-playing games, dress, music, argot, ritual, territoriality, subcultural actors*

### I. Introduction

If we turn to a widely (mis)used metaphor and compare man's life path to a road, this image can easily be expanded by adding that a modern man's road hardly looks like the one relatively recently used by the multitudes of his predecessors. Above all, it is a high-speed highway, which long ago lost all the passengers on foot. But there are other, less obvious things, as well. For example, there is a significant decrease in the number of road signs and signals along the way. Although a passenger may find it enjoyable to arbitrarily choose a side on which to drive or to speed without any restrictions, s/he is also very frightened by this limitless freedom. No direction is a must, and the guidelines, which were there to help him/her assess the consequences of his/her acts, are rapidly vanishing. So, what is our passenger to do now? Is s/he to choose a path which s/he finds appealing for some personal reasons, or is s/he to find some new directions, some new "suggestions" on what is the right and correct way to go?

Theorists of postmodernity may be likely to reply that an individual in the contemporary society simply chooses his or her own way (cf Miles). There is nothing to fully replace the strict determination of the appropriate roles and activities imposed by the family and the neighborhood. But, is it really so? Is there really no worthy substitute for the traditional sources of identity? In my opinion, we do find some new guidelines, which then display the same strength of influence. However, we do not give up our newfound freedom so easily either. The new guidelines are significantly less an accidental corollary of our birth in a particular culture or class. Rather, they are derived from our own choices. Naturally, our background preserves its power to limit or select

potential choices, but its boundaries are much more easily transgressed now. Therefore, the main determinant of our identity is, after all, the result of our own choice: "we are free to choose different lifestyles, subcultures, social ties and identities" (Miles 57). In other words, a modern man possesses an ability of social self-creation. In this process, man is guided by his personal affinities and, due to the development of new technologies, he is relatively independent of spatial limitations: he can accept his affiliations, modify them, or reject them and create new ones.

We believe that subcultures form one of the important areas of the abovementioned self-creation. Later in the paper we shall concentrate more closely on their definition and the related problems, but for now it is sufficient to say that, in the widespread usage, this concept mostly refers to the music and sport fan subcultures (that is, to voluntary communities based on such a strong commitment to a certain type of music, sport or sport club that this commitment becomes an important characteristic of an individual's identity). However, this paper will deal with another, very specific and potentially dubious subculture: a community of players of the role-playing games (RPG). The dubiousness of referring to the RPG community as a subculture mostly stems from the differences it displays when compared to other, more "legitimate" subcultures (such as music and sport fan subcultures). In addition, it is also less evident and publicly present than other subcultures, which, consequently, makes it less recognizable (though not less self-recognizable). For this reason, this paper will focus precisely on establishing the RPG community as subculture. We shall first attempt to give a definition of subculture, which will be followed by a definition and short descriptions of the role-playing games. Finally, we shall examine the subcultural characteristics of RPG community and the characteristics of the RPG subcultural actors.

## **II. Conceptualization of "subculture"**

The sixty-year history of the concept "subculture" notes relatively big shifts in its meaning. Today it mostly functions as a kind of indiscriminative, and therefore vague, umbrella term, which harbors a lot of different interpretations. In her introduction to *The Subcultures Reader*, Sarah Thornton notes how the only definition that is likely to elicit agreement from all contributors is that subcultures are "groups of people that have something in common with each other...which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other social groups" (Thornton 1). Of course, she herself understands that this is too wide a definition to be of any use as an analytical tool.

The concept "subculture" was first used in the forties to indicate the heterogeneity of the American society, and it actually referred to different (mostly ethnic) minority groups (Perasović 22). In the fifties the functionalist sociologists fused "subculture" with the notion "delinquent",

thus creating a concept-hypothesis which defined subcultures as deviant youth groups with values and lifestyles different from those of their wider social environment. This approach also asserted that these young people were "driven" into subculture by their unprivileged position in the social structure (see Perasović). A major development in the study of subcultures occurred in the seventies, with the emergence of the so-called Birmingham school (which refers to the work of authors related to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies /CCCS/). Their influence on the subcultural theory is immense, and the definition of subculture derived from the work of the CCCS's major theorists (which can be best summarized with the title of one of the famous studies: "resistance through rituals") has for a long time been inevitable in any work on subculture. These authors claimed that one of the main factors in the definition of subculture was class, and that the subcultures actually were cultures of the working class youth, which symbolically (through style) offered resistance to the dominant (parent) culture (see Perasović).

The nineties were characterized both by stronger criticisms of the Birmingham school approach and the attempts at the re-conceptualization of "subculture", which, in turn, led to the emergence of the so-called "post-subcultural studies". However, the post-subcultural approach is very heterogeneous, and there is not even a consensus on the proper subject of study, let alone on a single, agreed-upon, determinant of the (post)subculture (see Bennett, Kahn-Harris, Eds.). Furthermore, some authors try to replace the concept of "subculture" with some, in their opinion, more appropriate term (for example, lifestyle, scene, neo-tribe<sup>1</sup>, etc... /Bennet, Kahn-Harris 12-13/), while some try to modify or redefine it. In any case, it seems that the Birmingham school is still, despite its limitations, the building block of the subcultural theory: the authors today use it either to build upon it or to oppose it.

The abovementioned multiplicity of the things to which "subculture" can refer seems to turn the concept into a denominator that is too easily assigned to each and every sub-community in the society. In this sense, the concept of subculture can refer to almost anything, from the subculture of ravers to the subculture of firefighters or senior citizens. However, in order to make the concept in any way analytically useful, it is necessary to restrict its meaning and to define it with precision (which, in turn, will exclude many communities which were, until now, classified as subcultures).

In the widest sense, subcultures are affinity-based voluntary communities. Hence, subcultures are neither class nor space specific, but rather, they consist of individuals who share some particular interests with other perceived members of that community. Their "belonging"

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<sup>1</sup> However, it must be noted that these different terms often refer to slightly different things. For example, we can argue that "scene" is narrower in meaning than "neo-tribe", or that "lifestyle" can refer both to something that can be subsumed under "subculture" and to something that is unrelated to subcultural affiliations.

enables them to pursue their interests, which may not be that popular in the wider society or which may not be considered as something to which such an amount of time and/or energy should be dedicated, with more intensity. In addition, they can spend time with people who think and feel the same.

Hence, the subcultural actors are the individuals whose social identity is partially based on the belonging to a group focused on some interest derived from the sphere of free time (such as music, sport fandom, graffiti, or, as in this particular case, the RPG), that is strong enough to be perceived as one of the determinants of personal identity. We find the embedment of subculture into a sphere of free time necessary, as this excludes the communities whose members also have some shared specific interests and special internal bonds, which similarly differentiate them from the wider society and which can, therefore, function as the legitimate alternative sources of identity (e.g. some professional or age groups, such as abovementioned firefighters and senior citizens). But these interests and bonds are not rooted in the sphere of leisure, which is, in our opinion, *differentia specifica* of the subcultural community, and, therefore, they cannot be considered subcultural characteristics.

Also, the values of the subcultural actors are not necessary subordinated to the values of the dominant culture<sup>2</sup> as to require resistance (which was implied by the Birmingham school). Admittedly, the subcultural values may be subordinated, may even be deviant, but, on the other hand, they may not differentiate from the values of wider society at all (for example, non-violent soccer fandom is an accepted, even encouraged activity). As we have already suggested, the key difference focuses on the intensity of the attention the actor devotes to his or her interest. In other words, the "problem" arises when the actor dedicates himself or herself to an unproblematic content in a problematic way (Perasović 395). What the wider community considers to be only *one of* its aspects, the actor considers to be more important than the rest. Consequently, this interest becomes a driving force for much of actor's activities, it influences his or her everyday life, and, at least in that moment, forms the core of his or her self-definition.

### **III. Role-Playing Games (RPG)**

Before we turn to the subcultural characteristics of the RPG community, it is necessary to give more information about the particular leisure interest on which this subculture is based. In other words, we need to say more about the development and characteristics of the game itself. Here we come across the first problem. When we talk about the RPG, we do not talk about one

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<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the syntagm "dominant culture" seems to be somewhat inappropriate, but for the lack of a better term, we shall continue to use it in the text.

particular game, but about several, often very different games. In many cases the only connecting element is the aspect of the role-playing. It would take us beyond the scope of this paper to go over each of these different types of the RPG, so we shall give only a short description of the main ones. However, a description of one RPG type, the tabletop RPG, will be more detailed. This is the most widespread type of the RPG and, in addition, it could be argued that the publication of the first real tabletop RPG ever, "Dungeon & Dragons", in the seventies actually brought the subculture into being. Moreover, the tabletop RPG seems to form a basis for the RPG subculture as its nature is such to enable the creation of a more closely knit community, and also, it allows us to perceive the players as the subcultural actors rather than people pursuing a hobby.

### ***III.1. The Development of the RPG***

The RPG has evolved from the war games and simulations. Its beginnings could be traced as far back as 1811 when the father and the son von Reizwitz developed *Kriegspiel* (war game), which was intended for the training of the Prussian officers. In that game, the participants moved little markers that denoted different groups of soldiers on the table that denoted a battleground. At first, a referee proclaimed a winner of every battle, but, after some time, dice also became part of the game (Fine 8). Very soon the game was taken over and further developed by the English. But it took more than a hundred years for the game to be used for other purposes than military. In 1915 H.G. Wells wrote the first set of rules for amateur war gaming, and in this form the war games gained popularity in the next fifty years (Fine 9).

The turning point occurred in the sixties when Dave Wesley and his co-players introduced a number of modifications, which paved the way for the emergence of the RPG (they changed the conditions under which a party is victorious, the players started to control a single character that could be "re-used", the social component was added to the fights...). One of these players, Dave Arneson (who introduced game scenarios), started working with Gary Gygax, and in 1974 this collaboration resulted in the publication of the still most popular role-playing game "Dungeons & Dragons" (D&D) (Fine 13-14). It took a very short time for the D&D to take over the market<sup>3</sup>, and also to move beyond a hobby activity into the sphere of a community of players that can be considered the RPG subculture. The game was soon further modified, and new variants of the tabletop RPG, as well as other types of the RPG, appeared.

### ***III.2. Types of the RPG***

We can divide the RPG into five types: tabletop RPG, computer RPG, MUD, LARP and TCG. They all have in common the aspect of the role-playing, but, as we shall see in more detail

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<sup>3</sup> Although it must be noted that we talk about a specific and limited segment of the market. One of the reasons which curbed the spread of the RPG may be the negative publicity attributed to the game, but we shall talk more about this later.

in the short reviews of their characteristics that follow, the way in which this role-playing is implemented varies.

Tabletop (or alternatively, paper & pencil) RPG is the first and the most widespread type of RPG. Actually, when describing what RPG is, it is common to describe the tabletop RPG. In this game the players assume one of the two functions: they are either "regular players" or "a controlling player" (usually only one person can assume that role). Each "regular player" creates and leads one character. For example, a certain player can invent<sup>4</sup> a character of Zanzibar the dwarf, and as far as the game is concerned, he is Zanzibar the dwarf. The "controlling player", who is usually called "dungeon master" (DM) or "game master" (GM), creates the story (e.g. a group of adventurers goes on a quest to find the last blue dragon), delineates the setting (e.g. political and religious structure of the land in which the adventurers are, the climate, etc), controls the non-player characters (all the characters that are encountered in the game, but who are not controlled by a particular player), and referees. To play the game one needs only a set of dice, some paper and pencil (hence the alternative name: paper & pencil RPG) for taking notes, and a surface which could be used as a playing board (hence the name tabletop RPG). Each player says what his or her character does (e.g. the player who leads Zanzibar the dwarf will say "I go to the other side of the room and talk to the innkeeper"), and the outcomes of all activities are partially decided by the roll of the dice, and partially by the DM (e.g. DM can say that Zanzibar must roll a die to see if the innkeeper will talk to him). One session usually lasts 4-5 hours (many times even longer), and, as the game has no conventional goal (such as the victory of one of the players), but rather the story is being lived out, one "campaign" (a series of sessions with the same players and the same framework story) can last for months (or, as in some rare cases, even for years).

On the one hand, computer role-playing games are just another variant in the multitude of computer games. Since the playing of the computer games is an activity that includes only a player and his or her PC (here we shall leave aside all the talk about the alienation, social isolation and maladjustment of the so-called computer freaks), it can be seen as problematic to classify the computer RPG as something that may form a subculture. However, a distinction between playing computer games as a hobby activity (which is lonely in character) and playing computer games as a subcultural activity must be made. Those who engage in the latter are usually involved with other forms of the RPG (mostly the tabletop RPG), and they form networks of people trading games, discussing them and playing together (either online or through local area network /LAN/).

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that, although the players have considerable freedom in creating their characters, there are some rules they must follow. But for our needs, it is not necessary to go deeper into that.

The acronym MUD refers to Multiple-User Dungeons/Dimensions, which is actually "simultaneous online roleplaying" (Darlington, Hist. of RPG IX). MUDs developed in the beginning of the eighties as a computer form<sup>5</sup> of D&D adventures (Young), but they soon started a life of their own (in many ways they could be said to form a subculture of their own, but we shall not go into that here). Gradually, the MUDs developed from a kind of a textually based computer RPG into virtual communities, that consisted of a number of people playing virtual adventures following the same rules as in the tabletop RPG (with the difference that the MUDs were and remain text-based). However, it should be noted that many MUDs have grown out of their adventure beginnings and are now based on the social interactions of the characters/players (Young).

LARP is live-action role playing. The rules and principles are the same as with the tabletop RPG, but the players wear costumes and act rather than talk. Often the people who do not know much about the RPG, but who have heard about D&D, imagine a lot of people in capes running around with wooden swords. However, such a thing is possible only when it comes to the LARP, which is significantly less widespread than the tabletop RPG.

The nineties saw the development of the first trading card game (TCG): "Magic: the Gathering" (Darlington, Hist. of RPG VII). This is a cardgame RPG, which soon gained huge popularity and became common additional activity of the players of other types of RPG. But, the TCG is more a game of strategy than a role-playing game, and it therefore earns its place here more as a part of the activities of the role-players, than of its own merit.

#### **IV. Subcultural Characteristics of the RPG Community**

Earlier in the text we mentioned that the CCCS subcultural theory is now increasingly questioned and modified. But whether the post-subcultural authors choose to oppose or just modify the CCCS ideas, they cannot ignore them. For this reason, our starting point will be a theory of one of the Birmingham school classical authors, Phil Cohen.

Cohen differentiates between 4 subsystems of subcultural lifestyles, which he then clusters into two basic groups. The first group consists of dress and music, which are not directly produced by subcultures, but which express subcultural values, and the second group consists of argot and ritual, which are more infrastructural forms (Cohen 94). He also points out that one of the extremely important characteristics of subcultures is territoriality (Cohen 97). We shall examine each of these aspects in their relation to the RPG community.

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<sup>5</sup> Computer games played online should not be confused with the MUDs, as they are based on completely different principles.

Dress, or style, is definitely a theme very much concentrated on by the subcultural theorists. The reason is evident: the style is the most visible and distinguishing characteristic of the subcultural actors. Style makes them "recognizable" to the outside observers (whether they are people who do not perceive themselves as belonging to any subculture, or people who are members of some other subculture, or some fraction within the same subculture), and it also enables them the subcultural group identification. It is tempting to conclude that there is a kind of uniformity. Certainly, some of the CCCS work pushed into that direction. However, recent authors object to such a point of view. For example, Grossberg (qtd. in Perasović 390) says that the CCCS's portrait of the subcultural style was too ideal-typical. Stylistic boundaries were and remain less clear and definite. No matter whether the Birmingham Centre authors simplified the situation, or there really was a greater stylistic homogeneity when they were writing about it, it is certain that this is no longer so. Muggleton, whose book is a kind of a reply to Hebdige's famous discussion on subcultural style, clearly states that the "postmodern" subcultures are, among other things, characterized by stylistic heterogeneity, multiple stylistic identities, and weak maintenance of boundaries (52).

The RPG community and its lack of perceived shared subcultural style brings this situation to its extreme. But, not only is there no similarity in dress, the style itself is irrelevant. The latter, the irrelevance of the style, is one of the main distinguishing characteristics of the RPG subculture compared to those we dubbed "legitimate". Let us elaborate on this on the example of music subcultures, which have so far attracted most of the subcultural research. As we have already mentioned, we cannot any longer speak about clear stylistic boundaries. But for music subcultures the question of style is still an important subcultural issue. The subcultural core still determines if someone's style is "acceptable", that is, they determine how far one can, or even must, go with the style mixing (for example, Muggleton reports that some people he interviewed complained about the uniformed fakes). But the actors of the RPG subculture do not share a recognizable style. The importance of the RPG in their lives cannot be "represented" by how they dress and look (as, for example, some punker may declare his or her musical affiliations by wearing a Mohawk). This is one of the reasons of the RPG subculture poor public visibility.

When we turn to music as a subcultural characteristic, music subcultures, of course, again come first to mind. But music is important for other subcultures too. There is no data that could enable us to reach conclusions about specific musical preferences of the role-players. But, even if such data existed, we believe that it would indicate that the players do not have unique musical preferences. As with style, this is a question of personal taste, and has nothing to do with subculture as such. However, the music cannot be completely removed from the picture. When the

game is played in a player's flat or house, it is common to have some music in the background. Although the choice of the music mostly depends on the convergence in tastes of all present players and on the available music, we would hypothesize that in most cases players decide on an ambient music, which does not interfere with playing and fits the fantasy atmosphere they want to create.

However, it is possible that some of the players would disagree with us on the points about the non-existence of specific style and music. Presumably, they would argue that a lot of players, maybe even a majority, tend to listen to metal, goth or some similar music, and to dress accordingly. This may be true, but we do not believe that it is relevant for the RPG subculture. Although it is possible that people who listen to that kind of music are more likely to be attracted to the RPG, it does not follow that such music and style therefore characterize the *RPG subculture*.

The RPG argot, or the specific language the gamers use, seems to have developed as a result of two things. The first is a common reading background<sup>6</sup>, and the second are the specialized terms used in the game. In addition, there are no Croatian translations of the rulebooks and other related material (and there is a huge number of such books), so Croatian role-players usually use English terms. However, these terms are often adjusted to the Croatian language (for example, they are written phonetically and have Croatian suffixes added, as in "role-playing" that becomes "rolplejanje", or "elves" that become "elfovi"). Moreover, as the rulebooks are usually expensive, the players have developed networks for borrowing and trading the photocopied material and CDs with material downloaded from the Internet (also, these networks are often used for "dealing" computer games, which is another important additional activity of the role-players).

This leaves us with Cohen's last sub-system of subcultural lifestyles: ritual. It is easy to see that the game itself is a kind of a ritual. For example, there are specific ways of playing in each "fellowship". Admittedly, there are, like in every game, certain rules, but their realization much more depends on an "agreement" among players, that is, on the code that a particular group had established. Some rules may be modified, ignored or interpreted in a particular way. How the group will function is determined both by different gaming styles of individual players (and especially of the DM, who might be said to have the greatest influence on the overall gaming style) and by their personalities and interaction (see Fine). Furthermore, as we already said, it is common to have some music in the background, and also, the gamers are expected to bring something to eat and drink.

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<sup>6</sup> The RPG subculture actors usually also belong to the same reading audience, that is, they are familiar with the SF/fantasy literature. The importance of this literature is reflected in the fact that a great number of the RPG scenarios are based on the motifs derived from the work of writers such as Tolkien, Asimov, Gibson, Salvatore...

The last element we have to consider is territoriality. Cohen believes that territoriality is crucial for the subcultural belonging. For him, "territoriality is...the process through which environmental boundaries (and foci) are used to signify group boundaries (and foci) and to become invested with subcultural value....the way in which the subcultural group becomes rooted in the situation of its community" (Cohen 97). Admittedly, since the times Cohen wrote about the territoriality and subcultures, many things (such as rapid development of communication technologies, especially Internet) have happened, which may be said to have diminished the importance of the physical connection among the actors<sup>7</sup>. But one cannot deny that subcultural groups are still embedded in a particular space and time<sup>8</sup>. This applies alike to, for example, people who go to some rock club, to football fans from a particular neighborhood, and to tabletop RPG players. People who want to play together must be in the same physical space. However, the neighborhood comradeship, which is actually what Cohen is talking about, does not exist with the RPG. First, the RPG is a very specific interest, and therefore it is unlikely (though not impossible) that the people interested in it could be found in the same neighborhood. Second, even if the "neighborhood fellowships" were common occurrences, the character of the game is such that the neighborhood competitiveness does not make any sense. Gamers come together to play. People who share their interests are, in the majority of cases, welcome.

If possible, gamers will meet in a player's house or flat to play. If not, they will meet in bars, in special playing rooms<sup>9</sup>, or in the specialized stores, which sometimes organize tournaments. Also, in the tradition of the SF/fantasy conventions, the gamers have developed conventions for the RPG players where they can play, discuss RPG or just hang around with the likeminded people.

Finally, in the light of the RPG being such a specific interest, it is not surprising that the actors have also developed virtual communication networks, which, besides web pages on different RPG related issues, also include Internet forums (as places for discussion) and online RPG fanzines.

## **V. Actors**

Who are the typical actors of the RPG subculture? American sociologist Fine, who in 1983 published the only sociological research on the RPG community, claims that the hard-core gamer is "male, unmarried, and in his early to mid-twenties; he has read deeply in science fiction, fantasy

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<sup>7</sup> For example, it is now possible to create communication networks among subcultural actors in different countries and on different continents, let alone different cities.

<sup>8</sup> For this reason the theorists of subcultures (see Perasović) emphasize that it is extremely difficult to speak generally about some subculture: each subculture should be observed in its context.

<sup>9</sup> According to our information, there is only one in Zagreb.

and history; he has completed college and may have attended graduate school for some time; he believes that he has lively imagination...he disregards many of the normative requirements of conventional society..." (Fine 47). Besides these hard-core gamers, there are also younger and less committed boys, usually white, between 13 and 17 years of age. According to Fine, the number of female players is almost negligible (as for the girls and women who do play, they usually became involved through their partners or husbands). As a way of explanation, Fine says that the gamers (who in their everyday lives are usually peace-loving, and sometimes even active in pacifist movements) tend to project themselves into their fantasy world as the macho characters who treat women violently and who are sexually abusive. For this reason, male gamers feel inhibited and uncomfortable in the presence of women, and prefer to play in all male company (Fine 68-70). Fine also refers to then current research of the American society that found women's leisure patterns different from men's, and concludes that this may be one of the reasons why women are less likely to choose such a way of spending their free time (Fine 63-64).

Two things must be emphasized here. First, Fine's research was conducted in the beginning of the eighties and things have changed since (although, in some aspects, surprisingly little). And second, we have to consider local particularities of every subcultural group, and this is even more important with the RPG subculture. With that in mind, we must disagree with Fine on the question of female gamers. First, their numbers have increased since the eighties (this may not be a huge increase, but it is gradual and continual). Also, when they play, they do that on equal terms, and therefore have the same influence on the content of the game as the male gamers. For this reason, it is problematic to speak of the RPG as a tool for boys' playing out their sexual fantasies. As for the potential embarrassment and inhibition they allegedly feel, unfortunately, we cannot refer to any empirical data (as there is no such), but, based both on our personal observation and on a discussion about the abovementioned Fine's statement on one of the Croatian online RPG forums, we would hypothesize that the majority of the male players today do not feel that way (or, at least, they do not feel that such attitudes could be legitimately expressed or incorporated into the game).

Unfortunately, we do not have any data about the age of typical gamers today either. The newest data we do have again refer to the American context. According to the market research conducted by Dancey in 2000 (qtd. in Swett), the players are between 12 and 35 years old, with most players in the age group 19-35. Women make 19% of all players. From this we can conclude that, although many believe that the audience most attracted to the RPG are the adolescents, this is not quite so, as the RPG holds even greater attraction for people above 20. Ritter thinks that these so-called older players must be more motivated in order to engage in the RPG, but when they are, they are as fascinated by the game as the adolescents.

Although, as we have already mentioned, the sociologists have not paid much attention to role-players, the opposite holds true for the psychologists. This interest is probably stimulated by many accusations of drug addiction, depression, suicides, alienation, psychoticism, Satanism and similar negative phenomena, which have been made against the gamers by the American media and conservative religious groups since the very beginnings of the RPG (Swett). However, the psychological research on the personalities of the role-players have not found any of these accusations true. For example, according to Carter and Lester, the players of the D&D did not differ in mean scores on depression, suicide ideas, psychoticism, extroversion, and neuroticism from the control group of unselected undergraduates (182). Lancaster who explored the connections between the RPG and criminal, satanism and suicides, asserts that there is no proof that the role-playing causes gamers to commit a crime, join a cult or commit suicide, and he adds that "any blame linked to these games is probably a scapegoat excuse, the crime being the symptom of the real cause of a motive already inherent in a criminal or suicide case", and that "to believe that some role-playing games promote satanism is comparable to believing that one 'worships' Satan by reading Dante's *Inferno* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*" (77/78). On the contrary, the only research that confirmed their hypotheses were those that assumed that the RPG has positive therapeutic effect.

Furthermore, the characteristics most often mentioned in relation to the RPG players are imagination, creativity, and high IQ. This could be explained by the extreme complexity of the game, as it requires not only careful and detailed creation of characters (his/her biography, characteristics, motivation...), but also the creation of whole worlds populated by these characters. It may be the world of fantasy, but this world of fantasy is characterized by political and social structure, geographical and historical details and complex interactions between characters.

## **VI. In the Place of Conclusion**

We came to the end of this paper, but we are still overwhelmed with many questions. Why people start and continue playing? In what degree is the participation in this subculture important for the actors, and how much does it influence other spheres of their lives? What is the group dynamics: how are new members accepted and how do old ones leave? But, these and many other questions will have to, at least for the time being, remain unanswered. One sociological research 20 years old, a few psychological ones, and a number of texts written on the game by the players themselves, are not sufficient to give a deep enough insight into this very complex subculture. True, these data are very useful, and enable such a superficial account as this one, but it is desirable to go further.

We are aware that there are many problems in doing that. For example, the RPG subculture is much more present in the media (unfortunately, often negatively) in the USA, than in Croatia, but it is still rather marginal. In Croatia, it is almost invisible. There are people "in the know" and there is the rest of the world. So, if the potential researchers themselves are not, or do not become, the members of this community, they will have many problems in locating potential research subjects. Furthermore, even if they had access to the actors, obtaining a representative sample seems to be an impossible task. The best one can get is, in our opinion, big enough nonprobability sample (e.g. snowball sample). This would not allow us to make any generalizations, but it would give us a better insight. Also, the qualitative methods of research, although less reliable and valid, would, with the wealth of contextual information they provide, probably be much more suited for this, as well as any other subcultural research.

So, all we can do now is hope that the challenge will soon be accepted, and that this extremely fascinating subculture will soon get much more sociological attention, and consequently, a legitimate place in the (post)subcultural studies.

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